

Growing Deeper – Part Two

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

Week Four: *The Path of Service*

Acts 17:24-25

Spend FIFTEEN – Day One

1. Read John 13:1-17. Whom do you identify most with in this story? Do you identify with Jesus doing the washing, with Peter feeling apprehensive of Jesus washing his feet, or one of the other disciples who quietly lets Jesus wash his feet? Explain your answer.
2. Focusing especially on John 13:12-17, what are the reasons that Jesus washed the disciples' feet?
3. Jesus came to serve (Mark 10:45), and we are striving to be like Jesus by serving others. Who are people or groups of people that you are active in serving?
4. What are the good things that you are able to provide for friends or family when you are actively serving others?
5. One of the ways you can grow in your service of others is to think about the reasons that you serve. As you spend some time thinking about who you serve, also spend some time thinking about why you serve people. Try to honestly list out selfless as well as selfish reasons that you serve.
6. The danger of service is the temptation to serve "with strings attached." Spend the rest of your FIFTEEN minutes writing a prayer to God asking for a heart that is able to serve others without expectations of receiving something in return.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Two

7. Read 1 Samuel 13:8-10. Why would a typical person make burnt offerings (sacrificing a living animal) to the Lord as Saul did in this passage?
8. According to 1 Samuel 13:8, the reason for Saul's sacrifice was not an overwhelming appreciation for God's provision, but a reaction to Saul's men beginning to scatter. Was Saul's act of worship for the benefit of God or for the benefit of himself?
9. Read 1 Samuel 13:11-15. How did Saul's empty act of worship turn out for him?
10. David was probably familiar with this story when he contemplated his own mistakes. Read Psalm 51:16-17. What is the type of sacrifice that pleases God?

11. What are some of the things that you do for God, some of the ways that you serve him daily, weekly or yearly?
12. What are the temptations of serving God for you? Are there ways that those acts of service can also be self-serving?
13. End your FIFTEEN by contemplating the ways God would want you to serve him, ways that you set aside any self-serving actions and serve Him with a pure heart. Write down what he reveals to you in this time.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Three

14. Read Matthew 6:1-4. In verse 1, of what is Jesus asking his followers to be careful?
15. Today people do not use trumpets, but they may put their name on a building or foundation in order to honor themselves as much as the people they are helping. Where do you think this type of giving is dangerous in our current times?
16. Turn one chapter back and read Matthew 5:43-48. How would you connect “service to the needy” to “loving your enemies” (or at least loving people other than “the people that love you back”)?
17. What are some charities or groups of unfortunate people that you support?
18. How can you check yourself and know that you are serving unfortunate people for the right reasons?
19. Spend the rest of your FIFTEEN by contemplating ways that you can anonymously help someone who needs it this week in a way that truly benefits your heart but not your ego (your vision of yourself). Then ask God in prayer to help you accomplish this goal.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Four

20. Jesus is the fulfillment of each of the nine paths that we talk about in this series. He personifies the good qualities of each path without being entangled by the pitfalls associated with each path. Spend some time thinking about the ways Jesus was able to serve others with a pure heart. (If you are not able to think of many stories, you could start with Matthew 8 and read until you have a picture of Jesus’ heart of service.)
21. On Monday, we referenced Mark 10:45. Read this passage again and list how Jesus was a servant in this way.
22. The StrengthsFinder 2.0 assessment and other studies have found that your greatest weaknesses are not strengths that others have, but rather the dark side of the strength that you do have. Jesus has all the strengths of the nine paths but shows ways to avoid the dark sides. How did Jesus serve with “no strings attached”?

23. People with a strong gift to serve often become dependent on the response they get from serving others. What would enable you to serve without the need to receive that response from the people whom you serve?

24. Those who have been given an extra measure of “the gift to serve” find that they thrive with a healthy balance between serving (an external focus) and serving with unique qualities (an internal focus). How can you focus on your own gifts (in a healthy way) in order to benefit the people around you and *truly* serve them?

25. Conclude your FIFTEEN in prayer by asking God to help you recognize when you stray into an unhealthy balance of serving for the sake of your own needs.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Five

26. Read Acts 17:24-25, as well as some of the context around those verses if that is helpful to you. What do you think caused Paul to say these things to the people of Athens?

27. Christians may fall into the trap of thinking that they “serve God” and are able to further the work God is doing in the world. While he does call us into this, Acts 17 reminds us that we are not necessary to his plan or work. How does hearing that scare you? How does hearing that give you freedom?

28. Those who serve well often feel like they are dependent on other people around them, especially those in leadership positions. How is God calling you to serve those in leadership around you? How is God calling you to be a leader yourself?

29. Often those who spend a lot of time caring about the needs of others tend to ignore the needs that they have themselves. What are things that restore you so that you can be a blessing, and not a burden, to others?

30. Remembering that God continually provides for all of us is reassuring, that he gives everyone life and breath and everything else. What can you stop and thank God for today?

31. Those who have a gift to serve will usually find themselves energized by being around other people. However, going against that tendency can be a life-giving opportunity to grow. Solitude is a spiritual discipline, whether it is a three-day retreat in the mountains or a short ride in the car with no phone or radio or other distractions. How can you let God fill you up through the practice of solitude this week?

32. Finish your FIFTEEN in quiet solitude enjoying God’s presence without any expectation of action on your part.

Week Five: *The Path of Accomplishment*
Philippians 3:3-9

Spend FIFTEEN – Day One

1. As we begin to dig deeper this week, think about the most accomplished people you know. Do you admire them? Is it a good thing to be accomplished?
2. Do you consider *yourself* accomplished? Why or why not?
3. What determines whether you consider yourself accomplished? Is it dependent on what you do and how well you do it?
4. Read Philippians 3:3-9. What do you think it means to “put confidence in the flesh”?
5. “Putting confidence in the flesh” can include a lot, but it often refers to valuing yourself based on what you do and how well you do it. How does this mindset play a part in how you value yourself?
6. To finish your FIFTEEN for today, think about who our culture values most. Is it those who have the most to offer? What about God? How does he judge value? Spend some time praying that God would help you to better value what he does.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Two

7. To start off your FIFTEEN for today, read Philippians 3:3-9 again. Notice what Paul says in verses 3 and 4: “For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by His Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh – though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more.” What is your first reaction to this statement?
8. Do you find this humorous? Paul is basically saying, “We should be proud based on our own accomplishments, we should be proud of what Jesus has done for us. But if we *could* take pride in ourselves, I should be the proudest.” Doesn’t that sound *so* much like our human nature?
9. Think of a time when you were overly prideful in yourself and what you accomplished. Looking back, how long did it last? How long were you able to keep it up?
10. We all fail or don’t meet expectations eventually. What happens then? How do you feel?
11. When you do fail, does it feel like *others* find you less valuable?

12. To finish your FIFTEEN for today, spend some time in prayer. Pray you would always remember that all the accomplishments in the world mean nothing compared to what Jesus already did for you.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Three

13. Do you ever feel the need to pretend or play a role just to be valued and admired? If so, is that something you've realized before?

14. Do you think God wants you to feel the need to live that way? Why or why not?

15. Read Philippians 3:3-9 once again. Does anything new stick out to you today?

16. What do you think Paul means in verse 8? Is he saying everything other than Jesus is worthless?

17. Paul doesn't mean that everything other than Jesus is worthless. What he's trying to communicate is that *compared* to what Jesus Christ did for us, nothing else matters. How does this truth affect your need for affirmation?

18. To finish your FIFTEEN for today, ask God to help you prioritize as he does. Ask him to help you see where you need to rearrange your priorities in order to live in the freedom and honesty that he desires for you.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Four

19. To begin your FIFTEEN for today, read Philippians 3:3-9 again.

20. Read verses 8 and 9 again: "I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ – the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith." What would it look like to live your life in this way?

21. Living your life this way likely looks a lot like finding your identity, value and accomplishment in what Jesus has *already* accomplished for you. It's not dependent on anything you can or cannot do. Imagine how freeing it would be to live that way.

22. In another of his letters, to the Ephesian church, Paul shares similar words. Read Ephesians 2:4-9.

23. Paul says twice, in verse 4 and again in verse 8, "It is by grace you have been saved." Is this encouraging or discouraging to you? Why?

24. You probably already know that you are saved by God's grace, but it can be hard to really understand that and live according to it. To finish your FIFTEEN for today, spend some time being honest with God about times when you have judged or evaluated others based on what they have to offer instead of what Jesus has already done for them. Ask for forgiveness for those times and for more of a Christ-like mindset when interacting with others.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Five

25. Spend some time considering what most motivates you. Is it a desire to benefit others? Is it a need to be seen as successful? Something else?

26. Oftentimes accomplished people operate out of a fear of failure. Does that describe you? Why or why not?

27. Read Ephesians 2:4-9 again. Verse 9 says, "Not by works, so that no one can boast." How does that make you feel?

28. If you're anything like me, it can still be challenging to set aside the desire to accomplish in your own power and ability. Why do you think it can be such a challenge?

29. No one can boast, at least not in ourselves. Rather than finding our identity in the roles we play or what we have to offer, we find it from being found in Christ. And, if you can find your value in the accomplishments of Jesus on your behalf, then you can finally be authentic, both with yourself and with others. You are loved just for who you are, not for what you achieve. Spend the rest of your FIFTEEN thanking God for this truth.

30. Throughout the rest of the day, consider what it really means that God loves you just for you who are. Does that really change your life the way it should? Why or why not?

Week Six: *The Path of Originality*
Ephesians 2:10

Spend FIFTEEN – Day One

1. We all kind of want to feel special, don't we? It feels good to be recognized for our unique contributions to the world. Have you ever won an award or trophy or been recognized for something special you did? What was it for? How did it feel?
2. In the Pixar movie *The Incredibles*, the young boy with special powers is frustrated by having to hide his unique gifts. Check out this brief interaction with his mother: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8gXCCBmTvBI>. Do you agree or disagree with Dash's final line? Why?
3. Now read Jeremiah 1:4-10. What special calling does God give to Jeremiah?
4. It's fairly clear that Jeremiah had a "special" calling from the Lord. But, here's the harder question (and faithful people will disagree): Does God only have special intentions for *some people*, like a biblical prophet or great leader? Or does God know everybody in the womb and have a special plan for *everyone*? (In other words, is the promise in this passage just for Jeremiah, or is it for you too?)
5. Depending on which answer you believe, how would that change your own search for meaning in your life?
6. What things about yourself would you feel confident saying *are* gifts from God—something special that he designed you with?
7. Close your FIFTEEN by thanking God for the ways he made you uniquely.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Two

8. The direction of evolutionary science and advances in artificial intelligence seem to support the theory that human beings are nothing special—just one particular step in a long chain of natural development. How can people reconcile this theory with the idea that humanity is something unique?
9. Now read Psalm 8:1-9. What is the major problem that the psalmist struggles with?
10. What is it that helps the psalmist find hope?
11. Now read Psalm 103:15-16. How does the Psalmist sum up our existence?

12. Whether you believe in evolution or not, we all have to find a way to reconcile the majesties of creation with our own comparative smallness and the brevity of our lives. How do you make peace with your place in the universe?
13. There are two ways to interpret the magnificence of the heavens: we are but specks in comparison to the universe, or we are the crowning jewel of the God who made the universe. What is something that would help remind you of your unique value in the Creator's eyes?
14. Close your FIFTEEN in prayer, asking God to help you see your own wonder through his delight in you over all the rest of creation.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Three

15. Leo Tolstoy coined an expression that has since become known as the Anna Karenina principle: “All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.” Do you agree or disagree? Why?
16. Who do you think lives a more “unique” existence—someone who follows God, or someone who lives their own life the way they want to? Would the culture agree or disagree with your answer?
17. Read Philippians 3:17-21. What becomes the source of people's “boasting”?
18. What do you think motivates people to boast about their broken desires? How do you feel if someone ever calls you out on something for which you are ashamed?
19. It's tempting to double-down on our failures sometimes, because at least we can claim they make us unique. What other solution does Philippians 3 offer us?
20. A common fear is that letting God redeem our lives will also take away the things that make us uniquely ourselves. What is a trait or foible of yours that you would like to see God enhance in a wonderful and holy way?
21. End your FIFTEEN by praying for God to show you how he can transform even your worst weaknesses into something that gives him glory in a unique way.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Four

22. What do you usually do when a bowl or glass gets chipped or broken?
23. Skim this article about the Japanese practice of “kintsugi.” <https://www.lifegate.com/people/lifestyle/kintsugi> What is their approach to broken things?

24. In your opinion, can something still truly be beautiful once it's been broken?
25. Read Ecclesiastes 3:11. What promise about God is this making?
26. Now watch this short clip from the movie *Joshua*. In this movie, Jesus has come back to a small, modern-day town and goes by the name Joshua. Mary Magdalene (who goes by "Maggie") is despairing of her heartbroken life.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JXCOogmKI0c> How does Joshua show Maggie that her understanding is wrong?
27. End your FIFTEEN by contemplating the brokenness in your life that you could submit to God, and trust in him to make something beautiful out of the mess. Then pray to God to make you whole, in spite of your own flaws or a life that doesn't live up to your own perfect vision for it.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Five

28. We human beings are a mess of contradictions! On the one hand, we are each a lovely, admirable child of God. We are also each a "poor, miserable sinner." To which one of those do you more often tend to connect?
29. Read Genesis 1:26. What do you think it means that we are made in God's "image"?
30. After the Fall from Eden, we became tainted by sin (Romans 5:12). What effect did that have on our "image" from God? Does God think there's anything worthwhile in us anymore?
31. Now read Ephesians 2:10. What do you think the word "workmanship" means?
32. Take a few moments to read this article about Ephesians 2:10. <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/you-are-gods-workmanship> What does the original word for "workmanship" mean in modern English?
33. Think deeply about this next question: what unique work has God created for you to do?
34. Spend the rest of your FIFTEEN marveling at how wonderfully he made you. Thank him for putting his stamp on you with his image. Ask him to show you your God-given uniqueness and to make clear to you the specific work that you—and only you—can accomplish in his name!