

Growing Deeper

The Nine Paths: Finding Your Unique Approach to Growth, Relationships and Spirituality

Week One: *The Path of Strength*

2 Corinthians 12:9-11

Spend FIFTEEN – Day One

1. On a scale of 1 to 10, how comfortable are you in asking for help? (With 10 being very comfortable with it and 1, being least comfortable.)
2. Describe how asking for help makes you feel. What about asking others for help makes you comfortable or uncomfortable?
3. Some peoples have an exceptionally strong need for self-reliance. How does that affect one's ability to ask for help?
4. How about with God? How does a strong need for self-reliance affect our relationship with God?
5. Read 2 Corinthians 12:9-11. What does Paul, the author of this passage say about weakness?
6. How does our weakness demonstrate God's power?
7. End your FIFTEEN by confessing your inability to fully rely on God. Ask him to help you experience his strength through your weaknesses. .

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Two

8. Describe a time when you, or someone you know, ever refused help on a project, and winded up all alone to solve the problem. How did the situation resolve?
9. What sometimes drives people to decline help in situations like this?
10. How is the need for self-reliance often displayed in people that do not want to admit weakness?
11. How does someone's need for self-reliance affect his or her relationships with others? (If you are in a relationship with someone that this describes, speak specifically about your own relationship with him or her.)

12. Read 1 Corinthians 2:1-5. How did Paul, the author approach people?
13. One of the pitfalls of self-reliance can ultimately be isolation. How can we use our weaknesses to strengthen our relationships instead of allowing them to isolate ourselves?
14. As you finish your FIFTEEN, think about the ways that hiding your weaknesses has allowed you to isolate from others. Ask God in prayer to help you recognize when you do this and to give you the courage to be honest about your needs.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Three

15. When you think of strong people, who comes to your mind? What in particular makes you think of them?
16. Do you consider strength a good quality? Why or why not?
17. In what ways can strength become a bad thing?
18. Today were going to look again at 2 Corinthians 12:9-11, but first back up to 2 Corinthians 12:1-8 and see why Paul, the author, is talking about this in the first place. Why was Paul boasting about his weakness?
19. By all accounts, Paul was a strong man. Read 1 Timothy 1:13-16. How had he used his strength in the past?
20. Paul is not alone; the pursuit of strength for the sake of strength can lead many people down a destructive path. How did God redeem the terrible misuse of Paul's power?
21. Describe a current day situation where the misuse of strength has been destructive? What could be done to rectify that situation?
22. End your FIFTEEN in prayer. Ask God to help you recognize situations where strength is misused.

Spend FIFTEEN -Day Four

23. One of the downsides of being strong is that strong people are always expected to be strong. Is that a realistic expectation? Why or why not?
24. What happens to people who believe they are expected to be strong all of the time? In other words, what happens

when that expectation becomes too great a burden to bear?

25. Does God expect people to be strong all of the time? Explain your answer.
26. Read the following verses and note how God is described.
- a. Exodus 6:6
 - b. Exodus 33:14
 - c. 1 Kings 8:56
 - d. Matthew 11:28
27. Did someone in particular come to mind today when you were thinking about people who feel the need to be strong all of the time? Someone you love, maybe even yourself? What would you say to him or her, (or yourself) about what God expects of them?
28. End your FIFTEEN in prayer by asking God to speak into the heart of a person who is over-burdened by the need to be strong for others. Ask God to fill him or her with his peace.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Five

29. Sometimes being strong means you always feel like you are fighting something or someone, even God. Describe a time when you have felt this way.
30. How does it feel to finally let go of a fight?
31. This week, we have looked at the pitfalls of being of strength for the sake of strength and over self-reliance. What would you prescribe as the antidote for this type of behavior?
32. Look again at 2 Corinthians 12:9-11. What did Paul suggest in these verses?
33. On a scale of 1 to 10, how comfortable are you in sharing your weaknesses? (With 10 being very comfortable with it and 1, being least comfortable.)
34. It's been said that the first step to change is admitting that you need to change. What would happen if you decided to stop fighting alone and allowed someone to help you? How would your life be better?

35. As we can see by Paul's example, when Paul admitted his weaknesses, his life and others (including ours) were impacted. As you finish your final FIFTEEN this week, consider how you might affect others by admitting your weaknesses and allow others to help you. Then ask God to help you work toward this goal in prayer.

Week Two: *Path of Harmony*

Philippians 4:6-7

Spend FIFTEEN – Day One

1. Harmony or peace is an attribute of God. God's Son came into the world to establish peace between the Father and His rebellious creation. What has God provided you with to live at peace with Him?
2. When Paul speaks of the "peace of God, which transcends all understanding", how is God's peace different than the world's peace?
3. Read Philippians 4:6-7. What causes anxiousness in your life? What does Paul say is the antidote to anxiousness or worry?
4. Paul says the ingredient of thanksgiving should be tinged and intermingled in our attitudes and prayers toward God. What is the connection between a thankful heart and a peaceful heart?
5. Recall the instances and circumstances in which you have experienced peace with God. What was necessary and present in your heart in those experiences?
6. Paul implores us to present our requests before God. Why do you think God would grant you the desires of your heart? Does it mean that you will always get what you want?
7. Take time to be honest with God today. What you want, complain about, need, or desire will not be criticized or judged. Moreover, measure each request with a prayer of Thanksgiving. See how God grants peace in your heart and life toward your relationship with Him.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Two

8. Yesterday we explored how peace with God is possible through His Son. Today we want to explore our inner peace. When you pursue peace and harmony in your own life, what does it look like to you?
9. You are uniquely and wonderfully made. Read Psalm 139 and note some of the ways in which God knows all about you, and considers you his child.
10. If God is intimately involved with the fashioning of His creation, in what ways has he gifted you to reflect His glory?

11. God is a giver of great peace and harmony when we are doing what we have been created to do. When you feel called to do something, are you willing to pursue it wholeheartedly, or postpone and push down those desires to preserve peace in your life?
12. As you seek out peace in your inner self, what are some of the things that you tell yourself? Do the things you tell and think about yourself come from others perceptions or your own? Additionally, do the things you tell yourself agree or harmonize with what God tells you?
13. As you finish your FIFTEEN in prayer, ask for help in reminding that God has made you unique, and that your dreams, callings, and feelings are worth pursuing as you bow your heart to God.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Three

14. Over the next three days we are going to explore peace in our relationships.
15. How do you feel about conflict? Are you of the mindset that says, “Bring it on, I prefer my voice to be heard” or “I avoid it when I can, few things matter that much”? Explain your answer.
16. Today we want to look at a healthy pursuit of peace. Paul has much to say about living at peace with our brothers and sisters. Read Romans 12:18. What does it mean “ as much as it depends on you”?
17. How do you determine when it is best for you to make your voice be heard, and when it is the time for you to be silent and let others get their way?
18. When listening to others opinions and perspectives, how do you sort through all of their feelings and opinions and make sure that what you feel and express are truly your own thoughts and perspectives?
19. We must be careful at attempts to pursue peace at the expense of expressing our own dreams or desires. “Humility does not mean thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less.”- C.S. Lewis. What does Lewis imply in this quote? How can peace that God provides be connected with humility?
20. Finish up your FIFTEEN today by identifying thoughts or relationships that could be stagnate with growth at the expense of the avoidance of conflict. Start small. Be confident that your opinion matters, and that you are created uniquely by God.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Four- relationships

21. Read Matthew 5:3-9. In this section of scripture called the Beatitudes, Jesus calls peacemakers the children of God. (Matthew 5:9) Describe the qualities you think that peacemakers possess.

22. What is the benefit of having peace with oneself in order to sift through others different opinions and feelings that keep us from getting along?
23. In your pursuit of peace, how does peace become linked with understanding?
24. How can God use you as a peacemaker in relationships that have become derailed due to conflict?
25. Finish your FIFTEEN by reminding yourself of the identity and peace you've been given in a relationship through his Son. Secure in that knowledge, ask God to help you to be sensitive to the viewpoints of others, and to provide a point of security and understanding to helping two sides achieve peace.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Five

26. Today we will explore what it means to have peace with our enemies or those who are opposed to us. How can self-righteousness get in the way of what it means to have peace with those opposed to us?
27. Read what Jesus says about loving your enemies in Matthew 5:43-48.
28. What comes to mind when you think about people who have offended you?
29. Recall a time when you have offended others. What must be done to seek peace in your life after such an event?
30. Earlier this week, we explored Romans 12:18. Go back and read Romans 12:14-21. How can we have harmony and peace even when people have wronged us, or even spoken evil against the Lord?
31. As you finish your final FIFTEEN this week, consider all that it means to pursue peace. Peace is a fruit of the Spirit the Father intends for you to possess. As you pursue peace, the most important thing to understand is the role of His Son and all he has done to be the bringer of peace. Continue to take inventory of the areas and relationships in your life that could benefit from more peace and harmony.

Week Three: *The Path of Integrity*
2 Corinthians 5:21

Spend FIFTEEN - Day One

1. If you were asked to describe Jesus, what attributes come to mind?

2. Read 2 Corinthians 5:21. What do you learn about Jesus from this verse?

3. Did you include 'sinless' in your description? Do your expectations of Jesus reflect the fact that he never sinned?

4. Why is it important, even necessary, for Jesus to be sinless?

5. From 2 Corinthians 5:21, what does Jesus' sinlessness achieve for us?

6. How would your relationship with God be different if you fully believed what this verse says about Jesus?

7. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Ask God to help you find reassurance in Jesus' perfection.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Two

8. Would you say most people desire to be good?

9. Is being 'good enough' possible? Who decides what is 'good enough'?

10. Read 2 Corinthians 5:21 again. What does this verse imply about the possibility of being 'good enough'?

11. Since "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23), what would be an accurate expectation of yourself? How does this line up with your current expectations?

12. Read 2 Corinthians 5:21. Why would God send Jesus to make us righteous? What does this say about our value?

13. In light of this, where do you go to find your value? How could this impact the way you deal with your own sins, failures and mistakes?

14. Close your FIFTEEN bringing your sins, failures and mistakes to your loving heavenly Father. Ask him to help you grasp the depth of his unconditional love for you.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Three

15. Read 2 Corinthians 5:21 out loud. What is the righteousness of God?

16. What does it mean to “become the righteousness of God”?

17. The Message translation puts verse 21 this way, “In Christ, God put the wrong on him who never did anything wrong, so we could be put right with God.” We become righteous or perfect (without sin) before God. Moreover, it is not a manmade righteousness; it is God’s righteousness imparted to us. When was Jesus made “sin for us” so we could be given righteousness?

18. From this verse, what does God want you to believe about yourself?

19. How does that impact how you think about others?

20. We can get frustrated, exasperated and discouraged by our own imperfections. We can get angry and impatient with the imperfections of others. As you end your FIFTEEN, pray for the Holy Spirit to help you receive God’s forgiveness and peace through Christ. Then pray for opportunities to respond to others with forgiveness and encouragement.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Four

21. Are you a “fixer”, wanting to solve every problem or make every situation right? How does this impact your relationships?

22. What causes you to be disappointed with the people in your life? (Include family, friends, church leaders, government officials.)

23. Where do you get stuck in applying grace to others?

24. We often expect perfection in others, even when we don’t demand it of ourselves. Why is this not realistic?

25. How would opening yourself to God’s grace, relieve you of disappointment and the desire to fix and correct everyone around you?

26. You may have memorized 2 Corinthians 5:21 by now. If so, recite it. If not, read it again. What would it look like to rest on this work of Jesus? End your FIFTEEN savoring God's grace and letting it change you.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Five

27. Read 2 Corinthians 5:21. Is perfection or sinlessness something we should desire?

28. How can the urge for perfection be helpful?

29. When will this urge for perfection be fully satisfied?

30. The longing for everything to be good and right is the longing for everything to be restored to God's original creation. How can God's grace through Jesus help you wait until he restores all things?

31. Finish your FIFTEEN in thanksgiving for the perfection that awaits God's people. Ask God how you can tap this longing for perfection in others to tell them about Jesus.