

Growing Deeper
A New Way to Be Human

Week One: Finding Our Place Again
Genesis 1:1-27

Spend FIFTEEN – Day One

1. How would you describe what it means to be human?
2. What characteristics would you use to differentiate humanity from the rest of creation?
3. Read Genesis 1:1-27. What does God create? How does he describe all he created?
4. Reread verses 26-27. How does God describe the uniqueness of humanity?
5. How does God's description line up with your definition of humanity?
6. How does God's description impact your feelings about yourself?
7. End your FIFTEEN thanking your Creator for the goodness of all he has made, including you.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Two

8. How would you answer the question, "Who are you?"
9. Read Genesis 1:26-27. How does God answer the question, "Who are you?"
10. How would you define "the image of God"?
11. One Bible commentator states, "The word image is an interesting word. In the Hebrew language that word image means "shadow"...The shadow is dependent upon the reality...And it is a general outline without any details." How does being made in the "shadow" of God broaden your understanding?
12. This image was imparted only to humans. Humans share (imperfectly and finitely) God's communicable attributes such as personality, truth, wisdom, love, holiness, and justice. How do these qualities give us the capacity for an ongoing relationship with our Creator?

13. Another commentator says knowing who you are (the image of God) is a gift. How does knowing you are God's image help you? How does it humble you?

14. Finish your FIFTEEN making a list of ways you see God's image in yourself. Confess to God the ways you have fallen short of his image. Thank him for Jesus' work to forgive your shortcomings and restore his image.

Spend FIFTEEN: Day Three

15. Did God have to create?

16. Why do you think God created the world? Why did he create people?

17. Reread Genesis 1:27. How many times is the word "created" used?

18. With the repetition of the word created, it is as though God put exclamation points here to indicate that there is something special about the creation of man. What does Genesis 1:26 say about the purpose of man?

19. Read Psalm 8. How does David describe God's plans for man? What does it cause David to do?

20. How can technology help humanity accomplish God's purposes? How can it hinder?

21. Take time to consider how you are accomplishing God's purposes. Ask God to show you how he is using you to bless his creation. Finish your FIFTEEN by thanking him for the ways he has crowned you with honor and glory.

Spend FIFTEEN: Day Four

22. Read Genesis 1:1-27 again. What characteristics of God do you see in this passage?

23. What differences are there between what God creates and what man makes?

24. While God can create something out of nothing, humans take what God has already created to make something. How do humanity's "creations" reflect God?

25. How do humanity's "creations" confuse the reflection of God?

26. The Apostle's Creed states, "I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth." What would it look like to live as if you believed this? What things would you do or not do?
27. Believing God is the Creator gives a reliability and steadfastness to life. Natural processes go on because God is faithful. God not only called the world into being, but he sustains it. How does this help you when life seems out of control?
28. End your FIFTEEN praising God for each attribute you saw in the passage. Thank him for the ways these attributes help you in your current circumstances. Ask him to help you live like he IS the Creator of heaven and earth.

Spend FIFTEEN: Day Five

29. Genesis 1 teaches us that God is necessary for life. Would you say most people live as if this were true? How is it reflected in your own life?
30. Each of us struggles with living as we were originally created to live, in loving relationship with our Creator, in his image. What threatens your ability to live as you were intended to live?
31. Read John 1:4. What does that mean to you personally?
32. How does Jesus bring life into the places you struggle?
33. Even before he created, God intended to restore the world that sin broke. Read Ephesians 1:3-10. How is God working to restore his creation in you? How will you cooperate?
34. How is God working to restore his creation through you? How will you cooperate?
35. End your FIFTEEN by praying Psalm 8. Put your name in place of the words "mankind" and "human beings." Put "me" in place of "them."

Week Two – Restoring Our Rhythms
Genesis 1:28-2:3

Spend FIFTEEN - Day One

1. Read Genesis 1:27-2:3 very slowly and intentionally. Note anything that sticks out to you.
2. Whom did God bless with his work? (See also Psalm 115:16)
3. Describe the command God gave Adam and Eve in vs. 28.
4. Does God's command sound easy to do? Why or why not?
5. So often we think of work as punishment. However, God's original intention was to bless man through his work. How would you describe your work? Do you consider it a blessing most days?
6. As you finish your FIFTEEN, ask God to give you joy in the work with which with he has blessed you.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Two

7. Look back at your answer to question #5 from yesterday's study. Do you feel the same way about your work today? Do your feelings about your work change from day to day? If you work a traditional Monday through Friday schedule, how does your attitude change from the beginning of the week to the end?
8. God's original plan to bless man by giving him purpose through his work came with another command. Read Genesis 1:28-2:3 again. What did God establish in Genesis 2:3?
9. How does having a day of rest affect how you feel about your work?
10. Why do you suppose God took a day of rest? Do you think he needed to rest?
11. Look at verse 2:3. What made the seventh day holy? (See also Leviticus 23:3)
12. A day of rest became holy because God said it was. Not only did he say it, he modeled it. What does this say to you about the importance of rest for us?

13. How does technology aid in allowing you to take a day of rest?
14. In what ways does it detract from it?
15. Finish your FIFTEEN by thanking God for caring so much about us that he modeled rest.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Three

16. Look again at Genesis 1:28-2:3. Describe what did God did in Genesis 1:31.
17. God not only rested at the end of the week, he also rested and reflected on the day's work when evening came. Do you take the time to do this at the end of the day? If not, how might establishing this as a routine affect your day?
18. Take a moment to listen to the song *3 Little Things* by Jason Mraz. (Isn't it great that technology allows us to hear a song instantly, whenever we want to?) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OsrICJqWQ1E> Do any of these lyrics speak to you?
19. One of the great things about this song is the posture of gratitude and appreciation for the good things of life, but my favorite is Mraz's suggestion to close the chapter on the day and start fresh the next day. What happens to your attitude when you carry the same struggles into each new day?
20. Read Lamentations 3:22-24. What does God promise us every morning?
21. As you end your FIFTEEN today, ask God to remind you as you close your eyes tonight to help you lose the chapter on today to start fresh in his creation tomorrow.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Four

22. Are you more of a night owl or a morning person? What time of day do you feel like you've hit your stride?
23. If you think back to the time before the technology of the lightbulb was invented, the only way to extend the working hours of the day was the technology of candlelight indoors, and possibly a torch when outside. Nightfall itself was self-limiting when it came to human work. How have today's technologies affected humans' work schedules?
24. By all accounts, the time period in when we've had the luxury of electric lightbulbs is a small portion of human history. Do you think it has been mostly good for human health, well-being, and relationships or not? How about for you personally?

25. Read Ecclesiastes 5:18-19. What is the author telling us he has discovered?
26. What steps can you take in your life to help keep technology from upsetting your work/life balance?
27. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer, asking God to help you recognize when technology is causing an imbalance in your life.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Five

28. How do you feel about the use of technology in your life right now? Is it adding to or detracting from your work/life balance?
29. At St. John, we use a mnemonic device called the 1.1.15.6 to help us keep growing spiritually. But it also has the added benefit of helping us have balance in our lives. Go to stjstl.net/11156 to familiarize yourself with them. Which one of the 1.1.15.6 do you think would most help restore balance at this point in your life?
30. Read Hebrews 10:24-25. This is the theme verse for the second 1 of the 1.1.15.6, Be someONE to another person in an intentional relationship. Thinking specifically about this 1, how does technology help us be intentional about relationships with each other? How does technology hinder those relationships?
31. As you end your final FIFTEEN this week, think about the ways that you need to change the way you use technology in order to improve your life and relationships. Then commit the matter to God in prayer and begin to take those steps toward the goals you've set.

Week Three - *Connecting in a Digital Age*

Genesis 2:5-9, 15-25

Spend FIFTEEN - Day One

1. What are the different tools that you use to connect with people throughout your day?
2. Do you think that human beings are more connected to each other in this era of history, or were we more connected in the past? Why do you think so?
3. Mark Zuckerberg, the inventor and CEO of Facebook, says that the point of Facebook is to “help people connect and communicate more efficiently.” How well does Facebook do at that goal?
4. Read Genesis 2:18. Everything about this human that God created was “good.” But there was one thing wrong. What was it?
5. The human need for connection is something that God has called out since the moment he made us. Is it possible for this need to result in bad connections? Why?
6. Take a few moments to evaluate the quality of your own connections to others. How does the quality of these relationships correlate to the quality of your life?
7. Close your FIFTEEN in prayer. Thank God for the good connections he’s placed in your life.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Two

8. On Facebook, social media, or just life in general, are you more likely to share the good things that happen in your life or the bad? Which things (good or bad) do you think other people tend to share more?
9. The movie *Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle* features an image-obsessed teenager, Bethany. Check out this short clip: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D2S-7TILC3c>. What is the difference between what she claims about her selfie and the behind-the-scenes reality?
10. What do you think Bethany’s hopes for connection are? Why is she sharing this selfie?
11. What do you think she’s afraid of, causing her to lie about how much effort she put into looking pretty?
12. Read Proverbs 17:17. How would you restate this proverb in your own words?

13. Which kinds of connecting do you think would help create this kind of friend? Does social media reinforce these kinds of bonds, or does it require a different method?
14. Spend the rest of your FIFTEEN with God, meditating, and ask him to help you evaluate your own methods of connecting. Are you connecting with people in ways that are growing to create real acceptance, or in surface-y ways that require you to pretend that everything is better than it is?

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Three

15. In the movie *While You Were Sleeping*, Sandra Bullock falls in love with a man who she sees every day — for the 15 seconds when he buys a subway token to go to his work! How well does she really know him?
16. In a similar way, technology today helps us create lots of “sound bites” where people get tiny glimpses into our lives. Stephen Colbert asked technology expert Sherry Turkle this question: “Don't all those little tweets, don't all those little sips of online communication, add up to one big gulp of real conversation?” What do you think?
17. Read Genesis 2:18-23. God made Adam straight from the dirt. What did God use to make woman?
18. What level of intimacy would that seem to imply between people?
19. What kinds of interactions has it taken for you to feel like you really know someone deeply?
20. How can you intentionally create more of those moments?
21. End your FIFTEEN by praying to God and ask him to help you find the deep connections he designed for you.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Four

22. Here's an interesting hypothetical. Computers and A.I. are getting better every month. So which would you prefer in a local restaurant: your food is cooked by robots and made perfectly every time, or your food is prepared by humans, which means sometimes they burn it, lose your order, or take too long making it?
23. Why might someone prefer the robot version?
24. Sherry Turkle has a poignant observation: <https://youtu.be/t7Xr3AsBEK4?t=10m7s>. What is her opinion of the situation between the woman and the robot baby seal?

25. Read Genesis 2:18-20. Adam first tried to find meaningful connection through which things?
26. If you've ever owned a pet, you know that it is far simpler to connect with a dog or cat than a fellow human being. A dog never complains about you — it just loves that you're around!
27. But what ultimate conclusion does God make about relying on pets (or, in our current context, "sociable robots") for our deepest level of connection?
28. As you finish your FIFTEEN in prayer, ask God to reveal to you the ways that you have settled for connections that are easier to maintain than deep relationships with the people in your life.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Five

29. If you could live in any human era, which one do you think would be the most conducive to living a quality life? What factor of that time period matters the most in helping you choose it?
30. Continue by reading Genesis 2:8-17. This is a description of the "perfect" Garden of Eden. What is it about the garden that you think made it "perfect"? Was the weather ideal? Did the fruit taste better than hamburgers? Was it because of the relaxed pace of life?
31. We maybe get a hint a little later in the text. Read Genesis 2:25. What surprising detail is shared at the very end about Eden?
32. I wonder if the thing that made Eden perfect is that there was nothing hindering a true and intimate connection between Adam and Eve. Work didn't get in the way. There were no facades (or clothes!) that either of them had to hide behind. No social landmines they had to avoid. Does that sound idyllic or scary to you?
33. How could you begin to create that kind of environment for the people around you? What would it look like to make someone feel that they could be real with you "and feel no shame"?
34. As you finish your final FIFTEEN in prayer, ask God to help you recreate Eden for the people in your life. To mold you to be a safe place where people could connect freely and authentically.

Week Four: *Living Forever*
Genesis 3

Spend FIFTEEN – Day One

1. To begin your FIFTEEN for the week, take some time to read Genesis 3. Read the whole chapter, only 24 verses, but focus specifically on verses 17-24. Does anything stick out to you?
2. Notice verse 3 of Genesis 3. Eve clearly understood and knew what God had told her and Adam. So why do you think she disobeyed?
3. What does verse 6 say about why Eve took the fruit from the tree?
4. Think about a time in your life, either recently or when you were little, that you wanted something *so* bad that you did whatever it took to get it, even if you knew what you did was wrong. Describe how it felt to want something that much.
5. Once you got what you were wanting, how did you feel? Was it as good as you thought? Why or why not?
6. How do you think Adam and Eve felt after getting what they thought they wanted?
7. To finish your FIFTEEN for today, pray that God would reveal more of who he is to you this week. Pray that you would better see how much God loves you, even when it doesn't feel like it.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Two

8. To begin your FIFTEEN for today, reread Genesis 3. Is there anything new or noteworthy you got out of it after reading it again today?
9. In verse 8, what do Adam and Eve try to do after eating the fruit?
10. Did their hiding work? Did God find them?
11. When God finds them and confronts Adam about what he has done, does Adam accept responsibility or not? What about when God confronts Eve? Does she accept responsibility?
12. It never works to hide from God. You've probably experienced that in your own life. Can you think of a time when you felt like you needed to hide from God? How did you feel?

13. As we'll look at more tomorrow, even when we disobey God and feel shame and guilt and want to hide from him, he *still* loves us and comes running after us to take care of us and bring us back to him. As you close your FIFTEEN in prayer today, thank God for his crazy, unending, reckless love. Ask him to help you love others like he loves.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Three

14. To begin your FIFTEEN for today, read Genesis 3:17-24. In verse 17, God blames Adam for listening to Eve. Why do you think that is? Is it really Adam's fault?

15. At the end of verse 19 God says to Adam, "For dust you are and to dust you will return." Does that sound like Adam is going to live forever?

16. Notice that in verse 21, even though Adam and Eve disobeyed God and sinned against him, he still took care of them and provided for their needs. What does this tell you about God and his nature?

17. Does it seem harsh that God banned Adam and Eve from the garden forever? Why or why not?

18. Can you think of a time when it felt like God was punishing you or treating you too harshly?

19. To close your FIFTEEN for today, spend some time in prayer. Ask God to help you see those times when he is molding and shaping you into more of who he wants you to be. Ask him to give you the strength to see through the pain that you may feel in those times.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Four

20. To begin your FIFTEEN for today, read Genesis 3:17-24 once again.

21. Yesterday we talked about how God still took care of Adam and Eve by providing for their needs, even after they sinned against him. God *still* loved Adam and Eve, even though they sinned and even though they could no longer live forever on the earth. How does that make you feel?

22. Just like he didn't want Adam and Eve to live in their fallen state forever, God doesn't want us to live in our fallen state forever either. Through his sacrificial love, he has also made a way for us to live forever with him in Heaven. How does this change how we should view death?

23. Read 1 John 4:8. What does it say about God and his nature?

24. Notice that it says God *IS* love. It's not what he does or how he feels. It's who he *IS*. How does this make you feel about

God?

25. Now read Romans 5:8. How does or how did God express that love he has for us, at least according to this verse?
26. As you finish your FIFTEEN for today, spend some time thinking about how great and marvelous God's love is. Throughout the day, try to keep in mind how far God went to show us how much he loves us.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Five

27. Have you ever been treated surprisingly well by someone who you neglected or mistreated? If so, how did that make you feel?
28. Read John 15:13. In a way, that's kind of what God does for us each and every day. Because of our sinfulness, we continually reject God and sin against him. But does he treat us the same way in return? No, he shows us far more love and compassion than we ever deserve! Look at John 15:13 again. It says that no one has greater love than God. And he expressed it by sending Jesus to die on our behalf. Jesus paid the price that you and I deserve! Spend some time thinking about that! Jot down your reactions to these thoughts.
29. Now read Ephesians 5:25. What does it say about how we should love?
30. Even though this verse specifically talks about a marriage relationship, it can apply to all our relationships as well. We are commanded to love one another as Christ loved us. That's a pretty high standard to try to meet, don't you think? How would you rate yourself in this area?
31. While we'll never fully be able to love as Christ loves us, we can certainly do our part and try to do the best we can. Think about some practical ways you can better love those around you. Maybe a friend, neighbor, or coworker comes to mind.
32. As you finish your final FIFTEEN for this week, spend some time in prayer again. Ask God to open your heart to better understand and appreciate the love he shows each of us. Then ask him to open your eyes to better see those in your life who you can better love in return.