

Growing Deeper
The Gratitude Effect

Week One: Grateful people choose to see the good
James 1:2-4

Spend FIFTEEN – Day One

1. How would you characterize your season of life just now? Is it a hard winter, a refreshing spring, an oppressive summer, or a chilly fall? Explain.
2. How has your year been? Is this a new season or has it gone on too long?
3. If it's a challenging time, when was it last pleasant? If it is pleasant, when was it last difficult?
4. When you think about most crops and how they grow, why do they need both rain and sunshine? Is life the same? How so?
5. Read James 5:7-11. Why is patience needed in life?
6. Based on how you are feeling about your present circumstance, is God asking too much?
7. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. After reading James 5 above, pray for greater patience in life.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Two

8. Read James 1:2-4. What part of those verses caught your attention?
9. What does James mean when he says, "Consider it pure joy"? Consider what? What makes that so hard for most people to do?
10. Read a parallel passage in Romans 5:1-5. In this passage, what reason does Paul give that makes it possible to rise above difficult circumstance?
11. What does being "justified through faith" have to do with the here and now? Doesn't our perfection in Christ just mean we can die with confidence in eternal life? What relevance does it have to life before death?
12. In Romans 5:2, what kind of hope is Paul talking about?

13. Look again at Romans 5:3-4. Is Paul saying that Christian hope means our troubles will eventually end, or that we will be blessed by our troubles because they are helpful in life? Explain.
14. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray for a better understanding of the implications of the cross for life here and now.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Three

15. Back to James 1:2-4. In verse three, Paul gives a reason for finding joy in all things. What purpose does it serve according to Paul? Has that been your experience?
16. When you experience difficult challenges in life, do you tend to sigh deeply or get fired up?
17. What do you think Paul means by perseverance (some versions say endurance)?
18. Do you think other people mostly feel sorry for you or feel you have it good? Why?
19. When things are good in your life, do you tend to believe it will lead to greater things or plan to enjoy it while it lasts, knowing things have a way of going south?
20. Do you think the “testing of faith” is essential to maintaining faith?
21. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray to be supportive of someone who is experiencing a difficult season of testing.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Four

22. Read James 1:4. What is the result God wants for those who consider trial to be joy in their life?
23. When potters fire their clay creations, what result do they hope to achieve?
24. How is a life that is tested by difficulty similar to clay that is pulled from a kiln?
25. Is it possible to be hardened by hardship and yet remain sensitive and vulnerable? Explain.
26. Do you think God wants Christians to develop tough skin? How might that be construed as a good thing? How might

it be a detriment to a Christian?

27. What do you think Paul meant when he said a mature Christian lacks nothing? Don't we always have room for improvement?

28. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray for God to help you overcome your rough edges and create a more content attitude in your life.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Five

29. If you could name one "thorn in the flesh" that is keeping you from experiencing total joy in your life, what would it be?

30. Is it possible there might be some good purpose for that difficulty you are experiencing? What might it be?

31. How do the life, death and victory of Jesus help you face your trials?

32. Read Hebrews 4:14-16. In that passage, what difference does the author suggest Jesus should make in our day-to-day life?

33. Why do Jesus' life, death and victory give us confidence in prayer?

34. What title or name do you most often use to address God in prayer? What does that say about your perception of God?

35. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray the Lord's Prayer.

Week Two: Grateful people view the future with optimism
Romans 4:18 (See also Genesis 17:15-17)

Spend FIFTEEN – Day One

1. Read Romans 4:18. How would you express that verse using your own words?
2. The paraphrase called The Message Bible puts it this way: *“When everything was hopeless, Abraham believed anyway, deciding to live not on the basis of what he saw he couldn’t do but on the basis of what God said He would do. And so he was made father of a multitude of peoples. God himself said to him, “You’re going to have a big family, Abraham!”* Do you like Peterson’s paraphrase?
3. How did Paul describe the reality of Abraham’s situation? What do you desire in life that seems impossible at the moment?
4. Read 1 John 5:14-15. In his famous book, “When Bad Things Happen to Good People,” Rabbi Kushner said there are some things that even God can’t do. Based on this passage, do you agree?
5. According to the 1 John 5:14-15 passage, why does God sometimes not grant our prayers? What does that tell you about God?
6. When should you quit asking God to do the impossible?
7. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray for greater faith to ask for and expect miracles.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Two

8. Read James 4:1-3. What insight does James offer about unanswered prayer?
9. What two reasons does James give for needs that go unmet by God?
10. Recite (or read) the Lord’s Prayer. How many of the 7 petitions in Jesus’ prayer focus on material things? What does that suggest should dominate our prayer focus?
11. What spiritual issue in your life has been the most consistent focus of your prayers?
12. Do you pray mostly for yourself or others? Who and what do you pray for when you pray for others?

13. Do you think prayer is mostly an exercise in the devotional thought and meditation, or is it an action you take to engage God in life?
14. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray for a change in your life that would be to the benefit of others and not yourself.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Three

15. Look again at Romans 4:18. Abraham's confidence was based on a promise that had been made to him by God. Can you name one promise God has made to you?
16. Read John 14:10-14. What promise did Jesus make to His followers? Does that apply to you?
17. Do you believe in modern day miracles? Have you ever seen a miracle in response to a dire circumstance or as the result of a prayer? Explain.
18. Read Genesis 17:15-17. What was the miracle God promised Abraham?
19. Why was that miracle so hard for Abraham to believe?
20. Read Hebrews 11:8-12. How does Paul describe the impossibility of Abraham's miracle?
21. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray silently for something that you believe could forever change your life and your usefulness to God that seems utterly impossible.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Four

22. Are you a "glass half full" or a "glass half empty" person?
23. Do you think your family of origin is mostly responsible for your degree of optimism in life, or is it more on the basis of your own DNA and life experience? Nature or nurture?
24. Is it possible for a realist to become an optimist? Why or why not?
25. Read James 1:5-8. What is the essential quality James urges in prayer? Why is that so important?

26. Do you think most of Jesus' miracles were the result of his Godly nature, or because he was a "true man" of extraordinary faith and more fully aware of most of His Father's will for His life and for the world?
27. Have you ever fasted to help you focus on a key prayer issue? If not, maybe you should try that in a manageable way. (Remember, there is no special power associated with fasting, except to help you focus and be mindful of a matter you are keeping before the Lord in prayer.)
28. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray for a more confident spirit in prayer.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Five

29. Read Romans 4:1-3. What does it mean when Paul says that Abraham had no reason to brag before God?
30. Compare this passage to James 5:17-18. Were these men of the Bible special in any way? Explain.
31. What lesson(s) can we derive from their example?
32. Read again Romans 5:3. What gave Abraham confidence to expect a miracle from God? Are you blessed to possess that same reason for confidence, or was it unique to Abraham?
33. How much do you know about Abraham's life? Does the Bible describe any weaknesses in Abraham, or does it seem he was above our human nature? You may need to scan Genesis chapters 12 through 17 to discern your answer.
34. If Abraham was used by God and declared the father of faith, despite his sinful nature, what hope does that hold for you? Do you believe God has a divine purpose for your life? Why or why not?
35. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray for greater clarity about the unique way you might serve God that is different from all the other Christians you know.

Week Three: *Grateful people act courageously*

1 Samuel 17

Spend FIFTEEN – Day One

1. Read 1 Samuel 17. If this were all you knew about David, how would you describe him?
2. Conduct the same assessment of King Saul, David's father Jesse, and his oldest brother Eliab. (It might be interesting to go back and read 1 Samuel 16:6-7 regarding Eliab's words.)
3. David's offer was not made in a vacuum. Besides faith in God, what personal experience(s) gave him confidence to volunteer?
4. Read the description of a good shepherd in John 10:11-13. Why does a good shepherd risk his life for the sheep?
5. How might that also be a reference to Jesus? In what way was it different for Jesus?
6. How have your experiences changed your sense of courage? Has failure made you more or less courageous?
7. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray to recall and not forget all the ways God has enabled you to overcome past adversity. Don't hesitate to be specific.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Two

8. Goliath was the real deal. How did Saul compare David to Goliath in 1 Samuel 17:33? What is the point of that statement?
9. Are the challenges you face in life real, or mostly anxious thoughts based on what might go wrong? What's the difference?
10. Besides his own past experience, what else gave David courage? (1 Samuel 17:26, 46.)
11. Read the interesting words of Job in Job 42:1-2. Do you believe that or was that merely Job's opinion? Do you think that way also?
12. As Christians, we can look back not only on our personal experiences but also the historic record of the Bible. Read Romans 8:31-32. What difference does the cross of Jesus make when it comes to courage?

13. Do you have a sense God is prompting you to do something? Give it some thought and pray over it.
14. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray to have the courage of your convictions... that you would not be a Christian in name only but that others would know you by your words and deeds.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Three

15. Look again at 1 Samuel 17. David didn't go into battle without a weapon. What preparations did he make?
16. What was Goliath's assessment of David as a warrior?
17. What lessons can we learn from the success of David and the mistakes of Goliath?
18. In what way are you uniquely gifted to wage war against the enemy?
19. Why do you think Saul wanted to know who was the father of David? (See 1 Samuel 17:55-56, 58)
20. Are you your father's/mother's son or daughter? How are you the same? How are you different?
21. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray for the lessons you've learned from your family of origin, good or bad.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Four

22. Skim through 1 Samuel 17 to refresh your memory. As Saul approached David in full battle posture in 1 Samuel 17:48, what did David do? What insight does that give you into David? Why is that attitude still important for Christians to emulate?
23. What were the weapons Goliath brought to the fight? Read verse 45-47. What was the chief weapon David counted on to win the battle?
24. When it comes to representing the Lord, is it more important to talk the talk or walk the talk? Explain.
25. What was the result of the battle in 1 Samuel 17:51-53?

26. Why do you think the Philistines fled the battle? Didn't they still have a fighting chance to defeat Saul's army?

27. Does anyone take courage from your example? Explain who and why.

28. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray to be a courageous Christian role model for others to follow.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Five

29. Name three things that have gone right for you this year.

30. Are you more focused on your blessings or your setbacks? Why do you suppose most businesses and coaches attempt to build on strengths rather than overcome their weaknesses?

31. How well do you know David? What were some of his weaknesses? Why do you suppose God chose him to become the king despite his flaws?

32. Are your weaknesses holding you back? Read 2 Corinthians 12:7-10. What important lesson did Paul learn that every Christian needs to remember?

33. Answer the age-old question, what would you attempt if you didn't consider failure a possibility?

34. What has kept you from making the effort to accomplish the "impossible goal" you just identified above?

35. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray that God's Holy Spirit would inspire you to great acts of courage in the days, weeks and years to come.

Week Four: *Grateful people are willing to try more*
Luke 8:1-8

Spend FIFTEEN – Day One

1. Read Luke 8:1-8. Who was with Jesus? Why are they mentioned by Luke?
2. In Luke 8:1, Luke makes a point of saying, “the twelve were with Him.” When they chose a replacement for Judas, one of the qualifications was that the person (Acts 1:21-22) should be a person who had been with them from the beginning of Jesus’ ministry. Why would that be considered important?
3. Even though they had been with Jesus and observed His treatment of people and had listened to His many messages, they still didn’t understand who He was and what He was sent by His Father to do. (See Mark 9:32.) What does this tell us about human nature... about us?
4. Read Romans 11:33-36. How much can we really know about God? Is that a good or a bad thing?
5. Would you want a God that was limited by your ability to understand Him? Explain. What does this imply when we are confused by God’s apparent inattention to our needs and prayers?
6. What is God doing or not doing now that has you a bit confused? What are you seeking clarity on in life?
7. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray for greater trust of God when His actions or inactions seem confusing in your life.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Two

8. Read Luke 8:2-3. How would you describe these women?
9. The first century Jewish culture (like many Middle Eastern cultures today) did not consider women as important as men. What do this and other references to women in the life and ministry of Jesus (as the objects of His mercy and as examples of faith) say about Jesus and Christianity?
10. What had Jesus done for these women?
11. What is the difference between simply knowing the Bible and experiencing God’s grace and presence in your own life? How does that change your faith in God?

12. Many theologians stress the value of “word and sacrament” as the only means of grace (i.e. the primary means by which God works to convert and strengthen Christians in their faith). What role does personal experience play in the life of the Christian who has experienced a personal blessing or in sharing your faith with others?
13. Read Acts 4:20, Acts 22:1-15, 2 Corinthians 12:1-10 and 1 Timothy 1:12-17. Did Paul only quote the Scriptures? Why do you think he laced his own testimony with personal accounts of his experience?
14. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray to be more aware of the ways in which God has personally demonstrated His love and grace in your life.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Three

15. Look again at Luke 8:2-3. How did Luke describe the actions of the women in Luke 8:3? Why do you think he mentioned that? Why is that significant?
16. Read Jesus’ words in Matthew 6:19-24. Does Jesus say, “Where your heart is, your treasure will be also?” or “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also”? What’s the difference, and why do you think He said it this way?
17. God certainly cares more about our heart than our resources. What does His constant emphasis on first-fruit giving and tithing say about human nature and Jesus’ desire for us to establish godly priorities?
18. Is Christian giving something that is easy or hard for you to do? Were you raised in a home that made regular and generous gifts to Christian causes? How does our family of origin affect our own practice in this area, or doesn’t it?
19. Jesus went on to tell a parable about seeds and how they grow. Why would He use an agricultural example to teach in those days?
20. How might He change that story to engage us with a culturally relevant example?
21. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray for God to settle your spirit about the issue of financial support of Christian causes.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Four

22. Read the parable of the seed as Jesus told it in Mark 8:4-8. What do you think the seed represents? (see verse 11) How is that seed cast?
23. What types of soil received the seed, and what do they represent?

24. Is there anything the sower can do to make the seed better? Explain the point of comparison.

25. What does the seed need to be most productive?

26. What can a farmer do to make his fields more productive?

27. What can we do to make our hearts more receptive to the seed of God's Word?

28. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray for an open heart to hear and do God's will for your life.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Five

29. Look again at the parable in Luke 8:2-8. What words did Jesus say to end this parable? What did He mean by that statement?

30. Is the truth still true if no one pays attention? Explain.

31. Is the truth as effective if it is heard but ignored? Do you think that is a common occurrence when it comes to God's Word?

32. Do you think most people accept responsibility for the consequence of their disobedience? Where do they place blame?

33. Jesus said the seed that finds good soil produces a good crop yielding good outcomes. What does that mean when we think of the seed as God's Word?

34. In your observation, what are some of the weeds of life that sprout up to choke the seed and limit the harvest?

35. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray to recognize the dangers that temptations present to limit your influence as God's witness in the world.