

Growing Deeper
Only Jesus

Week One: Lasting Success
Acts 5:33-39

Spend FIFTEEN – Day One

1. Some products and companies come and go, but there are others that stand the test of time. Name one that has overcome the odds and explain why you think they have outlasted the rest.
2. Are you a trendy person, or do you prefer to purchase classic and time tested products? Why?
3. St. John Church strives to be Biblically Sound, but Culturally Relevant. How can those two values coexist?
4. Read Mark 7:5-9. How can you tell the difference between a long-standing tradition with biblical truth and one without?
5. Do you think some people equate long-standing traditions with Biblical Truth and change with error? Can you give an example?
6. What are some trends that you find difficult to accept?
7. What are some traditions that drive you crazy?
8. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray to be less judgmental and more patient with people whose preferences are different from your own.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Two

9. Read Acts 5:33. Apparently, the words of the disciples caused immediate anger in the Jewish ruling council. So much so that they wanted to have them put to death. Do you ever struggle to keep an emotional response in check?
10. What have you found most helpful to keep you from “flying off the handle?” Has that tendency in your life gotten better or worse over time?
11. Read Acts 5:34. What did Gamaliel do to gain control of the situation and allow cooler heads to prevail?

12. When you deal with a mistake in judgment, are you more critical of yourself or of others? Explain.
13. Who in your life helped you deal with things on a more reasonable level of response?
14. What do you think the description of Gamaliel means by “respected by all the people”? How do you think he came to be so respected?
15. End your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray to be slow to anger and quick to listen.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Three

16. Read Acts 5:33-38. Do you think it is harder to handle adversity or success? Explain.
17. List three or four hugely successful athletes, rock stars, or actors who became self-destructive.
18. Explain the term, “Be careful what you ask for.”
19. People get married, “for better or for worse.” Which do you think is harder on a relationship – success or struggle?
20. Read Proverbs 30:7-9. What’s the danger of too much too soon?
21. Explain the test that Gamaliel advised in Acts 3:38-39.
22. What’s the difference between asking God to bless what you are doing versus doing what God is blessing?
23. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray to know what direction or activity God wants to bless in your life.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Four

24. In your experience, does faithfulness as a Christian leader always lead to success and popularity?
25. On the other hand, is popularity and success usually an indication of unfaithfulness and compromise in a Christian leader?

26. Was Jesus popular? Who didn't like Him? Do you think that holds up today... that a Christian leader may be popular with the common people but out of favor with those in religious authority? Explain why that often happens.
27. Read 2 Timothy 4:1-5. What does Paul predict about Christian leadership? Do you think those days are here?
28. How can you tell a false Christian leader from a faithful Christian leader?
29. Read about Paul's experience in Acts 17:10-11. How did the Bereans protect themselves from false teaching? Is that still good advice?
30. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray for your pastor to resist the temptation of popularity in favor of faithfulness to the Lord and God's Word.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Five

31. Read the concluding verses in Acts 5:38-42. What assurance does Gamaliel offer to the Council about false teachers?
32. What warning does Gamaliel offer to the Council?
33. Do you think Gamaliel's advice is still relevant today? What is the danger of opposing Christian teachers who are being faithful but are doing things we don't approve?
34. What are the three most important things you look for in choosing a church or leaving a church?
35. The apostles did not escape completely unscathed. Were they upset that they had been falsely accused or falsely abused? What should be the attitude of Christian leaders today who suffer abuse despite their faithfulness to the Lord's mission?
36. Should those that are faithful expect trouble from believers? Why or why not?
37. Conclude your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray for your Christian leaders to rise above any mistreatment and consider it an honor to suffer for Jesus.

Week Two: True Satisfaction

John 4:4-14

Spend FIFTEEN – Day One

1. Have you ever been on the “outside looking in,” excluded from a certain group or level of activity? When was that? Why do you think you still remember it?
2. How did you handle it? Were you resentful and discouraged or did it motivate you to gain acceptance?
3. Read John 4:4-15. This woman was drawing water in the middle of the day to avoid running into others. Why did she feel so isolated?
4. Do you think it matters if your actions have led to your isolation, or if others have rejected you for no reason? Apart from being God who knows all things, what experiences did Jesus encounter to help Him empathize with this woman?
5. Do you think this woman had “settled” for a lesser life? What do you think causes a person to throw in the towel and quit trying?
6. Some people respond to rejection by forming new relationships with others who have also suffered rejection or who have values similar to their own. Which do you think is more important – the quality of the relationship or the status of those in the relationship? Explain.
7. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray for people like this woman who feel judged for their mistakes.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Two

8. In your opinion, what is required for a person to feel valued and fulfilled in life?
9. Bob Buford, a successful man who refused to settle for mere success, wrote the book *Halftime*. He wanted to be significant. What makes a person significant?
10. Jesus’ disciples lived under the social standards of their day. They were not permitted to talk to women, and only gentiles under certain conditions. Jesus refused to abide by rules made by men and not by God. Do you think that is still an issue in today’s culture?
11. Quickly read Acts 6:14; 15:1; 21:21. What changes did Jewish leaders believe faith would cause? Were they right?

12. What is the difference between religion and true faith? Read the words of Jesus in Matthew 15:8-9, and 2 Corinthians 3:4-6. Is it possible that some of the most dedicated and religious people in our churches have exchanged rules for faith without knowing it? Where does that lead?
13. Read John 10:10. What did Jesus say He came to bring? Consider the advice of 1 Timothy 6:17-19. What is true life?
14. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray to know the difference between true faith and mere religion. Pray to be gracious towards those who have mistaken the two as the same thing.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Three

15. Read the words of Jesus in John 4:10. What did Jesus say He was capable of giving to this sinful woman?
16. The human body can survive nearly a month without food, but less than a week without water. Water is essential to life. Is Jesus essential to life that is truly life? Explain.
17. Read Revelation 7:17; 21:1-17. What do these passages suggest is the key to eternal life in heaven? What is the connection between Jesus and the source of life in these passages? What is the intended significance?
18. What is the significance of Jesus offering this gift to such a known sinner? See 1 Timothy 1:15-16 for insight.
19. Did the Jewish leaders offer this same life to the people? Did the disciples? Is this something that only God can do, or can God use people to give the gift of life to people?
20. Read Matthew 23:1-4. What is the danger of making a relationship with God about obedience and rules? Is your pastor more often criticized for not condemning sin and teaching obedience, or for being too demanding? See how Paul described the balance in Ephesians 4:15-16. How would you describe the relationship between truth and love?
21. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray for your pastor and all Christian leaders that they might be a source of living water to thirsty sinners.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Four

22. Do you think most people consider regular church attendance a duty or a privilege? Explain.
23. What could the church do better to become a life-giving refreshment to people rather than the sacred obligation that many perceive?

24. Is it basic human nature to want rules, or to live motivated by love for God and the love for others? Why might rules be easier?
25. Read Luke 6:38. That seems like a trick to get people to give more and do more. What do you think?
26. Look again at John 4:4-14. This woman was a gentile, Jesus was a Jew, and there are others of various faiths living all around us. Is there anything about Christianity that distinguishes it from all other well-meaning religions?
27. Do you believe that there are only two religions in the world; those that teach you what you must do to please God and the Christian faith that teaches us what God has done to make us pleasing? Explain the concept of grace.
28. Conclude your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray to be a reflection of God's love in words and actions towards others.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Five

29. What brings you the greatest satisfaction in life? Why?
30. How is that activity different or similar to the values and actions that Jesus demonstrated in His life?
31. Do you feel your life is important? Are you making a difference in ways that matter? Why or why not?
32. What could you change or begin doing that might increase your sense of personal significance?
33. Do you think most people equate doing “big stuff” with doing “important stuff”? Is achieving a big goal more or less important than helping a single person in God's sight?
34. Read John 5:23. What do you think Jesus meant by this summary statement?
35. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray for your church and for your friends who have not accepted Jesus as their personal Savior to see Him as the gracious giver of life this woman came to understand.

Week Three: *Real Help*
Matthew 8:1-17

Spend FIFTEEN – Day One

1. When was the last time you were at your wit's end? Describe a time when you just were at a loss to find a solution to a problem... perhaps you are facing a time like that now.
2. How easy is it for you to ask for help? Are you getting more or less self-reliant?
3. Would you rather give help or receive help? Explain.
4. Some churches make it their mission to provide help to people in time of need. Others make it clear their primary mission is spiritual, not physical. Which approach is right?
5. Read James 2:14-19. Did Jesus come only to save the lost? Did He come only to help those who believe? How can His example give us direction?
6. What is the danger of helping people? Explain the term “enabling.” How can you help someone without making them needy?
7. End your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray to see the opportunity to help someone in a tangible way today.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Two

8. Read Matthew 8:1-17. Check out the previous chapter(s). What had Jesus just finished?
9. Is the focus of Matthew 8:1-17 primarily additional teaching or action? Why is that important?
10. Why is it significant that Jesus touched the leper?
11. What question did the leper ask Jesus? What does that reveal about his faith?
12. Read 1 John 5:13-15. Why do we pray, “If God wills”? Why might His will be different from ours – even if it is to prevent suffering?

13. Read Mark 1:35-36. Why do you suppose Jesus urged the leper to “tell no one”? What is the danger of Jesus being primarily known as a healer, or provider of food?
14. Do you think some people today primarily look to Jesus for physical needs? How can Christians reflect the balance between providing physical help and spiritual focus that Jesus showed in His life?
15. Conclude your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray to be the kind of witness to the goodness of God that would honor the example of Jesus.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Three

16. Read Matthew 8:5-13. Why is the fact that this man was a Centurion significant?
17. Why is it significant that the Centurion came to Jesus on behalf of one of his servants?
18. As a Roman Centurion, this man had significant authority over the inhabitants of Israel. Why do you think he told Jesus he was unworthy of a personal visit?
19. What was the perception of authority the Centurion was trying to avoid by the statement he makes in verses 8-9?
20. What impressed Jesus about this man?
21. What lesson(s) should we learn from the example of this man and Jesus’ statement about him in verses 10 & 11?
22. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray for a more humble spirit to be able to see the poor and people who serve us as worthy of our honor.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Four

23. Is it still important that Christians respond to people in distress? Why?
24. Do you think God primarily helps people in need through other people or by miraculous intervention? Is one more important than the other?
25. Lepers were the untouchable people of Jesus’ day. Who are the untouchables in today’s culture? Do you think Christians are portrayed in society as gracious towards those in need, or judgmental and superior? What can be done

to correct misconceptions?

26. Read James 1:2-8. What seems to be required by God if we expect an answer to our prayer(s)? Are no, not yet, and “it depends” all valid answers to heartfelt prayers?
27. In the Bible people sometimes poured oil (James 5:14) and laid hands (2 Timothy 1:6) when they prayed for their specific needs. If it is the prayer and not the action that matters, why are such actions nevertheless helpful and encouraged?
28. Take time now to pray for each other in turn, standing behind one another, praying for them with your hands resting on their shoulders.
29. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray to expect more from God. Pray that your faith would expect miracles according to God’s will.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Five

30. Re-read Matthew 8:1-17. Why is this example of Jesus important to understand the nature of God? Read John 14:8-9.
31. If God created a perfect world in the Garden of Eden, where did sickness, death, hatred, and murder enter the picture? Read Romans 5:15-17 for insight.
32. Read Matthew 13:24-30. Suggest several reasons (e.g. good that can come from hardship) that explain why God might allow the consequence of sin to exist until the final judgment.
33. Read 2 Corinthians 8:13-15, and 2 Corinthians 9:12-15. What good can come by means of Christians rendering assistance in the name of Jesus?
34. Did Jesus limit His help to believers? (See Matthew 8:11,12) Explain the statement found in Galatians 6:9-10.
35. Read Jesus’ words from the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:43-46. What is the primary teaching of this Scripture? How does it apply to our life?
36. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray to be more generous in the use of your material possessions to provide real help to people in need.

Week Four – True Purpose
Acts 9:1-19

Spend FIFTEEN – Day One

1. Have you ever been in a situation where you were trying hard to impress a group of people or achieve some measure of recognition and acceptance for others? Describe how you felt and why that was important at the time.
2. Do you still feel that way? If so, why is that important to you? If not, what changed?
3. Read the assigned Scripture. Who was Paul trying to please? Why?
4. Paul was from Tarsus. Although he was a well-trained Jewish leader, Tarsus was far away from Jerusalem, the seat of influence. How might that have contributed to his driven nature?
5. Read Galatians 1:13-17. What additional information does Paul provide about his status before becoming a Christian?
6. Paul, who was an outsider in the Jewish community, became an outsider in the Christian community after his conversion. How can that perspective serve God's purpose? Have you ever felt the same? Explain.
7. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray for a better understanding of how God can use your life experience in a unique way to help others find God.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Two

8. Why was Paul on his way to Damascus?
9. Acts 7 describes the accusations and stoning of the first Christian martyr, Stephen. Read Acts 7:57-60. What additional information do we learn about Paul's previous life as a zealous advocate for Judaism?
10. Is passion for God a good thing? What made Paul's passion a dangerous thing?
11. Much is said today about Radical Islamic Terrorists. Most consider their devotion to be misplaced passion to their faith. How is it possible for a godly person to turn so destructive in the name of God?
12. Although they may not be as extreme, have you witnessed evidence of misplaced passion among Christians? Discuss.

13. Our pastors have said, “Other Christians may be wrong on a lot of Biblical teaching, but if they preach Jesus Christ as God’s only begotten son who lived, died and rose again as our Savior for the forgiveness of sin; I’m a fan.” Do you agree? Is there too much or too little division in the ranks of Christians?
14. End your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray for well-intended but misguided people who use faith to hurt others.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Three

15. Re-read Acts 9:1-19. What was Paul’s purpose in life before his trip to Damascus?
16. What was his purpose after his trip to Damascus?
17. What do you believe is your primary purpose in life? Does the expenditure of your time, energy, and possessions align with your primary purpose?
18. If someone posed this question to you, “If it were against the law, and you were arrested for being a devoted Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?,” how would you answer?
19. If anyone asked your colleagues at work, your neighbors, or your extended family what they thought were the three greatest priorities of your life, what would they say? Would they be right?
20. Read Acts 9:1-19. What helps people recognize our purpose?
21. If you could change your life to mirror your primary purpose, what would you need to change?
22. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray for a greater alignment between your faith and your daily activities.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Four

23. What question did Jesus ask Paul after knocking him off his horse? Read Matthew 25:34-40. How often do you think people associate their behavior towards others with behavior towards Jesus?
24. Why did Jesus allow Paul to be blind and go without answers for three days? Have you ever had to wait on God to answer a prayer or provide direction in your confusion? What benefit comes from waiting?
25. Paul’s companions did not experience the appearance of Jesus in the same way that he did. What does that suggest to

us about faith and conversion? Is that significant? In what way?

26. When God came to Ananias, why was Ananias reluctant to get involved?
27. Read Acts 9:15. What purpose did God have in sending Ananias to Paul other than restoring his sight?
28. Read 2 Corinthians 12:7-10; 1 Timothy 1:15-16, and Galatians 6:10,11. Some believe Paul's famous "thorn in the flesh" was continuing eye problems as a constant reminder of his conversion. What purpose does ongoing hardship serve in the life of Christians?
29. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray that you would gain greater trust in God's love and provision despite the hardships you face and those times that God seems distant.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Five

30. Re-read Acts 9:17-19. Ananias knew who Paul was and what he had done in persecuting other Christians. How difficult is it to overlook an offense, instead of wishing those who hurt others would feel the consequence of their actions? Do you pray for your enemies? What do you pray?
31. How do you think Paul felt to be shown kindness and compassion by those he considered his enemy and an enemy of God?
32. When you realize you have been wrong about someone or something important, how do you overcome the guilt?
33. As a trained Pharisee, Paul was an expert in Jewish laws and customs. See Acts 9:22. Why would God take someone so skilled in working with a certain group of people and designate him as a missionary to others? In other words why was Paul asked to be a witness to the gentiles, not Jews? (Acts 9:15)
34. Verse 17 says that Paul was filled with the Holy Spirit. What does that mean? See 1 Corinthians 12:3. Do all Christians have the Holy Spirit? Do you believe all Christians have the same measure of the Holy Spirit?
35. Why would God take an enemy of the Church and use him as a chief spokesman for the faith? What implications does that have for us today?
36. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray for a more gracious spirit towards those that make your life so difficult.

Week Five – A Secure Destiny
John 14:1-7

Spend FIFTEEN – Day One

1. Are you more like your mom or your dad? Explain.
2. How much influence do you think your family of origin has on your values, opinions, character development?
3. Read John 14:1-7. What did Jesus mean when He said, “If you really know me, you will know my Father as well”?
4. The Bible clearly describes a Triune God that is three distinct persons yet one true God. What divine attributes does Jesus share with God the Father?
5. How is Jesus distinct and different from God the Father?
6. Read Philippians 2:6-8. In His human nature, what did Jesus do to distinguish Himself from the Father? Why was that important?
7. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray to live a life that lets others see God in your values and compassion.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Two

8. Have you suffered through the death of someone in your immediate family in the last several years? What was your chief concern for them and for those closest to them?
9. What was their concern for you and others close to them?
10. Jesus’ arrest and crucifixion were not something tragic and unavoidable that suddenly happened to Him. Read Matthew 16:21. His disciples did not yet understand it all, but He knew what awaited Him. When did this conversation with His disciples happen? Where were they? What day was it? What happened next?
11. How would you summarize these last words to His disciples? What was Jesus’ chief concern?
12. See Revelation 21:1-7. How would you describe the place Jesus is preparing for His followers?

13. Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. How should Christians feel about the death of those we love?
14. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray for those you know who are mourning the death of loved ones. If you are grieving the loss of someone close to you, remember Jesus' love for you and ask Him to give you His comfort and peace.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Three

15. Who responded to Jesus that he did not know the way to where Jesus was going? What do you know about him? See John 11:16 and John 20:25 for insight.
16. Thomas demanded truth and was not easily persuaded. Are you more or less like Thomas?
17. How was the character of Thomas beneficial to the other disciples? How is it beneficial to us?
18. What does it say about Jesus that He gathered such a diverse group of men as His disciples?
19. Jesus did not want His disciples to be troubled. Is there anything that is troubling you right now?
20. Does God understand our weaknesses and doubts? What might Jesus say to you about your troubled heart?
21. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray for God to calm the fears and worries that trouble you and those you love.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Four

22. Look again at John 14:1-7. What does it mean when Jesus told His disciples that they have seen Him, they have seen and know His Father too?
23. Some have concluded that God the Father is the God of the Old Testament and was a God of war, ritual, high-demands and no compassion. Why was the thirty-three-year life of Jesus so important in addition to the sacrifice He made for us on the cross? In other words, what other purpose did Jesus' interaction on earth accomplish?
24. Read Matthew 6:9-13. What does it mean when Jesus told His followers they should pray to "Our Father in heaven?" Why is it important to think of God in that way?
25. Others trusted in God the Father but did not see Jesus in the same way. In what ways did Jesus show He was also true

God?

26. Read Hebrews 4:14-16. Why is it important that Jesus lived and walked on earth before ascending back to heaven?
27. What does it mean to say, "Jesus sits at the right hand of God the Father in heaven?"
28. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray to gain a great appreciation for the human and divine natures of Jesus our Savior.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Five

29. Read John 10:10. How does Jesus describe the life He wants to bring us? Is that life something you must wait for or something you can enjoy even now? Explain.
30. In addition to eternity in heaven, what benefits do Christians enjoy through their faith in Jesus as their Savior?
31. Do most people believe that faith provides immediate blessings, or do you think they limit the value of faith to the time of their death?
32. Why do you think our churches are not full every single Sunday?
33. Is the church partly to blame? What could the church do to change the perception that faith is only important for the old or those in trouble?
34. Look again at John 14:6. Explain the difference between each point Jesus made when He said He was "the way, the truth and the life." How is each of these blessings different?
35. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray for a great awareness of the value of your relationship with Jesus here and now.