

## **Growing Deeper**

***Standouts*** - Then you will shine like stars in the sky as you hold firmly to the word of life –Phil 2:15

### **Week One: Unconditional Acceptance**

***Matthew 9:9-13***

#### **Spend FIFTEEN – Day One**

1. Before we dive into this week's reading, let's look at the events that took place just prior to God calling Matthew. Read Matthew 9:1-12. Where had Jesus just arrived? (vs.1)
2. What did Jesus say to the man? (vs. 2)
3. Why would the religious leaders of the day take offense at Jesus' words?
4. How would you answer Jesus' question in verse 5? Explain your answer.
5. What reason did Jesus give the people for healing the paralyzed man? (vs. 6)
6. What impact did the miracle have on the crowd? How might the setting have something to do with His need to take extra steps to demonstrate His authority?
7. God used this miracle to get at the heart of doubters and skeptics. How do you think you would have responded to seeing this miracle?
8. Seeing a formerly paralyzed man walk elicited praise and gratitude from the crowd. Can you say the same about the work you see God doing in your life? Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer by asking God to direct your focus to the work He is doing. Ask Him for a spirit of gratitude and trust.

#### **Spend FIFTEEN – Day Two**

9. Read Matthew 9:9. Whom did Jesus address and where did He find him?
10. If witnesses to this event tried to claim Jesus acted out of ignorance, there's no denying that Jesus knew what Matthew was, even if He didn't who he was. Looking at the account, does it seem that Jesus was worried about who may have seen Him with Matthew? Explain your answer.
11. Read Matthew 9:10. Where do we see Jesus next?

12. Have you ever been in a situation when you were with someone that you did not want others to know about, even for innocent reasons like planning a surprise party for someone else or going for a job interview while working for another employer? Describe how it felt, both emotionally and physically.
  
13. If Jesus was ashamed to be with Matthew, He sure didn't show it. After publically speaking to him, already a huge breach of protocol for Jews of that day, Jesus goes to Matthew's home. What does that say about Jesus' character?
  
14. You may have noticed that the author of this book is Matthew, the tax collector himself. Why do you suppose Matthew included these events? If you were in his place, would you have shared your own story? Why or why not?
  
15. Perhaps Matthew was just reporting the facts, or perhaps the fact that Jesus marched up to him in broad daylight and *invited* Matthew to follow Him profoundly impacted Matthew. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray to be more conscious of those around you who may need the affirmation of your attention.

**Spend FIFTEEN: Day Three**

16. Describe a time when someone (maybe even you) did something unpopular or confusing to those around them.
  
17. In your case, did those upset address their concerns to the party causing offense, or did they talk to others about them instead of directly to them? For what reasons would people avoid addressing the offender directly?
  
18. Read Matthew 9:9-12. To whom did the religious leaders address their concerns?
  
19. The Pharisees went to the disciples instead of asking Jesus directly. What do you think this reveals about their intentions?
  
20. If the leaders did not truly want clarity, what reasons might they have had to talk to the disciples instead of directly to Jesus?
  
21. Crossing socio-economic, ethnic, religious and cultural boundaries (just to name a few) can still ruffle feathers today. How can we encourage those around us to have open and honest conversations instead of stirring up dissent or adding to the angst?
  
22. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer by asking God to help you be gracious, especially with those that seek to undermine your efforts at crossing boundaries.

**Spend FIFTEEN: Day Four**

23. Can you remember some of your first boy-girl dances? Do you remember how much better it felt to stay on “your” side of the gym than to risk crossing the divide? What made it easier to stick with your own kind?
24. Read Matthew 9:9-13. How did Matthew describe the guests at his own party?
25. Many translations of the Bible have quotes around the word sinners. Why might Matthew have included that disclaimer?
26. Times now are not much different from Jesus’ day. There are still some sins that are frowned upon where others seem to get a free pass. Brainstorm a quick list of behaviors that used to be taboo five, ten, even twenty years ago that hardly raise an eyebrow today.
27. Many of us can recount tales of our parents, grandparents or family and friends that were ostracized because of a sin. What was often the result of those banishments?
28. Human nature does not change — people still have a need for relationships, and when ostracized, they will look for a new group with which to belong. How might it be unhealthy for a group of people like the tax collectors to cloister together? (Think of the results of long-term imprisonment, young institutionalized children, etc.)
29. If it is our desire as Christians to become more Christ-like, how can we display the same character as Christ when dealing with those with whom we may not typically agree? (See Colossians 3:1-17 for ideas.) Then brainstorm a list of actions you can take to be more welcoming to others.
30. Finish your FIFTEEN by asking God to help you to recognize opportunities to include those who need to feel accepted because of their lifestyle.

**Spend FIFTEEN: Day Five**

31. Look again at Matthew 9:9-13. What assumption about Jesus does the Pharisees’ question in verse 11 suggest?
32. How did Jesus respond to their question?
33. Many people make a similar assumption about the church, that it is for perfect people. If Jesus says that He came for the sick and not the healthy, whom might His church be intended to reach? Explain your answer.
34. If you had to estimate, how many perfect people attend your church? (Just kidding.) Seriously though, how effective is your church at conveying the idea that the church is not intended for perfect people? Would you say they are doing

pretty good or do they need a little work in that area?

35. If showing unconditional acceptance is a good thing for individuals to do, how can an institution like a church do the same thing? What steps can a group of people take to let others know they are welcome? Take a few moments and brainstorm a list of actions or attitudes a church can adopt to be more accepting.
  
36. As you finish your final FIFTEEN this week, look over the list you have just brainstormed about the church, and the list you made on Day 4, question 29. Ask God to give you the courage to be a part of making them happen, both personally and as a part of your church.