

Growing Deeper
In the Waiting

Week One: Take It Personally
Luke 1:26-38

Spend FIFTEEN – Day One

1. Are you by nature a patient person? Do you enjoy the anticipation more than the realization? Are you okay with your nature, or would you change it if you could?
2. Do you live for the next vacation, adventure, weekend, or do you prefer routine activities? Why do you prefer your approach?
3. Read Galatians 5:22-23. Patience is considered a *fruit of the spirit*, meaning it is routinely found in Christians that demonstrate Christian maturity. It is not like a *gift of the spirit* that varies from Christian to Christian. What does that truth suggest regarding the development of greater maturity?
4. Read 2 Peter 3:9. What is the reason for God's patience as it is explained in this passage?
5. Is there something that you are impatiently waiting for God to accomplish in your life? What reason might He have for not responding immediately?
6. How are immature Christians similar to young children when it comes to waiting? What lesson can we learn from the comparison?
7. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray for God to be patient with your impatience.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Two

8. Read Luke 1:26-38. Name each person mentioned in the reading. What was their status in life when this moment occurred?
9. Gabriel is described as an angel sent by God. Only Gabriel, Michael and Satan are among the angels known to us by name. Read Hebrews 1:14. According to that passage, what purpose do angels serve in God's kingdom?
10. Are angels superior or inferior to human beings in the kingdom of God? In what way? See Hebrews 2:5-8. Which is more powerful? Which is considered the crowning glory of God's creation?

11. Do you think the angels were waiting for this announcement in heaven? Read Galatians 4:4-6. What circumstance(s) made the time right for the birth of Christ?

12. Read Luke 2:8-15. What insight does that description give us into the attitude of the heavenly host?

13. Why do you suppose Christmas, more than any other holiday- religious or secular, is the most popular of all annual celebrations?

14. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray that you will always retain a childlike awe of the events surrounding the birth of Jesus our Savior.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Three

15. Look again at Luke 1:26-38. Where was Nazareth compared to Jerusalem and Bethlehem? Why would God choose someone so far removed from the religious and faith center of the Jewish people?

16. Do you think Mary shared this story with anyone other than Joseph? Explain your thinking.

17. She immediately travels to Galilee to be with Elizabeth, her kinswoman. After six months, she returns and tells Joseph the news of her pregnancy according to Matthew 1:18-21. How might those six months with Elizabeth been a blessing to Mary before returning to her home?

18. There is no indication that Joseph and Mary told anyone about her pregnancy. Why? How hard is it for you to keep an important secret?

19. Mary's robes could have easily hidden her pregnancy until the birth in Bethlehem. Is it easier or harder for you to wait without others knowing your cause?

20. God seems to have kept much of the detail of Jesus' birth from even Joseph and Mary. They had to scramble for shelter and make plans as things went along. Would you prefer to know or not know how things are going to turn out in your life?

21. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray for greater trust in the Lord, who has and will provide for all your needs.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Four

22. Read Luke 1:26-38. Mary asked Gabriel how this would all work out since she was still a virgin. After she was told that God would conceive her child, how did she respond? What does that tell us about Mary?

23. There is nothing in the Bible that says Mary was any less human than the rest of us. No doubt, she was chosen by God for her great faith and simple trust, but otherwise she would have had all the emotions of anyone in her situation. Look at Luke 1:46-55. What do these words tell us about Mary's thoughts during her pregnancy?
24. What did Mary call God in Luke 1:47? What insight does this give us into Mary's understanding of her life before God?
25. Why is it always fitting for us to confess our sins, faults and failures before seeking God's favor about anything in our life?
26. Have you experienced a pregnancy in your life or the life of your immediate family? How would you describe the unique experience of waiting for a child to be born?
27. How much do you think Mary and Joseph knew about the purpose of Jesus' birth? Do you think they understood the implications? See Simeon's words in Luke 2:34-35.
28. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray for someone you know who has been waiting for some form of rescue from the Lord. Pray for their patience and for God's intercession.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Five

29. Think about the story of Zechariah and Elizabeth, who were already pregnant after God performed a miracle for them. What do you suppose the time Mary spent with them was like, and why was it important?
30. When the angel Gabriel mentioned Elizabeth, it is doubtful that Mary knew anything about her pregnancy. Then Gabriel said it proves nothing is impossible for God. Have you experienced God doing impossible things in your life?
31. What do you believe about God that gives you confidence to face the uncertainty of the future?
32. If you could, would you prefer to know the future, or prefer to know the ONE who knows the future and trust yourself to Him? Explain your answer.
33. Read Psalm 31:15. What routines help you to stay positive and hopeful about the future? Is this a constant struggle for you? How can you help others or how can they help you deal with uncertainty?
34. Why do you suppose God provided the "back story" on the birth of Jesus? Mark and John tell us nothing about the people and the story of Jesus' birth. Why do you suppose God chose to explain the circumstance of His nativity?

35. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray to be more open to God's direction of your life and for a more attentive heart to hear and understand His purpose in granting or withholding the desires of your heart.

Week Two: Remember the Bigger Picture

Luke 1:5-25

Spend FIFTEEN – Day One

1. Read Psalm 37:1-6. Whom was David addressing in this Psalm? Is that issue still troublesome for modern-day Christians? In your own words, how would you explain David's advice?
2. Continue reading Psalm 37:16-19. Has that been your experience?
3. Have you known poor people who were "rich," and rich people who were "poor"? How much does a person's happiness depend on material possessions?
4. Read Luke 1:5-25. How does Luke describe the character and nature of Zechariah and Elizabeth? (See Luke 1:5-6) Why do you think that is important to the story?
5. Read Job 1:6-11. What was the assumption Satan made about faithful people? Do you think faithful people are blessed more by God than unfaithful people? On what basis have you reached this opinion?
6. Read James 5:10-11. Were the most committed followers of God spared hardship because of their faithfulness? Why would God allow faithful people to suffer?
7. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Think about and pray for some faithful people you know who are undergoing a rough patch. Pray for them to endure and remain steadfast in their faith.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Two

8. Read Luke 1:5-25. There are two especially troubling, even confusing, realities that Zechariah and Elizabeth were experiencing. Why is the ability or inability to have children especially difficult?
9. Notice too that Zechariah, while an old man, had never been chosen to offer the incense in the temple. It was a once in a lifetime experience. How might Zechariah have felt every time he was passed over and younger men were chosen?
10. Why is it common for people to think hardship is somehow related to personal failure and God's punishment?
11. Read 2 Corinthians 5:18-19. How can we be sure God is not punishing us for our sinfulness when things seem to go badly for us?

12. If God is not punishing us for our sins by allowing difficulties in our life, what other explanation makes sense?

13. Read John 9:1-3 and John 15:1-2. What two other possibilities exist for God to allow us to endure hardships?

14. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray to better notice faithful people who are struggling in life and to be more supportive of them in the midst of their difficulty.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Three

15. Look at Luke 1:11-12. What words were used to describe Zechariah when the angel appeared to him? What do you expect to happen when you pray?

16. Look at Luke 1:13. What did Gabriel tell Zechariah? When was the last time you think Zechariah may have actually prayed that prayer? What does that say about God's timing?

17. We would not even know the names of Zechariah and Elizabeth had it not been for God's decision to bring John into their life. What does that tell us about all the unknown and supposedly insignificant people who quietly keep the faith?

18. Why do you think God chose an old couple to bring John into the world? Jesus was born to young people. Why not John?

19. Luke 1:24 tells us that Elizabeth chose to hide her pregnancy for five months. Why would she do that?

20. Mary came to visit Elizabeth during Elizabeth's sixth month of pregnancy and stayed for 3 months. Why is that significant? What did the two women have in common? What was different?

21. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray for all the pregnant mothers who are wondering now about the nature and purpose of their yet unborn children.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Four

22. Read Zechariah's words which he spoke at the birth of his son in Luke 1:68-79. What phrase or expression made the biggest impression on you?

23. Remember, Zechariah had not been able to speak for the nine months of Elizabeth's pregnancy. Read Luke 1:64-66. What purpose had his silence served in his life? In the lives of those who knew him?

24. Do you think Zechariah's prophetic words are mostly about his son John or the coming of Jesus?
25. Have you ever written a personal mission statement? What is it? If not, what thoughts would you want to include?
26. According to Zechariah, what was John's main purpose? How does this compare to what John later said about himself in John 3:28-30?
27. What names (titles) does Zechariah give to Jesus in his prophetic speech, and what does each one mean?
28. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray that you would always remember and honor the truth that your purpose to proclaim Jesus through your life and words is the most important thing you will ever do.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Five

29. Look again at Luke 1:5-25. How would you describe the mood of Zechariah and Elizabeth before the visitation of Gabriel — consternation, acceptance, or quiet expectation?
30. How would you describe their mood after the visitation but prior to the birth of John?
31. Is there something you are waiting for God to do? How would you describe your mood?
32. Would you rather be a small part of something big or a big part of something small?
33. Are you part of a small group now? Why or why not? If so, what role do you play in your group?
34. Are you proud of all your church is doing to reach the lost and strengthen the saved, or do you wish they were doing more (or less)?
35. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray a prayer of thanks that Jesus did not consider saving the world too great a goal nor the saving of you too small a challenge.

Week Three: *Learn to Love the Now*
Luke 1:39-56

Spend FIFTEEN – Day One

1. Using only one word, how would you describe your season of life right now?
2. Are you able to be objective about your struggles or do you find yourself overwhelmed by the emotion of the moment?
3. Read 2 Corinthians 4:16-18. What does Paul suggest is the best way to get past a momentary rough patch in life?
4. What does Paul mean when he urges us to focus on what is not seen?
5. The Greek word for anxiety is the same as our English word “morose.” How would you define morose?
6. The word morose in Greek means “to separate.” When we focus too much on one aspect of life and ignore the other parts of our life, we become depressed. Why do negative things have more power than positive experiences?
7. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray that your eyes would be opened to see the blessings of your life as clearly as you see your struggles.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Two

8. Read Luke 1:39-56. Have you ever known anyone who had to manage an “unexpected” pregnancy? How did they handle it?
9. Gabriel gave Mary few details about her pregnancy and what to expect of her child. What questions would you have wanted to ask?
10. Gabriel mentioned that Mary’s elderly relative Elizabeth was pregnant (Luke 1:36). Why do you think Mary decided to go immediately to visit Elizabeth?
11. How would you describe the first meeting of Mary and Elizabeth?
12. What did the two women have in common? What was unique to their situation?

13. What term does Elizabeth use to describe Mary in Luke 1:43? What insight does that description give into God's understanding of pregnancy?
14. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray that all women who find themselves pregnant, whether expected or unexpected, would view their pregnancy as a gift from God.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Three

15. Look again at Luke 1:39-45. How do you explain the reaction of Elizabeth's unborn child when Mary entered Elizabeth's home?
16. Elizabeth might have been more excited about Mary's pregnancy than her own. How did she describe Mary's situation in verse 42?
17. Do you suppose there was anything special about Mary and Elizabeth that God chose them for their incredible mission? Read Luke 1:48-53. What explanation did Mary offer?
18. Read Luke 1:45. What is required of a child of God to experience the Lord's miraculous blessing?
19. Mary and Joseph had to make a difficult journey in the ninth month of her pregnancy, and when they arrived in Bethlehem, they were not well received. Because of Herod's threats, they also had to flee to Egypt. Wouldn't you expect God to better provide for them? Why do you suppose the Lord didn't eliminate their struggle(s)?
20. Why does God still allow those He loves to struggle? Read 1 Peter 5:6-7 for insight.
21. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray to face your struggles and hardships with the same degree of faith and trust that Mary and Joseph displayed in the stories surrounding the birth of Jesus.

Spend FIFTEEN- Day Four

22. Read Mary's words in Luke 1:46-47. Despite the difficulties awaiting her and the unanswered questions about her future and how Joseph would react to her pregnancy, what was Mary's response? How is it possible to rejoice in the face of uncertainty?
23. Read Philippians 4:4-9. What advice does Paul offer when facing adversity?
24. Paul combines prayer and thanksgiving. What do you have to be thankful for at this moment?

25. What situation is out of your control and has you unsure of how it will turn out?
26. In his closing comments in Philippians 4:8-9, what does Paul suggest is essential to maintaining a positive spirit in the face of uncertainty?
27. Read James 4:13-17. What is the caveat in verse 15? Why should you always approach the present and the future with the same attitude?
28. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray to commit to heart and practice the lessons you have learned in today's study.

Spend FIFTEEN- Day Five

29. There may be a tendency on the part of Christians today to place people of the Bible on a higher standing than ourselves, as though their lives are different from ours. What term does Mary use to define God in Luke 1:47? Why did Mary also need a Savior?
30. Read James 5:10-17. What do we learn from those verses? Why was it important for God to tell us the struggles, weaknesses, and hardships that the great people of the Bible faced?
31. How would you describe your present life situation: excellent, anxious, upsetting, challenging, under control? What role does faith play in your day-to-day activity? Is it a daily part of your thinking, or is it not a conscious part of your daily life? Is that how you want it to be?
32. When you face difficulties and uncertainty, does it make you fearful or "fire you up"?
33. Would you like to know how your life will turn out or do you prefer not knowing?
34. How do you think Mary would answer that question? Read Luke 2:19. What do you think that means? What does it tell us about the character of Mary?
35. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray to be intentional in life and not consider the events of your life mere coincidence. Pray to be able to use your life circumstance to glorify God and exercise faith.

Week Four: *When the Wait is Over*
Galatians 4:4-7

Spend FIFTEEN – Day One

1. Have you heard the phrase, “God is never late, but seldom early”? What does it mean?
2. What’s the advantage of forcing a child (or yourself) to wait rather than always receiving instant gratification?
3. Read James 5:7-9. What example of patience is mentioned? Why is that a good illustration of waiting for the Lord? Can a farmer predict the outcome of his crop? What might happen, good or bad? How is that like waiting on the Lord?
4. The farmer must rely on outcomes beyond his control. How is that the same for you? How is it different?
5. Continue the reading from James 5:10-11. Do you think most would assume that someone like a prophet would be under great blessing from God because of their dedication and sacrifice? Was that the case? Why is it important for us to remember this?
6. Why is the example of Job a good one for us to consider when it comes to patiently enduring hardship? Were Job’s troubles a result of Job’s unfaithfulness? How did it ultimately turn out for Job? See Job 42:12-16 for insight.
7. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray for greater patience while you await deliverance from your struggles.

Spend FIFTEEN- Day Two

8. Read Luke 2:25-26. Who was Simeon and what was he waiting to see?
9. What had God allowed Simeon to know?
10. One of the key principles of effective leadership is to “Begin with the end in mind.” Why is that so helpful?
11. How does focusing on the desired outcome help determine the strategy and steps to achieve the goal?
12. Read Jeremiah 29:11. Do you know the historic circumstance surrounding this promise of God? Why do you suppose God made this promise at such a hard time in the life of His people?

13. What assurance has God given you in His Word, while you await your rescue or the second coming of Christ? (See Hebrews 13:5 or John 10:10 for examples.)
14. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray to trust more completely in the good outcome God has planned for you.

Spend FIFTEEN- Day Three

15. Read Galatians 4:4-7. People had waited for centuries for God to fulfill His promise of a Savior. When the time was right, He fulfilled His promise. What were the conditions in Israel at the time? How did the historic circumstance of the Roman Empire, and the Greek domination before that, serve God's purpose?
16. What is the significance that Jesus was born of a woman?
17. What is the significance that Jesus was born under the law?
18. Read John 1:11-13. How are we made *children of God*? (See John 3:3-8 for additional insight.)
19. Why does God want us to know we are His children? According to Galatians 4:4-7, what is the major distinction between a child and a slave?
20. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray a prayer of gratitude for your status as a child of God and to grasp more fully the significance of that fact.

Spend FIFTEEN- Day Four

21. Did you ever have to wait a long time for something important? Graduation, certification, the birth of a child, marriage, or a job promotion? Was the wait worth it?
22. Did the waiting make the moment more special?
23. What did you learn by waiting?
24. Are you more or less patient than you were five or six years ago? Why?
25. In Galatians 5:22-23, patience is called a *fruit of the Spirit*. In other words, those who are mature of faith have greater patience than those who are less mature. Why is patience considered such a good thing in life? Can you be too

patient?

26. As one who has waited for something important, what responsibility do you feel towards those who are still waiting for an important outcome? How can you help them?
27. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray for those you know who are impatiently waiting on the Lord's Deliverance.

Spend FIFTEEN-Day Five

28. Why do you think Christmas is considered the most important celebration of the entire year by most people in the world?
29. What aspect of the birth of Jesus is most significant to you?
30. Were Mary and Joseph's troubles over when Jesus was finally born? What else were they about to face?
31. What lessons have you learned through patience that can serve you well in the days to come?
32. Why was Jesus, the Son of God and the Savior of the whole world, subjected to such a humble birth? What purpose did it serve then? What purpose does it serve us now?
33. Look again at Galatians 4:4-7. What does this teach us about God's timing? How can we incorporate the lessons we have learned this month about waiting into our everyday life?
34. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray a prayer of thanks that God was willing to enter our world and experience first-hand our struggle before conquering sin, death and the devil and that He now (with the knowledge of our weakness and hardship) intercedes for us before God the Father in Heaven.