

Growing Deeper

Hollow: Reclaiming our heart, our life

Week One: Wasted Struggles

Galatians 1:11-24

Spend FIFTEEN – Day One

1. Do you remember the song of Olivia Newton John called, “Have You Never Been Mellow?” No worries if not; it’s from 1975! But, the lyrics are worth remembering; among them: “There was a time when I was in a hurry as you are/ I was like you/ There was a day when I just had to tell my point of view/ I was like you/ Now I don’t mean to make you frown/ No, I just want you to slow down.” Have you ever been mellow? Have you ever been vulnerable? Have you ever let someone else be strong (for you)? Why is that important?
2. Read Galatians 1:1-10. Do you think most people really know the “true you,” or only the “you” you allow them to see; do you sometimes try to be something that you’re not? How many people have you allowed to get close enough to know the real you?
3. Jesus once said to His disciples, “Have I been with you so long and still you do not know me?” Sometimes people only see the “you” they want to see. What kind of Savior did the disciples want Jesus to be?
4. Read Matthew 16:21-23. Explain what happened. Why was it important for Jesus to reveal His “true mission” to His disciples? What reason did Jesus give for Peter’s response to His vulnerability? How was Peter a stumbling block?
5. Someone has said, “The heart wants what the heart wants.” Peter no doubt thought he was acting in Jesus’ best interest. Has anyone ever tried to get you to do, or to be something that you are not? Did you immediately resist or accept their expectations, at least for a while?
6. What’s the danger of becoming hollow? ...i.e. (To compromise your true self for the sake of acceptance.)
7. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray for the courage of your convictions and for the ability to be the person God has gifted you to become.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Two

8. Read Galatians 1:11-24. What do we know about Paul before He accepted Jesus Christ?
9. Read of his conversion in Acts 9:1-9. Was Paul seeking Jesus when he became a believer? Why do you think God chose Paul as His chief spokesman rather than someone who already believed?
10. Read 1 Timothy 1:15-17. How did Paul feel about his past life before coming to faith? Why was he so willing to share it?

11. Have you always believed in Jesus? If you were raised in the faith, was there a time in life when your faith became more authentic and important to you? Explain.
12. If someone were to ask you, “Why do you believe in Jesus?” what answer would you give?
13. Why is authenticity so important in relationships? What’s the key(s) to creating a safe place for someone to be authentic?
14. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray to be a better listener, not only to hear what is said, but also to create an atmosphere of trust for people to share their hurts and disappointments in life.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Three

15. After his conversion Paul said, “He did not consult any man, nor go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before he was.” Why do you think he said that?
16. What role do others play in the development of our faith?
17. Despite the need for instruction, encouragement and mentoring, what else is needed for an individual Christian to grow in personal faith?
18. Read Psalm 46:10-11 and Matthew 6:5-8. What advice does Scripture give for developing a deeper personal faith?
19. How would you describe false piety? Why is it so harmful when it comes to sharing faith?
20. Paul seemed more than willing to talk of his misguided past life before Jesus. Why is that helpful to us? What are the implications for our testimony?
21. Conclude your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray for greater humility as a Christian and for other Christians to be less judgmental of those who do not yet believe.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Four

22. We’ve discussed how an inauthentic life is hazardous to our Christian testimony. How is it hazardous to us?
23. What happens when you try to be something you are not?

24. Read Philippians 3:4-11. Did Paul have reason to brag about his accomplishments? Why didn't he?
25. How would you define a truly great person? Do you know anyone besides Jesus who inspires you in life? Who and why?
26. Read Luke 18:9-14. What is the lesson of that story?
27. What do you think is the best way to help someone become more authentic and less pretentious in life?
28. End your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray to become a more sincere and accepting Christian who reflects the love of Jesus to all people.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Five

29. Read Galatians 1:24. What was the reason Paul mentioned that caused people to praise God?
30. Who are you praying for to come to saving faith? (You don't have to mention their name... but describe how you know them.)
31. Take a moment and pray for them now, and for more opportunities for you to engage them in an authentic and gracious witness.
32. How often in the course of a week do you have a conversation about faith with other people? Is having such a conversation something you look forward to, or try to avoid?
33. Why is listening to others as important (or more important) than talking about your own life and your own faith journey?
34. What single greatest struggle in life has the Lord helped you overcome? How does that struggle still serve a useful purpose in your life today?
35. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray for someone you know who is in the midst of a life-changing struggle. Write their name down and continue to pray for them each day this week.

Week Two: *Hollow Actions*
Galatians 2:11-16

Spend FIFTEEN – Day One

1. Read Galatians 2:1-10. Are you more of a leader or a follower? (Both are needed in life, and one is not more important than the other.)
2. What are the two things you are never supposed to discuss in polite conversation? Do you agree? Why do you think that is an often-followed “unwritten rule?”
3. Do you feel qualified to discuss matters of faith among friends? Among strangers? Why or why not?
4. Is every point of doctrine equally important? For example? If you know something said is wrong, are you inclined to correct the person or let it go? What factors do you consider in your decision?
5. Read Titus 3:9-11. Why is this advice important?
6. Compare the previous verse to 1 Peter 3:15. Are they contradictory? Why or why not?
7. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray for a more gentle and gracious spirit. Pray for the spirit of Christ to dwell in you richly.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Two

8. Are tolerance and compromise the same thing? Explain.
9. Read Galatians 2:11-15. What was the relationship between Peter and Paul? (See verse 8.) Who had been an apostle longer? Do you think people were inclined to put more trust in Peter since he had been at the Lord’s side and Paul had not? What’s today’s equivalent to that disparity?
10. What did Peter do that so offended Paul?
11. A Judaizer was someone who taught that you had to become a practicing Jew first (honoring all the traditions) before you could accept the Jewish Messiah and become a Christian. Why is that a bad thing?
12. Are there Christians today who, like the Judaizers, expect new Christians to accept and honor all their customs and traditions before they can become mature Christians? Can you think of an example? Read Matthew 15:8-9.

13. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray to always know and honor the difference between personal preference and God's truth.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Three

14. Look again at Galatians 2:12. What reason did Paul give for the behavior of Peter?

15. Do Christians today still struggle with peer pressure when it comes to maintaining their faith in public? Who do you think struggles the most? Teenagers, Business-people, Relatives?

16. What was the effect of Peter's compromise on the others who respected him, even Barnabas?

17. Did Paul violate the expectation of Jesus to talk to his brother (Peter) in private before confronting him in public? Why or why not?

18. In his admonition of Peter, what did Paul emphasize in Galatians 15-16?

19. Why is this so hard for people to keep straight – both Christians and non-Christians tend to describe faithful people by works and not by belief?

20. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray to be willing and able to keep the faith about faith and not behavior in your discussion and example of life.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Four

21. Read Mark 9:38-41. Put Jesus' instructions into your own words.

22. Truth matters. We never want to compromise any part of God's truth. But, you may sometimes hear your pastor(s) say, "Eat the fish, spit out the bones." What does that mean?

23. Can you name any prominent Christian ministries in your area, or in the nation, that are winning countless souls for Christ, but may be in error on some basic Christian teachings? What should our attitude be towards those ministries and towards people who attend those churches?

24. How do you decide when to correct error and when to tolerate aberration?

25. If you feel secure enough to admit it, what's your weak spot? Cursing? Envy? Materialism? Sexual Temptation? Others? How do you feel in your spirit when you realize your life is contrary to your faith?
26. What's the best way to handle hypocrisy in your life? What works for you?
27. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Read Matthew 7:3-5 and let that serve as the basis for your prayer.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Five

28. Read Galatians 2:17-21. Do you agree with the phrase, "Fake it till you make it"? If Christians aren't perfect, should they do their best to appear better than they really are? What do you think?
29. The word hypocrisy comes from two Latin words that mean – "play-acting." It is one of the biggest reasons nonbelievers have for not joining the faith. Is it a fair criticism? Does it justify disbelief?
30. It has been said, "If you stopped going to church because someone there hurt you, your faith was misplaced." Do you agree? What should a Christian do or say when they hear that criticism?
31. How important is it for Christians to admit, rather than explain and/or justify, their false steps, especially towards those outside the faith?
32. Read Jesus' words in Matthew 5:23-24. What do they mean? Why is that important?
33. Define integrity. How is it different from perfection? Why is integrity in the heart of Christians important for the Christians themselves?
34. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray that your walk would always match your talk, and when it doesn't, to be vulnerable and willing to admit it.

Week Three: *Empty Promises*
Galatians 3:6-17

Spend FIFTEEN – Day One

1. Are you inclined to make a New Year's Resolution? Why or why not?
2. Which do you think is worse, making a well-intentioned promise but failing to keep it, or never making a commitment for fear of failure?
3. Read Matthew 21:28-32. What is the point Jesus made about great sinners versus outwardly "religious people?" How does that lesson apply to us?
4. Read Galatians 3:1-6. Do you think a person's actions are important in determining maturity of faith? Explain.
5. Do you think Christians often attempt to strike a deal with God? In other words, "Lord if you do this for me; I will do this for you and for others?" How do you think God feels about such offers?
6. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray for consistency of faith; that regardless of your circumstance in life, your feelings about the Lord and your behavior will remain faithful.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Two

7. Read Romans 4:1-5. How were people of the Old Testament era saved?
8. Read Genesis 12:1-3. What was the specific promise that God made to Abraham? Also Genesis 15:1-6.
9. Why do we call ourselves "children of Abraham"?
10. Proverbs 14:12 and 16:25 both say there is a way that appears to be right, but leads to death. What "way" might seem so reasonable to most people?
11. What is the main purpose of God's laws? Read 1 Corinthians 15:55-57 for insight.
12. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray to resist the temptation to measure a Christian's faithfulness by the outward appearance of goodness.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Three

13. How would you answer the question, “Do you consider yourself a good Christian?”

14. Is personal piety the mark of a good Christian? What is the upside? What’s the downside?

15. Read Matthew 7:15-20. Why are good works considered important in this instance?

16. Read James 1:22-25 and James 2:14-19. The great Reformer Martin Luther rightfully taught that a person is saved by grace apart from good works. Why do you suppose he was concerned that people might misunderstand the point James was making in his epistle?

17. Read Ephesians 2:8-10. What is the right relationship between faith and good works?

18. Luther is remembered for once saying, “Sin boldly!” What do you think he meant? How could it be misconstrued?

19. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray that you always maintain a proper motive for the good works that you are privileged to do as a child of God.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Four

20. Read Galatians 3:6-17. What is the main point of Paul’s teaching?

21. Look again at Galatians 3:13. What does Paul mean? Consider what Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:21 for help.

22. What should a person do if they keep resolving to change an aspect of their life and fail time after time?

23. Are you easily discouraged by failure when attempting to become the mature Christian you want to be? What advice would you give to a newer Christian who is still struggling to overcome the weakness of their own sinful flesh?

24. What help has God offered to forgive and renew Christians who stumble and fall in their faith walk?

25. Why is it important to participate in regular worship if you already know you are saved by grace through faith in Jesus?

26. Read Jeremiah 29:11-12. It is one of the most treasured promises in the entire Bible. What does it mean to you?
27. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray for greater faith to overcome discouragement based on passing circumstance.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Five

28. Read Galatians 3:19-22. Why do you think God gave us the Ten Commandments if we are unable to keep the Law anyway?
29. Read Galatians 3:23-29. Theologians have described three useful purposes for God's Law. As a mirror, the Law shows us the reality of our sinful nature. As a curb through the human conscience, (which is God's Law written on each person's heart), it keeps society from falling into anarchy. As a rule, it directs people of faith to those actions that please God and help other people. Describe an example when you have seen the Law work in one of these ways.
30. When you read the Bible, do you feel mostly comforted or convicted? Explain your answer.
31. Why are both the Law and the Gospel needed in our lives?
32. Paul makes a point in Galatians 3 that God's promise (as an inheritance) cannot be changed since it was sealed by the death of Jesus. Have you made promises through a Last Will and Testament? Why is it important that our laws protect those promises after we die? Why do you think Paul used that metaphor?
33. How important are God's promises to you?
34. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray for greater confidence in your life based on the certainty of God's promises to never leave you or forsake you.