

## **Growing Deeper**

*Where is God When...*

### **Week Four: When I Fall Short?**

*Psalm 38*

#### **Spend FIFTEEN – Day One**

1. Read Psalm 38. How would you describe David's present situation?
2. Look again at the first two verses. How would you describe David's relationship with the Lord at this moment?
3. What's the difference between "discipline" and punishment? Does God punish believers for their sin?
4. Read Hebrews 12:5-11. What's the stated reason for God's discipline in the life of a believer?
5. Consider Hebrews 12:10-11. What's the hoped-for outcome of proper discipline?
6. Were you disciplined as a child? If so, what was the most common form of discipline you experienced? What effect did it have on you?
7. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray for all of the parents in your life to know the difference between punishment and discipline and to be motivated by love.

#### **Spend FIFTEEN – Day Two**

8. In Psalm 38 and other psalms, David actually had a physical reaction to God's discipline. Look at Psalm 38:2-8. To what human experience(s) did David compare God's discipline?
9. We often say, "We are just sick about what happened." How can regret make a person feel sick?
10. According to Psalm 38:9, did David believe that God understood his regret? How would you define sincere repentance?
11. Besides his relationship with God, according to verse 11 who else was impacted by David's failure?
12. Can you remember a time when your behavior caused heartache for your family and friends? How did you work through the disappointment?

13. Not everyone was upset by David's failure. According to Psalm 38:12 &19, who was happy to see David at odds with God and his family?
  
14. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray for the grace to always be quick and ready to forgive family and friends who have offended you.

**Spend FIFTEEN – Day Three**

15. What was David's only hope of recovery from his failure in Psalm 38:15?
  
16. Read Psalm 130. What gave David reason to believe God would forgive his sin? (see verse 7)
  
17. What's the word that defines undeserved forgiveness?
  
18. Why should Christians have special confidence in God's willingness to extend forgiveness? See Philippians 3:8-9 for Paul's answer.
  
19. Do you find it easier to forgive others or forgive yourself? Explain.
  
20. How important is forgiveness? How would you describe the effects of guilt or shame on a person? What about bitterness over a past wrong? Again, how important is forgiveness?
  
21. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray for God to grant complete remission of your sin, including relief from any lasting guilt or shame.

**Spend FIFTEEN – Day Four**

22. There is an old saying, "If God seems far away, guess who moved?" What does that mean?
  
23. Read Psalm 38:21. Do you believe God distanced Himself from David or did David's sin (like Adam and Eve) cause him to keep his distance from God?
  
24. Read James 4:8-10. If God seems far away, what does the Bible say we should do about it?
  
25. How important is confession and absolution to you?

26. What sins should we confess to God? What sins should we confess to those we have offended? What sins should we confess to a spiritual mentor?
27. What can you do to create a safe place for a friend or fellow Christian to bring their burdens to your attention for prayer and help?
28. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray to be more gracious in both word and actions to those troubled by sin.

**Spend FIFTEEN – Day Five**

29. David said in Psalm 38:4 that his sin had “gone over his head.” What do you think he meant by that?
30. Have you ever been caught up in an addictive or chronic behavior that no matter how hard you tried you could not overcome? Explain.
31. Most twelve-step programs are designed to help people ‘over their head’ in a behavior they can no longer control. Have you ever heard the steps that have helped so many? If not, do a quick internet search for them. Why do you think that concept has proven so effective?
32. Read Matthew 18:15-20. Outline the steps explained in these verses to help a fellow Christian who has succumbed to sin.
33. Some have said the last step in church discipline is the removal of the sinner from the body of Christ. Is that the goal of church discipline? If not, what would you say is the last step?
34. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray to be useful in the hands of the Lord to help others restore their relationships with others and with the Lord. Pray also for your heart to be open to the care and keeping of others.

## **Week Five: *When Life Is Good?***

### ***Psalm 34***

#### **Spend FIFTEEN – Day One**

1. Of the 150 psalms, only 34 lack superscriptions of any kind. Psalm 34's subtitle indicates it was written by David after his escape from Saul and his subsequent escape from the Philistine king of Gath by feigning insanity. The historic context for each Psalm was added after the Psalms were written and compiled but is nevertheless ancient and existed several hundred years before the time of Christ. What value do you feel is added by the editorial notes?
2. Read the historic setting in 1 Samuel 21:10-15. What insight(s) does that story provide into the character and nature of King David?
3. We know of David's courage through the account of the time he faced and defeated the giant Goliath. What lesson can we learn from his actions in this account? (1 Samuel 17)
4. Bible students treasure the Psalms because they provide eloquent expression of David's feelings in both good and difficult times of life. What quality of the Psalms do you find most appealing?
5. Read Psalm 34. How does the historic context of the Psalm help explain the emotions of the author?
6. What verse jumped out as you read it? Have you heard it before? In what circumstance is that verse most applicable?
7. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray for a more accepting and less judgmental spirit when observing the behavior of Christian leaders.

#### **Spend FIFTEEN – Day Two**

8. Read Psalm 34:1. How does David begin this Psalm? Is that possible, even in difficult times? Do you share David's spirit, or are you more inclined to be confused by His apparent lack of faithfulness in difficulties?
9. Do you think it is easier to be faithful in difficult or good times? Explain the reason for your answer.
10. When people get married, they pledge to be faithful in good times and bad. Someone has said that hard times force you to dig deep and strengthen your bond of marriage. Do you agree?
11. Why do you suppose God doesn't always spare those He loves from the difficulties of life?

12. What is the inherent danger to a person's faith during good times?
13. Are you more or less inclined to be in worship, read the Bible or pray in times of blessing or times of struggle? Why?
14. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray to be more faithful in prayers of gratitude and thanksgiving.

**Spend FIFTEEN – Day Three**

15. Historically, it has been said that faith is for weak people who can't solve their own problems. In your experience, are the Christians you would consider strong in faith mainly people of strong dispositions?
16. Read Psalm 34:4. David admits to being fearful when facing a potentially life-threatening situation. Do you believe fear demonstrates lack of faith? If not, how is it a helpful emotion?
17. Is it a good or bad thing for a Christian leader to admit their own fears, doubts and struggles? Explain.
18. Read Psalm 34:7. The angel of the Lord is a common term found in the Old Testament but not the New Testament. Who is the angel of the Lord? Check your Bible's footnotes if it has them or Google the term. What is unique about this title?
19. Again, looking at Psalm 34:7, what kind of fear is David talking about? Is it a good thing to have a healthy "fear" of God?
20. Have you ever heard the phrase, "There is nothing left to do but pray"? What do people mean when they say that? What does it subtly suggest?
21. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray to be more transparent and vulnerable to others as you demonstrate your Christian walk in the sight and hearing of others.

**Spend FIFTEEN – Day Four**

22. Read Psalm 34:8. What does it mean?
23. Compare verse 8 of this Psalm to Malachi 3:10-12. Do you think God is actually inviting you to take faith for a test drive? Explain.

24. In Psalm 34:9, David states that those who fear the Lord lack nothing. We know that faithful Christians are not without trouble and sometimes lack all they need to provide for their families. What do you think David meant?
25. Read Psalm 34:13-17. What do those verses suggest regarding the Lord's favor? Whether you are a parent or a child, how important is it to know that in times of favor families stick together? Can hardship be a blessing in a person's life? How so?
26. Do you think it is better to be "delivered out of trouble," or to never experience trouble? Explain your answer. See verse 17.
27. Psalm 34:16 says that the memory of the godless is soon forgotten. Read Psalm 37:37-38. What is the difference David predicts between the godless and the godly? (The word "future" mentioned in that passage actually means posterity.)
28. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray that when people remember your legacy it would be one that honored God and helped others.

**Spend FIFTEEN – Day Five**

29. Do you sense the nearness of God when things are going well as strongly as in the midst of struggle? Explain.
30. Read Psalm 34:19. What is the relationship between faithfulness and hardship?
31. Do you think most people expect God to protect faithful Christians from hardships and setbacks despite the statement of verse 19? Is it human nature to question God's faithfulness or concern when Christians encounter difficulty?
32. Read Psalm 34:21. What is the cause of the death and destruction of the godless?
33. Read John 3:18-20. How would you describe the judgment that awaits the wicked? Would it be fair to say, "God allows the wicked to experience the consequence of their own choices" rather than say, "He punishes them for their errors"? What do you think?
34. In the last verse of Psalm 34, what does David say God will do? What price was paid for the soul of His servants? How does this make you feel?
35. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray to better understand why God allows His own to suffer hardship and then comes to their assistance in answer to prayer. Pray to be less critical and more trusting of God in hard times.

**Week Six: *When The Church Is Failing?***

***Psalm 74***

**Spend FIFTEEN – Day One**

1. Read Psalm 74. How would you describe the purpose of this prayer?
2. In regards to its structure, the psalm has two equal parts. The first 11 verses describe the problem, verse twelve is a declaration of faith, and then the last 11 verses are a plea for help. Do you think the author lacks faith in God's concern or ability to help?
3. According to the first verse, what does the author feel is the cause for the suffering of God's people?
4. Most believe this Psalm was written after the destruction of the temple and the exile of God's people to Babylon. Read Jeremiah 25:1-11. Why did God bring judgment on His people?
5. What happened at the end of seventy years? Read 1 Chronicles 36:20-23.
6. Why do you think God allowed the exile to last for seventy years?
7. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray to accept the discipline of God and to be able to discern the purpose of His judgment.

**Spend FIFTEEN – Day Two**

8. Before the exile, the chief sin of Israel was idolatry and the worship of false gods. After the exile, that was never again the primary failing of God's people. As best you can tell, what was Jesus' most common complaint against the religious leaders of His day? See Matthew 23 (Especially verses 1-7).
9. Have you ever heard of the terms "the visible church" and "the invisible church?" If not, try a quick Google search and describe the difference between the two concepts.
10. What's the difference between practicing religion and practicing the true Christian faith?
11. Read Hebrews 10:23-25. What's the value of Christians uniting in worship, fellowship and mission?

12. The Third Commandment is: “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy” (See Exodus 20:8-11). In your opinion, is it a sin not to worship? We know the law is established for our benefit and not our harm. Why does God place a high value on faithfulness in worship?
  
13. While there is much that can only be accomplished together, there are some aspects of worship that are intended to be done by each Christian in their day-to-day life. Read Romans 12:1 and describe what Paul meant by worship in that verse.
  
14. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray to be a blessing and not a hindrance to your congregation.

**Spend FIFTEEN – Day Three**

15. The fault of the church in Psalm 74 was the worship of foreign gods. Do you think Christians today place other things above the worship of God? Explain.
  
16. The Christian church in America is in trouble. 80% of all American churches are stagnant or in decline. 4,000 churches will close for good this year. There are 33% fewer churches in America than in 1950, and 3,500 people leave the church every day. What’s wrong?
  
17. Some say the American church has turned inward and lost its way, and it is more interested in keeping its members happy than in obedience to the mission of God. Do you agree or disagree?
  
18. Do you feel your congregation pays too much attention to the demands of its members, or do your Christian leaders challenge you to faithfulness to the Lord and service to others?
  
19. Read Amos 8:11-12. Do you think that prophecy applies to America today?
  
20. Read 2 Timothy 4:1-5. What did Paul predict would happen to churches in the last days? Is that the problem today?
  
21. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray a prayer of repentance for all the times you have complained that the church didn’t pay enough attention to your needs and priorities. Then ask God to help you to stay focused on the needs of others.

**Spend FIFTEEN – Day Four**

22. Read Psalm 74. Despite the fact that God was intentionally frustrating His people for their unfaithfulness, what reason did David, the author (Psalmist) of Psalm 74, have for asking God to come to their rescue?



23. What reason(s) can we implore for God's favor despite the modern day church's problems?
24. As a parent (or the child of a parent), have you ever made your children sit in "time out" as a result of misbehavior? What do parents hope to accomplish by that form of discipline?
25. Do you think God puts us in time out? If so, for what purpose?
26. Look again at Psalm 74:9. What aspect of faith did the Psalmist notice was lacking in life? Do you still expect God to perform miracles, or do you tend to believe God doesn't work that way today? Explain.
27. If you examine your prayer life, what type of prayer dominates your worship? (Thanksgiving, intercession, repentance, request for personal blessings, wisdom, good health?) Would you consider your prayer life balanced?
28. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray for a greater faith to believe and expect miracles in your life and in the life of the church.

**Spend FIFTEEN – Day Five**

29. Read Psalm 74:4-8 and verses 10 & 23. What reason does David (the Psalmist) give to request God restore His favor on His people?
30. What reasons does David give in verses 2 & 20?
31. Notice that David takes time to recall the power of God as demonstrated in creation and times past. See Psalm 74:3-17. Would you say that you often, seldom or occasionally notice the power of God demonstrated in the world He has made? What most often captures your attention?
32. Are you of the opinion that Christian churches of different denominations who differ on matters of doctrine should do more or less to encourage each other?
33. When you think of the word church, do you think of your local congregation or the Christian Church as a whole? What do you believe is the chief cause of division in the greater Christian church, and what should be done about it?
34. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray for greater unity in the body of Christ.

