

Growing Deeper
Born for This

Week One - Isaac: Born to Spare Us
Genesis 22:1-19

Spend FIFTEEN – Day One

1. What were the circumstances of your birth? Anything unusual?
2. Read Genesis 18:1-19. What were the special circumstances of Isaac's birth? (Read also Genesis 17:17)
3. Read verse 18. What were God's plans for Abraham?
4. How is a child key to these plans? To whom do these plans ultimately refer? (Galatians 3:13-14)
5. Why did Sarah laugh when God made the promise of a child?
6. When have you disbelieved God's Word? What promise of God is too unbelievable for you to count on?
7. In verse 14 God says, "Is anything too hard for the LORD?" Throughout the Bible, God reminds us nothing is too hard for him. He keeps every promise. End your FIFTEEN thanking God for keeping his promises despite our unbelief.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Two

8. What do you treasure more than anything else?
9. Read Genesis 22:1-5. What did God tell Abraham to do? What is your initial reaction to this command?
10. Why did God do this? (read verse 1) Which phrases reveal God knew what it cost Abraham to give up his son?
11. What has God already told Abraham about Isaac (see Genesis 17:19)?
12. Does God test our trust in him for his benefit or ours?

13. How would this test benefit Abraham? Was it fair to ask Abraham to do this?
14. What can you infer about Abraham's faith from verse 5?
15. The purpose of a test is to show us what we know. It strengthens and deepens our understanding. A test gives us an opportunity to experience what is true. End your FIFTEEN in prayer for all those being tested.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Three

16. Read Genesis 22:6-8. Unlike what you may have seen in many children's Bibles, Isaac was not a young child at this time. What do you think was going on in Isaac's mind?
17. Did Isaac deserve this treatment? What treatment does any human being deserve from God? Read Romans 3:23 and 6:23a.
18. What was Abraham's response to Isaac's concern?
19. It seems Isaac had no further questions. Who was Isaac trusting? Who was Abraham trusting?
20. To what characteristics of God might Abraham have been clinging?
21. Hebrews 11 tells us Abraham's peace and confidence came from his trust in the all-powerful, promise-keeping, merciful God. End your FIFTEEN today contemplating the ways God has shown you his mercy, his power, and his trustworthiness.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Four

22. Read Genesis 22:9-19. What do you find surprising in this part of the story?
23. What is the relationship between trust and obedience?
24. What truths was God teaching Abraham in this test?
25. Imagine Abraham's relief and joy when the angel stopped his hand. When have you experienced God's merciful provision? What was your response?

26. How far will you obey God because you trust him?

27. End your FIFTEEN thinking of times when God has been merciful to you instead of fair (not giving you what you deserve). Ask him to show you ways to extend mercy to others.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Five

28. Reread Genesis 22:1-19.

29. What similarities are there between this event and Jesus' death on the cross?

30. The journey to Mt. Moriah covered 50-60 miles and took 3 days. Abraham named the place Jehovah-jireh: the LORD will provide. More than 1,000 years later, God instructed Abraham's descendent Solomon to build the temple, the place where lambs were slain in atonement for sin, on Mt. Moriah. Years after that, in that same area, God provided Jesus, the Lamb of God, to die in our place. How does this repeated message from God deepen your love for him?

31. What is a substitute? What substitute did God provide for Isaac? What substitute does God provide for you?

32. From what does God's substitute spare you? What does this free you from? What does this free you for?

33. Abraham was called to sacrifice his one and only son, but was spared from going through with this horrific act. God himself, however, sacrificed his one and only Son without sparing him. Jesus is the substitute sacrifice for all who look in trusting faith to him. He is the ram in the thicket, taking your place. What a beautiful, heart-wrenching picture of Jesus' great love for us! God provided then and provides now, to spare us. End your FIFTEEN in adoration and thanksgiving.

Week Two - Moses: Born to Rescue
Exodus 3:7-22

Spend FIFTEEN – Day One

1. As we dig deeper into what it means that God is our rescuer, begin by reading Exodus 1:1-2:10. Why did the Egyptians enslave the Israelites, according to the text? (Exodus 1:9-14)
2. Eventually, what was the king of Egypt's solution to suppress the growing Israelite population? (Exodus 1:16)
3. The king of Egypt commanded the Hebrew midwives to kill all the newborn sons, but did they listen? Why or why not?
4. At the end of Exodus 1, what was the king of Egypt's backup plan to wipe out the newborn sons of Israel?
5. It's ironic that the casting of Moses into the Nile River, the very thing the king of Egypt intended to kill and destroy, is the very thing that saved him. In Exodus 2:5-10, who found Moses and pulled him out of the river?
6. If you were to write Moses' story or plan how he would be saved, would you have done it this way? Put yourself in Moses' mother's shoes. Can you imagine trusting God to save your son like she did?
7. To finish your FIFTEEN for today, confess your inability to fully trust God to rescue you. Ask him to continually grow your faith and trust in him to rescue and care for you always.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Two

8. To begin your FIFTEEN for today, read Exodus 1:1-2:10 again. Does anything new or noteworthy stick out to you this time?
9. We discussed it briefly yesterday, but can you imagine being Moses' mother? Can you imagine putting your three-month-old child in a basket in a river, not knowing what would happen to him?
10. Even though this story seems to make no sense at first, doesn't God call each one of us to do what Moses' mother did? Doesn't he call each one of us to trust that *he* can take better care of us and our children and our possessions far better than *we* ever could?
11. How does that make you feel? Is it easy to give up trust and control like that? Is it easy to trust in a rescuer beyond yourself? Why or why not?

12. In a situation that appeared to have no positive, hopeful outcome, God rescued Moses' life, and eventually his people. What's keeping *you* from trusting that God can rescue you from what you're currently facing?
13. Before finishing your FIFTEEN for today, spend some time in prayer, thanking God for all the times he has rescued you from situations that seemed hopeless. Ask him to remind you of those times and how he rescued you when you face difficult situations in the future.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Three

14. To begin your FIFTEEN for today, read Exodus 3:7-22. What strikes you about the portion of Scripture?
15. God was not blind to the suffering of his people. Verses 7 and 8 say, "I (the Lord) have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land." How does it make you feel that God saw and understood the affliction of his people? Is it comforting?
16. Does it comfort or encourage you to know that God sees and is aware of what you are going through? Why or why not?
17. What did God tell Moses in verse 10? How did Moses respond?
18. Moses clearly showed a lack of faith and trust, doubting that he was the right person for the job. Does this sound familiar to you? Does this sound a lot like you?
19. What was God's response to Moses' lack of faith? What does he say in verse 12?
20. How does it make you feel when God says, "I will be with you"? Even though *how* he will be with you is not fully revealed, those words should bring an overwhelming amount of comfort and peace. Do they for you? Why or why not?
21. To finish your FIFTEEN for today, think about an aspect of your life that currently seems impossible to accomplish or overcome. What can you do to better live with the knowledge and trust that God will be with you through it all?

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Four

22. To begin your FIFTEEN for today, read Exodus 3:7-22 again. Did you catch anything new or noteworthy this time?
23. To review, after Moses' lack of confidence and faith, God told him, "I will be with you."

24. In these verses, God told Moses exactly how he would rescue Israel and get them out of Egypt. Did Moses' lack of faith, his doubt, or his inadequacy affect what God would be able to do? Did it limit God at all?
25. At this point in the story, Moses found himself completely in over his head. Do you ever feel this way? Do you feel this way right now? If you don't feel this way right now, think about the last time you felt this way.
26. When you feel like you're in too deep and can't get out, what do you do? Even then, do you still try and turn things around by your own power? Even then, isn't it our natural tendency to still at least attempt to fix things ourselves?
27. God actually *wants* us to come to the point and realize that we cannot help ourselves. He *wants* us to realize that we need to cry out for a rescuer, for *him*. Even then, even when it feels like things can't get any worse, God can and will rescue us.
28. To finish your FIFTEEN for today, thank God that he rescues you. Thank him that he makes something out of nothing, that he rescues us when it seems like there is no possible way out.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Five

29. To begin your final FIFTEEN for the week, think about what it was that allowed Moses to rescue the Israelites from slavery. Was it Moses' words, persuasiveness, or skill? Or was it the power of God within him? (If you need to refresh your memory, read Exodus 3:7-22 again.)
30. It was, of course, the power of God within Moses that allowed him to accomplish what he did. Moses had reached his wit's end. He was at the end of himself. What was God demonstrating to Moses?
31. When was the last time you felt like you were at the end of yourself? When was the last time you felt like you were out of options and all hope was lost? Is this a comfortable place to be? Is this a good place to be?
32. Likely, being at the end of yourself, out of options and answers, is not a comfortable place to be, but it's a *good* place to be, even if it doesn't feel like it. Does this understanding help? Does it make it easier?
33. There are eventually times where things get bad enough that we cry out for a rescuer. And in those times, God will rescue us, even from the worst problem facing all of us: death. Even though Moses felt unable to face Pharaoh, God's power allowed him to rescue God's people from slavery. How is Jesus similar to Moses?
34. To finish your final FIFTEEN for the week, spend some time thinking about the peace that should come from knowing God always has and always will rescue us. Despite what we may face in life, this knowledge should help us keep our focus on God, his love for us, and how we are to live as his children. Ask God to help you always keep life in the proper perspective as you seek to rely more fully on him and his power.

Week Three - *Samuel: Born to Listen*

1 Samuel 3:1-11, 19-21

Spend FIFTEEN – Day One

1. Read 1 Samuel 1:1-11. Have you ever been in Hannah's shoes — wanted something so much that you bargained with God? How did (does) that feel? Can you put it into words?
2. Hopefully you did not have a rival who goaded you during your struggle as Hannah did. How might that have increased Hannah's pain?
3. How would you have reacted to Hannah's rival?
4. Read 1 Samuel 1:12-20. Hannah must have looked pretty crazy to Elkanah if he thought she was drunk. What happened after she told him what was troubling her?
5. How might she have felt after feeling heard by her husband?
6. Look again at 1 Samuel 1: 20. Why did Hannah choose the name Samuel for her son?
7. Read 1 Samuel 2:1-11. What is it like to feel truly *heard* by God?
8. Even if no one else listens to us in our lives, we can count on God to hear us. Spend the rest of your FIFTEEN telling God anything you need to get off your chest. Remember he will be faithful to hear you.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Two

9. On a scale of 1 to 10 (10 being the best score), how would you rate yourself as a listener? What factors affected your assessment?
10. Yesterday, we looked at how good it feels to be heard. Do the people you love most feel heard by you? (Hint, look at your self-assessment in question 9.)
11. Read 1 Samuel 3:1-10. As his mother promised, Samuel served the Lord under Eli. According to verse 1, why might Samuel not realize that it was God speaking to him?
12. What did Samuel say when he finally realized that it was actually God who was speaking to him?

13. Interestingly, the name Samuel means “God listens.” And yet in this moment, God was going to speak directly to Samuel. Given God’s relative silence at this point in his life, how might Samuel have felt in this moment?
14. Do you believe God has ever talked to you? If so, what were the circumstances?
15. As you finish your FIFTEEN in prayer, invite God to speak to you as Samuel did. Then spend some quiet moments listening for his voice.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Three

16. Look again at 1 Samuel 3:1-11. Maybe one of the reasons that God had been more silent than usual was that no one was listening to him on a regular basis. How do you react when you feel no one is listening to you?
17. What did God say he was going to do in verse 11? Would that get your attention?
18. Now continue reading 1 Samuel 3:18-21. What did God routinely do from the first time he spoke to Samuel?
19. How might the fact that God routinely talked to Samuel have impacted his attitude toward hearing from God?
20. How would your attitude about listening to God be affected if you knew God would talk to you?
21. Read Hebrews 1:1-2. How can we be certain to hear from God?
22. While the people of Samuel’s time did not hear much from God, we have the privilege of being able to read God’s very Word in the Bible whenever we need to hear from him. As you finish your FIFTEEN in prayer, ask God to give you a fresh excitement to read his Word every day.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Four

23. Yesterday, we saw an example of one of the consequences when people do not listen to God — he stopped talking. How would you feel if God stopped talking to you? Does that scare you? Would that make a difference at all or do you feel your life would be about the same?
24. Look again at 1 Samuel 3:19-21. What happened as a result of Samuel listening to God?
25. How would it feel to have a life with that kind of impact?

26. Samuel was literally born to listen. Samuel listened to God and it made him a powerful leader. Why is it important that each of us is also a good listener?
27. God created us to be in relationship with others. How is listening vital to having fulfilling relationships?
28. How can you become a better listener to others in your life? Brainstorm a list of steps you can take.
29. Finish your FIFTEEN by asking God to help you accomplish these steps. Then get out your calendar and start scheduling some actions.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Five

30. As a whole, humans are not great listeners. This truth keeps doctors, pastors, counselors, even hairstylists and bartenders pretty busy. What makes listening so difficult for us?
31. Listening can have life or death consequences. Have you ever found yourself in a predicament that someone tried to warn you about? How did that add to your misery?
32. Read John 5:24-30. What kind of life or death consequences does this passage talk about?
33. Jesus is warning us about the very thing Samuel tried to warn his people about — listening and obeying the Word of God. How does looking at it that way affect whether or not you want to hear from God?
34. Since most of us are not great at listening to God, what good news do we find in this verse?
35. Because of Jesus, we have eternal life, even if we are not great at hearing and obeying him. Because Jesus died and covered us in his righteousness, we will not be judged. What reasons do we still have to continue to seek to hear his voice?
36. As you finish your final FIFTEEN this week, ask God to help you hear him clearly and have the ability to heed what he says.

Week Four - John: Born to Become Less
John 3:23-36

Spend FIFTEEN – Day One

1. Read Luke 1:5-25. What kind of moral character did Zechariah and Elizabeth have?
2. What kind of man was their son going to be, according to the angel? (See verses 14-17.)
3. This was a pretty miraculous circumstance! Why do you think God would have such a splashy birth story for John the Baptist? Why not just let him be born in a normal way to parents of a normal age?
4. How were Zechariah and Elizabeth's reactions to this announcement different than if they'd been a normal parenting age?
5. How does this birth story set up the life of John the Baptist as different from most people?
6. How do you think you would react to God doing something extraordinary in your life that hadn't been a part of your plan?
7. End your FIFTEEN in prayer. Ask God to open your eyes this Christmas week to the miraculous (but unplanned by you!) ways that he wants to move in your life.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Two

8. Start by reading Luke 1:57-66. What decision caused consternation for the family?
9. Do an internet search for the meaning of the name John. What does it mean?
10. Not naming a baby after an immediate family member was a shocking break from cultural norms. Why might God have asked Zechariah and Elizabeth to do this? What might he have been trying to communicate with this name?
11. This moment caused a stir in the whole community (verse 66). What was God preparing these people to expect from John?
12. Believe it or not, you are a part of the community that God is blessing through John's birth. Why do you think his birth matters, even to you today, 2,000 years later?

13. It's hard to break with tradition or our culture's ways of doing things. What is one way you think you could be countercultural for the sake of revealing something about God to your community?
14. Close your FIFTEEN by asking God to help you live in ways that unsettle people from their comfort zones for the sake of revealing God's power.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Three

15. Has there ever been a time where you wanted to rescue someone from a situation? Maybe spare a child from a consequence? Help a friend who was stuck in a rut? What was that time?
16. Zechariah spoke a prophetic poem over his son, John. Read about it in Luke 1:67-80. Did your parents ever speak words of encouragement over you? What were they?
17. What did Zechariah say would be John's future role?
18. How exactly would John "prepare a way for the Lord"?
19. In your own faith journey, how did other people prepare for you to receive the truth and love of Jesus Christ?
20. What are ways that you can try to "prepare the way" for others to know about Jesus?
21. Close your FIFTEEN by asking God to use you the same way he used John: to pave the way for Jesus to enter into people's lives.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Four

22. Have you ever felt jealous of someone else's success? Who and why?
23. Read about a moment of professional comparison in John 3:23-26. What problem were John's disciples complaining about?
24. How would you handle it if someone in your field were stealing your clients or putting your work to shame?
25. Now read John 3:27-30. How did John react?

26. What priorities did John clearly have?
27. How can the good news of Jesus reshape your own priorities in this season?
28. Conclude your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray that God would help you keep your priorities for yourself in line with his priorities for you. (If you have time, meditatively pray the “beatitudes” in Matthew 5:3-12.)

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Five

29. Have you ever known someone who voluntarily turned leadership over to someone else? Why would anyone do such a thing?
30. Read John 3:27-30. How did John see himself in comparison to Jesus?
31. Nobody would deny John’s assessment. But now check out something fascinating: read Philippians 2:6-8. Where did Jesus position himself in the hierarchy?
32. What could Jesus possibly accomplish by doing this? (Read Galatians 4:4-5 for help with this.)
33. How does it make you feel that Jesus became lower than the angels — the most despised of humans (a criminal) — for the sake of rescuing you?
34. Close out your final FIFTEEN this Christmas week by thanking God for the birth of his Son, and ask him to help you take delight in the value he has of you!

Week Five - *Jesus: Born to Shine in the Darkest Places*
Luke 2:1-20

Spend FIFTEEN – Day One

1. Spend time thinking about the preparations that you make for getting yourself or your family ready for Christmas. Which are some of your favorite activities?
2. Read Galatians 4:4-5 and then contemplate all that God brought about “in the fullness of time” in the second chapter of Luke to orchestrate the birth of his Son. Jot down what comes to mind.
3. God comes to his people in unexpected circumstances. Recall the ways God has displayed his faithfulness to you even in unexpected ways. How does it feel to reflect on that time?
4. Why was it important that both Joseph and Mary belonged to the “house and line of David”?
5. God’s message of salvation was for everyone, from the greatest to the least. The events surrounding the birth of Jesus in Luke 2 describe the angels of heaven announcing the “Good News” to the shepherds. What was this “Good News”?
6. Recall a time in your life where you were the first to learn of some good news. How did it make you feel? How did it feel to share it? What have you done this Christmas season to share the real “Good News”?
7. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Ask God to fill you with his Spirit to proclaim his “peace” and to use words when necessary.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Two

8. Read Luke 2:21-35. Yesterday we looked at circumstances surrounding Jesus’ birth. Today we will look into circumstances that help answer why he was born. What does it mean to be consecrated? What might you be asked to “consecrate” to God?
9. Describe all you can about Simeon.
10. Reading through the words of Simeon, what are the indications given as to why, or for what purpose, Jesus was born?
11. “The thoughts of many hearts will be revealed.” What do you think Simeon meant by this statement? How has Jesus revealed the thoughts of your heart in relation to his purpose and salvation?

12. What do you think Simeon meant when he said to Mary, “a sword will pierce your soul too”?
13. Close your FIFTEEN by praying that God would reveal to you the dark reaches within your heart where his light and his healing can bring his peace.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Three

14. Read Luke 2:36-40. Today we want to find out more regarding the reasons why Christ was born. Recall a time when you had to wait very long for something that you desired.
15. Yesterday’s text indicated that Simeon would not see death until he had seen the Messiah. Today describe all you can about Anna.
16. Anna had been in the temple every day fasting and praying. Yesterday we took a closer look at consecration. Read 1 Samuel 1:9-20. In addition to consecration, compare what qualities Anna and Hannah had in common.
17. What does it mean to “pour out your soul to the Lord”?
18. What do you think were the motives of the prayers of both Anna and Hannah?
19. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer that God would continually check your motives and that nothing that we ask for or desire would hinder our relationship with him.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Four

20. Read Luke 1:46-55 (Mary’s Song). Today we are going to spend some time reflecting on the incarnation (Word made Flesh) of Jesus as revealed in Mary’s Magnificat. Describe the attitudes of Mary described in her words.
21. For the sake of context, read Genesis 3:15. Where does Mary reference this promise in her “song”?
22. Mary’s words indicate a strong sense of God’s purpose, majesty, and wisdom. One might conclude she was very familiar with the Psalms based on the words and cadence of the Magnificat. What has helped you to get a greater sense of God’s purpose, majesty, and wisdom?
23. Jesus was born to bring light and salvation to the world. Additionally, he exposes the dark reaches of our hearts. Read Proverbs 30:8-9. What part of Mary’s song awakens us to be mindful of our own humility or lowliness?

24. Conclude your FIFTEEN today by finding a psalm to read and pray over.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Five

25. Read Luke 1:67-79 (Zechariah's Song). Today we will take a closer look at the prophesy of Zechariah. Zechariah was unable to speak when it was revealed that his wife, Elizabeth, would give birth to John the Baptist. Upon John's birth, Zechariah's mouth was opened, and the words that flowed out were prophetic! List all of what Zechariah said God would do through the Messiah.

26. What does it mean to you to “serve God without fear”?

27. What does it mean to you to have “rescue” and “salvation” from the hand of your “enemies”?

28. What does it mean to you to have Jesus “guide our feet into the path of peace”?

29. Spend the last few minutes of your FIFTEEN reflecting on the miracle of the incarnation (what it truly means that God is with us; Immanuel). We are known intimately by our heavenly Father. He desires what is best for us. Pray for trust as you continue to “pour out your soul” to God.