

Growing Deeper – Part Two

Standouts - Then you will shine like stars in the sky as you hold firmly to the word of life –Phil 2:15

Week Four: *God-Directed Journey*

Luke 18:18-30

Spend FIFTEEN – Day One

1. As we dig deeper into what it means to live a God-directed journey, we'll look at a man who seemed to desire just that. Read Luke 18:18-30. How did Jesus respond when the man called him "good"?
2. When you are Spending FIFTEEN, whether you're doing Growing Deeper or something else, do you ever read ahead to try to find an answer for a question for which you are uncertain? How does that affect your answer? (example: stifle your creative thinking or personal reflection)
3. It does not appear Jesus was concerned about steering the man toward a specific conclusion. He reminded the man of the full weight of the law required to be good, and stated that no one is good except God alone. How did the man respond to Jesus in verse 21?
4. Why do you think the young man still claimed to have kept the commandments in spite of what Jesus said to him?
5. If the young man actually believed that he perfectly kept the commandments, why do you suppose he would even ask Jesus this question in the first place?
6. Do you struggle with your inability to keep God's Commandments or do you feel you do a pretty good job? (see Exodus 20:1-17)
7. If we are going to honestly pursue a God-directed journey, a great place to start is by acknowledging our inability to do this on our own. End your FIFTEEN by confessing your failings at keeping God's Commandments. Ask God to help you recognize when you are straying from His laws.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Two

8. Do you wrestle with the commandments God has given us? In other words, do they seem too restrictive? Do they take away your enjoyment or do they seem to serve a purpose in your life? Explain your answer.
9. Most of us consider the Ten Commandments as God's law. But the Jews in Jesus' day lived under a much broader list. The Mosaic Law had 613 commands, some very complicated. Skim though Leviticus 11-19 for just a brief look at some of them. How would you categorize these laws?
10. From our modern day point of view, some of the laws seem unreasonably harsh and excessive. However, if we think

about the difference between our lives today (i.e. refrigeration, air conditioning, antibiotics) and theirs, we can clearly see why there's no wiggle room in some of these laws. We know it can be deadly to come in contact with a little rotten meat, much less eat it! How might following laws of sanitary eating, hygiene and healthy relationships have made the Jewish people stand out amongst other cultures of their day?

11. Many of the cultures foreign to God's people had to think His people were crazy to abstain from what were likely common practices of the day. Perhaps they recognized in them a health and vitality that they did not experience themselves. Can following God's commands today have the same effect? Why or why not?
12. Some Christians today believe that following rules can attract others to Christ. Read Matthew 22:34-40. How does Jesus summarize the Law?
13. Now read 1 John 2:7-11. How does our light shine brightest? In your life, how does this love look, not just in theory but in practice? Brainstorm a list of ways you can show love to others.
14. As you finish your FIFTEEN in prayer, pray that the love that you show others because of Jesus will draw them to Him.

Spend FIFTEEN: Day Three

15. Look again at Luke 18:18-30. The author Luke retells a conversation between Jesus and a "certain ruler." The same event is recorded in Mark 10:17-31, but Mark calls him the "rich young" man. By all accounts, the man is rich, young and powerful. Yet he comes to Jesus because being rich, young and powerful was not enough for him. Why do you think he wanted more? Have you ever felt the same as this man?
16. In both accounts, Jesus told the ruler that he still lacked one thing. What did Jesus say would happen if the ruler followed Jesus' instructions?
17. Mark includes a detail that Luke left out. What happened in Mark 10:21?
18. It is interesting to note that Jesus did not despise the man. He recognized his poverty of spirit in spite of his riches. Do we typically feel the same about the rich? Describe an example.
19. Read Ephesians 2:4-9. How are we saved? (vs. 8)
20. Scripture is clear and consistent; we are saved by God's grace through faith. This portion of scripture even says God displays the riches of His grace. Our salvation has nothing to do with our riches or lack thereof, so why might have Jesus made this particular command to this "certain ruler"?

21. One of the benefits of a God-directed journey is that it is very, very personal. As you finish your FIFTEEN in prayer, ask God to give you openness to hear what He has to say to you.

Spend FIFTEEN: Day Four

22. Reread Luke 18:18-30. How did Luke describe the demeanor of the man? Why did he feel that way?

23. What example did Jesus use to describe the challenges of being rich?

24. Look again at verse 24. The young man originally asked about eternal life, but Jesus changes His phrase slightly. What does Jesus actually say it is hard for a rich man to enter in this analogy?

25. Jesus uses this term in an interesting way as He launches His ministry right after His Baptism. Read Mark 1:9-15. Who had come near?

26. The Kingdom of God is not as much a place as a person. It is the reign and rule of Jesus Christ. And that's not something that we have to wait for until we are in Heaven; it is available to us now. Why might the wealthy have trouble embracing the Kingdom of God when it is right in front of them, like this young man?

27. Wealth is not the only thing that keeps us from focusing on the things God would have us turn our attention toward. Maybe managing or acquiring money and possessions distracts you, or maybe it's something else. What things keep you from fully focusing on what God desires for you?

28. Finish your FIFTEEN by asking God to help you to focus on the things He cares about, rather than the things that steal your time and attention.

Spend FIFTEEN: Day Five

29. What is the most exciting thing that's ever happened to you? Have you ever won a prize, received an award, or escaped a near death experience? Describe that event and how it felt at the time.

30. Look again at Luke 18:18-30. In verse 26, we see the people around Jesus chime in with a question. How did Jesus answer them?

31. After Jesus reminds the crowd of the Good News, Peter can no longer be silent. One thing we know about Peter, he was impulsive, passionate and often first to speak. What we don't know is his tone. (If only the Bible included Emojis!) What do you think Peter meant by his statement? Was he looking for credit? Was he bragging? Was he implying if the disciples could do it anyone could? What do you think his intention was?

32. Then Jesus makes another promise in reply to Peter's in verse 29. What did Jesus promise? What does that mean to you? Does it sound like an easy, struggle-free life?
33. If we look at the example of impulsive Peter, we see an amazing God-directed story. By his own admission, Peter had given up everything to follow Jesus. But, by following Jesus, Peter witnessed and performed miracles. He saw the blind have their sight restored, lepers healed, the lame walk, thousands fed with five loaves and two fish, and miraculous catches of fish, just to name a few. Perhaps one moment may have trumped them all; a moment that came after Jesus' death and resurrection, after Peter had denied Jesus in His hour of need. Read John 21:4-19. Jesus took the time to reinstate Peter to his former role. Have you ever felt that kind of intimacy with God? If you have, describe how that feels. If not, what would it be worth to you to feel that?
34. As you finish your final FIFTEEN this week, consider all that it means to be on a God-directed journey. Is that what you want? Are you willing to trust that whatever the sacrifices required will be worth it to experience the Kingdom of God in your life now and in the age to come? If so, end by declaring so in prayer to God.

Week Five: *Becoming a Standout*
Genesis 32:22-28

Spend FIFTEEN - Day One

1. Have you ever experienced family drama? The most serious kind where you're not sure if relationships could ever be repaired? How did that feel? How did it affect the rest of your life?
2. Before we dive into the events of this week's scripture, let's back up a little and see what has been happening prior to these events. Up until this point Jacob has lived a pretty interesting life; he's been on both sides of some shady dealing. He's stolen his brother Esau's birthright and been duped by his father-in-law, Laban. Where Jacob is concerned, he's definitely given as good as he's gotten. If Jacob is a standout, it's mostly for being up to no good. When we catch up with him, he's just pulled up stakes in the middle of the night and left his father-in-law behind, taking all his possessions, his wives (Laban's daughters) and children with him. Read Genesis 32:1-21. What is Jacob trying to accomplish?
3. If you were Jacob's brother, Esau, and you heard that Jacob was heading your way with his entire family, what would you assume Jacob wanted?
4. Describe a time when someone assumed a motive of yours that was not true. How does that make you feel to know someone made those types of assumptions about you? (Maybe it was the situation with a family member in question #1?)
5. Jacob's reputation preceded him and he knew it. He used gifts and messages of humility to help soften his brother toward him. What types of things have you used? Were they effective in accomplishing your goals for them?
6. Jacob's generous actions and posture of humility did indeed soften Esau toward his brother. As you finish your FIFTEEN, consider again your example from question #4. If the situation has been resolved in a positive way, give thanks to God for that result. If not, ask God to give you the wisdom and humility to find a way to repair the situation.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Two

7. Have you ever been a part of a group with a reputation? Maybe it was a high school clique, sports team, or a particular career. Maybe your family of origin had a reputation. How does it feel to be lumped in with that group, fairly or not?
8. Read Genesis 32:21-24. Speculate why Jacob might have wanted to spend some time alone.
9. One of the challenges of being a part of a group is living up to the expectations of the group. Maybe everyone in your family has great singing voices, but you do not. Or maybe everyone expects you to be the one to come up with the solutions to problems. How might separating yourself from the group for a period of time help you to see yourself more clearly?

10. Are there other ways alone time helps you?
11. Another challenge of being a part of a group is being identified with them by others, whether or not you actually have the attributes expected from being a part of that group. Did the group you identified in question #7 give you a group reputation or was it something you had to overcome?
12. We don't know Jacob's exact reason for being alone — maybe he just needed some time to relax, maybe he was coming up with a plan B if the gifts did not work on his brother, maybe he was hesitant to go back to the land of his birth. Or maybe he hoped God would show up. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer by asking God to come close to you. Then spend time just talking to Him about whatever is on your mind.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Three

13. Read Genesis 32:22-26. Verse 24 may be one of the most understated descriptions of one of the weirdest stories in Scripture. If you have ever seen any of Peter Sellers' Pink Panther movies, you may remember a character named Cato, who was hired by Sellers' character to attack him randomly in order to keep his reflexes and martial arts skills sharp. Peter Sellers' character is never surprised; he just springs into attack mode. How would you feel if you were alone and suddenly found yourself in a wrestling match?
14. If Jacob was surprised, it is not evident by what we read. He just wrestled with the "man" until he incapacitated Jacob. What did he do to Jacob in verse 25? Why might he have done that? (Instead of, say, twisting his arm?)
15. Yesterday, we speculated on why Jacob was alone in the first place. Maybe Jacob had good reason for staying behind, or maybe he was planning an escape out the back door. Now with his hip wrenched, he was going nowhere but facing the man. What did the man ask Jacob in verse 26, and what was his response?
16. By Jacob's response, we can see that Jacob knew that this was no ordinary man. He knew that he was wrestling with God Himself. Do you ever feel like that? In other words, do the events in your life sometimes seem like God is trying to get your attention about something? What do you do (or would you do) if you felt God was trying to get your attention? How could you be certain it is God?
17. Do you ever wrestle with God because of hardships in your life or challenges that you face? Describe some of the ways you wrestle with God.
18. Some scholars think the man was an angel, but many believe he was the pre-incarnate Jesus. In any case, Jacob knew it was God and he was not about to let Him go without a blessing. Jacob knew the value of a blessing (he'd already stolen one from his brother!). If God were in front of you right now, how would you ask Him to bless you? Close your FIFTEEN by asking Him for His blessing.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Four

19. Jacob was a man that stood out, and not necessarily for good reasons. He was wealthy and powerful, but he was on the run and scared to move forward. Read Genesis 32:27-28. What had just changed for Jacob?
20. Since the man was God and already knew Jacob's name, why would He ask Jacob his name?
21. There was no mistaking this moment for Jacob. The man plainly asked Jacob his name and declared a new name for him. What things change when you change your name?
22. In American culture, many women change their last names to be the same as their husbands' when they marry. What does that type of name change say about a woman's identity?
23. Do you still use the name your family of origin called you when you were growing up? Why do some people stop using those names and use a more formal first name?
24. Jacob had a new name, Israel. A new name for a new season. How might a new identity give Jacob courage to move forward with his plans?
25. What is one of the hardest things about establishing a new identity?
26. It's very hard to shake off an old identity. God chose to give Jacob a new name to help him grasp a new identity and to help signify to others that Jacob was not who he used to be. Close your FIFTEEN in prayer. Ask God to show you if the way others see you reflects who you truly are or who you want to be. Ask Him for the courage to help you change that.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Five

27. How do you feel about your name? Do you like it? Is it so common that you were forced to use a last initial to identify your elementary schoolwork, or is it so rare you'd never find it on a key chain? Are people surprised when they meet you because your face doesn't match the name? Something else?
28. On week four, we looked at the importance of a God-directed journey on being a standout. Like Jacob, Peter was a man that struggled with his identity. Read Matthew 16:13-18. What did Jesus declare for Simon Peter?
29. What had Simon just done prior to this?
30. Look again at Genesis 32:25-28. What had Jacob acknowledged?

31. Like Jacob, Peter's shift in name came after Peter declared the truth of who Jesus truly was. Read 2 Corinthians 5:17-18. For followers of Jesus, what do we now have?

32. What does it mean to you to know that Jesus offers us a new identity, one that is found in Him and free from the baggage of our past?

33. Close your FIFTEEN by asking God to help you use the identity you have in Christ to stand out and make a difference in the lives of those around you.

Week Six: Road to Redemption

Mark 12:1-12

Spend FIFTEEN - Day One

1. This week is going to be a reflective one, as we walk through Jesus' final days before the Crucifixion. To start, remind yourself of what significant event kicked off this week. What happened on the Sunday before the Crucifixion? (Check Mark 11:1-11 to see the event that started Jesus' final week.)
2. On Monday of His Passion Week, Jesus started with an activity that was of a much different tone than His Sunday. Read Mark 11:12-19. What did Jesus do in the temple?
3. What was Jesus' concern about the "church habits" of that time?
4. The Gospel writer Mark clearly placed this story of the temple alongside the story of the fig tree that didn't bear fruit. What connection might he have been making?
5. See what happened to the fig tree the next day. Read Mark 11:20-21. What happened to the tree? What parallel promise was Jesus making about the temple? (If you need help, read Matthew 24:1-2.)
6. In what ways should the church "bear fruit" in the lives of people who are part of it? How does your church life encourage you in your fruitful endeavors?
7. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Ask God to bear much fruit in your life. Look at the list in Galatians 5:22-23; pick one of the "fruits" that jumps out to you and ask God to nourish that fruit in your life!

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Two

8. Yesterday, we saw how Jesus declared an end to the empty religion of the temple. Today, we see how He establishes the parameters of His new church. Read what He did on Tuesday of His final week: Mark 14:1-9. How did Jesus spend this day?
9. Whose house was Jesus eating at? According to the passage, what was apparently the defining feature of this man? How respectable do you think it was to have dinner with such a person?
10. What was the unusual event that happened while Jesus was eating?
11. Why did people have a problem with this act? What would have been a respectable thing to do with her money?

12. Based on these two examples, what would you say were some of the “principles” of a faith built around Jesus?
13. What are ways that we can embody these principles in our lives today?
14. Close your FIFTEEN by praying that God would show you ways to be radically inclusive of others who might be dismissed in our society. Ask for God’s spendthrift generosity towards others.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Three

15. The Bible doesn’t tell us what Jesus did on this day of His final week. So today we shall spend our 15 minutes reading Psalm 118 meditatively. Read Psalm 118:1-29.
16. Read Psalm 118 again. Try to notice things you didn’t notice the first time.
17. Read Psalm 118 a third time. What would you say is the main theme of this psalm?
18. Read Psalm 118 a fourth time, and this time focus on verses 19-24. What is the imagery in these verses?
19. Now read Luke 20:17. Who is the “cornerstone”?
20. As you end your FIFTEEN, pray for the Holy Spirit to help you build your life on the foundation of Jesus Christ.
21. If you are in the St. Louis area, you are invited to come to the Prayer Labyrinth at St. John (15800 Manchester Road) anytime between 6:00pm-9:00pm.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Four

22. Thursday of Jesus’ final week was a special day. Read about it in Mark 14:12-26. What historic holiday were Jesus and his disciples celebrating?
23. For the sake of background, read Exodus 12:1-13, 24-30. What are God’s people celebrating when they commemorate Passover?
24. In the Passover in Egypt, the blood of what animal saved the Israelites from death?

25. Now read 1 Corinthians 5:7 and John 1:29. Why is it significant that Jesus is given this title?
26. With this background, what is Jesus' blood accomplishing for you every time you receive it through Communion?
27. Take time to commemorate Jesus' last supper by visiting the Prayer Labyrinth at St. John (15800 Manchester Road) anytime from 6:00 in the morning until 9:00 at night today, March 29.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Five

28. Friday marks the beginning of the end for Jesus' time on Earth. Read Mark 15:1-15. What is the main event in this passage?
29. What charge was laid against Jesus? (see verse 2 and verse 9) Was this claim true or not?
30. In earthly power structures, what are kings' duties expected to be?
31. Instead, what duty did our king, Jesus, endure for our sake?
32. Spend the last few minutes of your FIFTEEN reflecting on the cost that God was willing to pay for the sake of saving your life. It is appropriate for this to be sobering, as well as to feel grateful for God's amazing sacrifice. Give thanks to God through prayer for what He has done for your sake.
33. Take time to commemorate Jesus' ultimate sacrifice by visiting the Prayer Labyrinth at St. John (15800 Manchester Road) anytime from 6:00 in the morning until 9:00 at night today, March 30.