

Growing Deeper

Where is God When...

Week One: *He Seems Absent?*

Psalm 13

Spend FIFTEEN – Day One

1. Looking back over your life, what do you consider the most difficult period so far?
2. What made that time so difficult? Was it the hardship of the moment or not knowing how it would work out?
3. How did it resolve itself? How were you different after that experience?
4. Have the lessons you learned remained with you, or has time put that period in your rear-view mirror?
5. Read Romans 8:28. Does it say God causes all things? Is He to blame for hardship or at least not rescuing you from hardship? What does it say about God working in the midst of hardship?
6. Read Romans 5:1-5. What might be the benefit of hardship and misery?
7. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray to remember lessons learned in the past from blessings and hardships.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Two

8. Read James 5:10-11. Were the great men of the Bible spared hardship because they were faithful?
9. Why do you suppose God doesn't protect His own better than those who are not faithful to Him?
10. Do you know how any of the apostles died? How did their deaths serve God's purpose... or maybe they didn't?
11. Have you ever had it within your power to spare someone you love from hardship or struggle but didn't, not because you couldn't but because you thought it might do more harm than good? Why is that so hard for us?
12. Put yourself in God's shoes for a moment. God has not only the person He loves to consider, but the lesson that others around Him are learning by observation. What would happen if every time someone needed help, God stepped in? Have you ever known a child who was spared all hardships in life? How did that affect the child?

13. If you ruled the world, do you suppose things would be better or worse? Why?
14. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray a prayer of acceptance and trust for all the times the outcome of a hardship did not turn out the way you wished. Thank God for His wisdom and willingness to take abuse from those who blame Him for everything.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Three

15. Read Psalm 13. What verse or main thought jumped out at you?
16. Have you ever prayed an angry prayer towards God? Have you ever gotten angry with a loved one or a friend who disappointed you? Is there a difference between the two?
17. According to verse one, what accusation was David making against God? Some would say, “Either God doesn’t really care, or he’s impotent.” Is there another explanation?
18. In Psalm 13:2, David admits wrestling with his thoughts and being depressed. Are those attitudes the result of weak faith, or can faithful people (true believers) still be confused and depressed over a life situation? Explain.
19. David felt God was allowing his enemy to triumph over him. Name some enemies that are fighting for the upper hand in your life. Does it ever feel like you are fighting a losing battle? Do you think it’s okay to get mad at God for His apparent lack of concern? Explain.
20. What would you tell a Christian friend who is facing a hard time and is angry with God? (Or is it best to let them vent and say nothing?) Would you react the same way towards an unbelieving friend? Why or why not?
21. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray for a friend you know who is confused by God’s apparent lack of concern for their hardship.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Four

22. Why was David so concerned about what his enemies and adversaries thought about his present hardship?
23. Have you ever worried about what others were thinking about God’s (supposed) lack of blessing in your life? Why did you care?
24. Read Romans 11:33-36. Why is it impossible to know the mind of God?

25. Do you want your God to be so small you could understand His actions and plans, or would you prefer a God whose ways and wisdom far surpasses your ability to comprehend? Why do so many people judge God by human standards?
26. When you were a child, how fast did time fly? How often did a birthday or Christmas come each year? Now that you are older, how often do they come? Read Psalm 90:4. What does it mean?
27. As children (by comparison to God), we focus on the near-term, but God focuses on eternity. What difference does that focus make in prioritizing single events or single lifetimes?
28. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray for a more gracious spirit towards God's actions (or inaction), especially those you find hard to accept.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Five

29. Read the Parable of the Weeds in Matthew 13:24-30. Who sowed the weeds?
30. Why did some suspect that the seed the master sowed was low quality?
31. Is God responsible for sin, death and hardship in life?
32. Read Revelation 12:7-12. How does this passage explain evil coming to the perfect world God created?
33. Why do people tend to blame God for hardship and forget about the Devil?
34. When will evil be eradicated from life? See 1 Corinthians 15:50-58.
35. Read Isaiah 40:29-31 and Galatians 6:9. What hope do we have to survive these hard times until the Lord returns and ushers in the perfect world God has prepared for those who love Him?
36. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray for those who are having a hard time trusting God in the midst of their hardship, when God seems far away.

Week Two: *I'm At The End of My Rope?*
Psalm 42

Spend FIFTEEN – Day One

1. Has it always been easy for you to believe, or was there a time (perhaps even now) when your trust in God seemed to make no difference in the quality of your life? Explain.
2. Have you ever heard the song “More Than Words”? It’s a love song that describes a love that doesn’t need to be expressed in words because our actions make it clear how we feel. How are you feeling towards God at this time of your life: close, distant, routine? When was the last time you felt especially close to Him?
3. David’s Psalms reveal his own close and distant feelings towards God. Read Psalm 42. What phrase best expresses his feelings towards God at that time?
4. Most believe this period of David’s life was when he was on the run from King Saul, who was jealous of his popularity and was trying to kill him. What had David done to cause Saul’s anger?
5. Read Psalm 42:6. Where was David at the time he wrote this psalm?
6. David was not only banished from his home. According to verse 4, what else did David miss?
7. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray for those who feel far from God.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Two

8. Why do you attend worship services?
9. What would you miss most if you were not allowed or discontinued your regular practice of worship?
10. Read Psalm 42:2. During this period in David’s life, how did he describe the attitudes of his friends who were aware of his hardship?
11. Read 1 Samuel 22:1-2. How would you describe the kinds of people that gathered to follow David during his exile from Jerusalem?
12. How important is the company you keep?

13. Read 1 Corinthians 15:33. What does the verse mean to you? How have you applied it in your life?
14. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray for those closest to you, that your friends and family would be a blessing rather than a hindrance to your faith.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Three

15. Whom do you know in your circle of friends and family that feels alienated from God by His apparent failure to help in their time of need?
16. Without lecturing them, quoting scripture, or making them feel unfaithful, what are some things you could do to show love and compassion towards them?
17. What are some possible reasons why God allows Christians to suffer hardships and setbacks?
18. Read the following Scriptures to guide your thinking: John 9:1-4; John 15:1-2; Hebrews 12:5-6 and 1 Corinthians 10:11-15.
19. Read Romans 8:35-39. How does this passage help Christians face times of hardship?
20. Despite the hard times David was suffering, as related in Psalm 42, what phrase keeps reoccurring? See verses 5, 8 and 11. What insight does that give us into the heart of David?
21. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray for the person you thought of in point #1 above. Pray for insight and blessing to be used by God to bring love into their life.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Four

22. Read James 5:10-11. What does this passage teach us about the correlation of faithfulness to suffering?
23. Why do so many people believe that hardship in a person's life is a sign of God's punishment?
24. Do you think Jesus paid the price for all sin or only part of our sin and therefore we must suffer some ourselves for the mistakes we make? Explain.
25. If God does not cause hardship, suffering and pain in life, who is responsible?

26. Why do you think people blame God rather than the Devil, their own behavior or the behavior of others?
27. According to Psalm 42:9-10, where did David place the blame for his troubles?
28. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray for Christian leaders who often suffer the attacks and hardships Satan uses to discourage them in their work.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Five

29. How would you describe the attitude of David in Psalm 42?
30. Is it healthy for Christians to vocalize their frustrations? Was David being unfaithful by acknowledging his confusion over the difficulties of life?
31. According to Psalm 42:4, what sustained David in the midst of hardship? How does that apply to us?
32. Is it wrong or healthy to be like David in Psalm 42:6 and admit despair?
33. How did he feel towards God in Psalm 42:9? Have you ever felt this way?
34. What happens to a child who is overly protected by his parents from every hardship and difficulty in life? What spiritual lesson can we learn from that observation?
35. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Read Psalm 42 aloud and make it your prayer today.

Week Three: *Evil Wins?*

Psalm 73

Spend FIFTEEN – Day One

1. Does it pay to be godly, or does it seem to you that the ungodly have greater success in life?
2. Read Psalm 73. How would David answer the question posed in #1 above?
3. Check out what David had to say in Psalm 37:1-2. Why do you suppose God allows nonbelievers to enjoy earthly success?
4. According to David's comments in Psalm 37:1 and 73:2-3 what difficulty did the success of nonbelievers cause for David? Is that still a problem for believers?
5. Do you have anyone in your family or among your friends or colleagues who believes you are foolish to believe in God and follow the narrow path? How does that make you feel?
6. David was pretty candid about his frustration in watching nonbelievers succeed while believers struggle. Do you share his frustration? Do you ever feel tempted to give up the faith as David was tempted?
7. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Share with God (as David did) your honest frustrations over what appears to be unfairness in life.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Two

8. Read 1 Timothy 6:6-7. Why do you suppose Paul didn't just say, "godliness is a means to great gain"? Why did he feel a need to single out contentment? Does godliness already include contentment?
9. Why is contentment so hard for people to achieve?
10. Are contentment and lack of ambition the same thing? What's the difference?
11. Can you be content while working hard to improve your status in life? Explain.
12. Is it a sin to want more, to work hard to achieve more, to set big goals? When does personal drive cross the line and become sinful?

13. Read 1 Timothy 6:9-11. What is the warning Paul issues? Is it only money that can lead a Christian astray, or could something else (power, fame, love of a person/place/thing) also become an unhealthy obsession? How do you know when you have gone too far?

14. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray for contentment in your life.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Three

15. Read Psalm 73:1. Why do you think David begins with that statement when he spends most of the Psalm talking about the frustration he feels over the success of godless people?

16. Judging from David's observations in Psalm 73:3-9, is what you see on the surface the same as reality? Do the pleasures of this world always equate to happiness and a sense of well-being? Explain.

17. Read Solomon's observations in Ecclesiastes 1:1-11. What did he discover about getting everything his heart could desire?

18. Read Ecclesiastes 5:12. Explain what Solomon was trying to say.

19. Read Solomon's prayer in Proverbs 30:7-9. Do you feel the same way about possessions?

20. Studies show that most Americans feel they would be happy if they just earned 10 to 20% more than they have right now (no matter their current level of prosperity). Have you ever felt that way? Why do you suppose that is true no matter if a person earns \$25,000 or \$200,000?

21. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray for 20% more income than you are currently making. (Just kidding!) Pray to be more aware of your current blessings in life, material and otherwise.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Four

22. Do you think God would have greater success converting the godless if they had less success in life? Or is it better for them to experience outward success but internal dissatisfaction with things and achievement?

23. Who do you know that is less well off than you, but appears to be content and even happy in life? What about them do you find so attractive?

24. Are you happier now than when you got your first job? Why or why not?

25. Read Psalm 73:17-20. What caused David to change his mind about being envious of the ungodly?
26. After considering the bigger picture, how did David describe his previous attitude of jealousy and envy? (See Psalm 73:21)
27. Read Luke 16:19-31. What lesson was Jesus trying to teach by telling this story?
28. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray for a better perspective on what is most important in life.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Five

29. Read Psalm 73:21 again. What happens when we compare ourselves to others?
30. Read John 21:20-22. What did Jesus say to Peter when he wanted to know what was going to become of John? What lesson can we learn from that exchange?
31. According to Psalm 73:18-20 and 27, what will become of the godless? How do you feel about that?
32. Read Ezekiel 33:11, John 3:17-20 and Romans 10:21. What is God's attitude towards those headed towards eternal judgment? Is God eager to see them punished?
33. Is the judgment of the ungodly something God does to them, or is it something they (or their ancestors or family-of-origin) have chosen for themselves instead of believing in God? Should God force Himself on people?
34. If man had no say in the matter of his relationship with God, we would lack the very essence of being human - free will. If you had no choice but to believe, what would be the difference between you and a programmed computer?
35. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray for the opportunity, the words and the actions to show someone far from God the kind of love and compassion He has towards all people.

