

Growing Deeper

Next: Lean In, Step Up, Break Out

Week One – Why We Can't Stay Here

Joshua 13:1-7

Spend FIFTEEN – Day One

1. One of the key principles of Steve Covey's classic work, Seven Habits of Highly Effective People, was "begin with the end in mind." State three reasons why specific goals are important in any venture.
2. Do you believe setting personal goals is contrary to trusting the Lord to provide and living one day at a time? Explain the relationship between faith and personal responsibility.
3. Consider the advice in these two scriptures: Matthew 25:22-30 and James 4:13-17. How do you reconcile these two passages?
4. Read Joshua 13:1-7. Apart from the detail, what concept(s) are universal?
5. There are two types of changes we face in life: those required of us due to circumstances outside of our control and those we intentionally make to achieve new goals. Which of these two best describes your life?
6. What do these have in common?
7. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray for continued optimism in the face of challenges that require personal adjustment.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Two

8. Describe a time when you witnessed a transition in leadership in a business or organization. What lessons did you learn from that example?
9. Reread the story of how Joshua was chosen to lead Israel after the death of Moses in Joshua 1:1-9. Is the formula for success in life that God gave Joshua still valid today? Why are both qualities needed in a leader?
10. When Joshua was called to lead the nation, it had not yet crossed the Jordan or set foot in the promised land. By chapter 13, Joshua had fought and won many battles but the job was still unfinished. Each generation is part of a greater whole. What legacy have you received that you must pass on to the next generation? How can you best do that?

11. Read the dying words of David as he spoke to his son, Solomon, in 1 Kings 2:1-4. How are those words similar to the words of God spoke to Joshua in chapter 1? Has anyone shared their last words with you?
12. What would your last words be before dying if you had the opportunity to share with your loved ones?
13. Do you think older adults focus more on the past or the future? Explain.
14. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray to be strong and courageous and unwilling to turn to the right or left from what you know to be God's will for your life.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Three

15. Read Joshua 13:1. Getting old is not optional. From your observation, what are the keys to growing old gracefully?
16. Read Psalm 37:23-26. What life lesson(s) had David learned by growing older?
17. Name three things on your bucket list.
18. Before you die, what one or two things would you like to accomplish of a spiritual nature?
19. Have you written a will? Why or why not? Have you thought of leaving a letter to be attached to your will as a Christian witness to your family, perhaps even a brief message of faith that might be shared with your friends at a memorial service?
20. Who do you know that lived well and left an enduring legacy?
21. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray that in life and in death your confidence in God would always be seen by those within your sphere of influence.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Four

22. Read Joshua 13:1-7. God shows great concern for the ongoing work of Israel after the death of Joshua. Why is now the best time to make plans for how the priorities of your life will be honored and fulfilled after your death? What can you do to help make that possible?

23. Statistics show that the number one reason congregations stop growing and lose their purpose is turning inward. Give specifics. What are some symptoms of that behavior that you've observed?
24. Has your congregation turned inward or does it still exist to accomplish something greater than meeting the expectations and preferences of its members?
25. Congregations, like all human organizations, go through cycles. How would you describe the cycle your church is in at the moment?
26. In your opinion, are the leaders of your congregation urging forward movement or holding the congregation back for fear of criticism? Which would you prefer?
27. React to the statement, "The church is not the mission, it is established by God to accomplish the mission. The mission has always been and always will be to reach the lost and strengthen the saved to live bold and courageous lives of Christian witness."
28. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray for your congregation's Christian lay leaders and staff.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Five

29. Read Ecclesiastes 11:1-6. Summarize the advice of God in your own words.
30. What changes have you made to your home in the last 25 years? What does it say to your guests if you allow your home to become dated and worn?
31. Should churches also continue to make improvements in the Lord's house? Why or why not?
32. There has been a huge technical revolution in our lifetime. How has that changed the way you communicate? Should the church embrace new forms of communication without compromising the truth of God's word? Why or why not?
33. How should churches decide to organize their missions and adjust their appearances? Should these decisions be based on what pleases existing members, "because they pay for it anyway?" Or, should it be based on what best accomplishes the mission of reaching those not already connected to Jesus and the church?
34. On a scale of 1-10, how well is your church keeping pace with changes in the culture of your community? Explain your rating.

35. Finish your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray for peace and unity around the mission of your local congregation and all Christian churches.

Week Two - Pursue People Like Never Before

Luke 14:15-24

Spend FIFTEEN - Day One

1. When was a time that you actively pursued a goal or a relationship? What kinds of action and time and focus did that require?
2. Now read a parable about pursuing guests for a banquet, Luke 14:15-24. Why is Jesus telling this particular story to His listeners?
3. Parables are deceptive in their simplicity. It's often quite difficult to figure out which parts of a parable represent which things. For this parable: Who do you think the master of the banquet represents? Who do the first round of guests making excuses represent? Who are the second round of guests, the crippled and blind and the ones from the roads and lanes?
4. Are *you* represented by any of the figures in this parable?
5. What does the wedding banquet in the story represent in our lives?
6. What did you do to deserve your invitation to God's eternal feast in heaven?
7. Close your FIFTEEN in prayer, thanking God that He searched for you and found you to invite you to His wedding feast.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Two

8. Let's look again at the deceptively simple parable from yesterday. Re-read Luke 14:15-24. As a refresher, who does the master represent? Who do the different sets of guests represent?
9. What does this parable reveal about God's priorities?
10. How legitimate do you think the first guests' excuses were for skipping the party?
11. How might this same attitude affect believers today? What are ways that we decline God's invitations to us?
12. If this were a real-world story, we would likely pity or scorn a party host who is so desperate for guests that he

grabs ragamuffins and undesirables off the street. So, if the host represents God, in what ways do you agree or disagree with God's actions?

13. Is it accurate to say that God is foolish for being willing to reach, love and rescue people who want nothing to do with Him? What does that say about how we should act toward those who are not believers?
14. Finish your FIFTEEN by praying and asking God to give you some of his "foolish" love for people who don't love him.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Three

15. Jesus continues His teaching on God's pursuit of the lost with two more parables in Luke 15:1-10.
16. Again, it's always important to start with parables by identifying what the parts represent. Who is the shepherd? Who are the 99 sheep? Who does the lost sheep represent?
17. With which character/characters do you think you're supposed to identify?
18. In the coin parable, who does the woman represent? Who are the nine silver coins? Who is the one lost coin?
19. Again, which part of the story represents you?
20. Who is God's priority, the people who already know and love Him or the people who are lost? Why do you think this is?
21. End your FIFTEEN in prayer. Ask God to open your eyes to the lost coins and lost sheep who are all around you in this life.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Four

22. We've spent this week looking at three parables that show God's priority for pursuing the lost. What might it look like in practice for your church to show the same priority?
23. Read this quote from CFW Walther, the founder of the LCMS: "What an influence it will be on our dear congregations and their pastors and on their relationship toward one another if all acknowledge the saving of souls as the end and aim of our joint work! Whatever will win the most souls for Christ, that would decide between us."

How well would you say the LCMS follows this admonition? How well does St. John? How well do *you* do at treating the saving of souls as your top priority?

24. Read Luke 19:9-10. What does Jesus say is His mission statement? How well does this match Walther's mission for the LCMS?
25. What programs do you think a church should have if it's going to make seeking and saving the lost its top priority? What would its members need to commit to doing?
26. For help with this question, look back at Luke 19 and see what actions Jesus performed immediately before stating His mission. How was Jesus practically seeking the lost?
27. How might you practically seek the lost?
28. Close your FIFTEEN with prayer, asking for God to provide opportunities for you to form connections with lost people.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Five

29. Have you ever crossed paths with someone involved in a multi-level marketing program or a pyramid scheme? What was that experience like?
30. One negative of those programs is that salespeople feign interest in others for the sake of selling them something. They tell lots of stories of their own success, without truly caring about the story of those they're pursuing for financial gain. Look again at Luke 19:1-10. How was Jesus' approach different from that of a salesperson?
31. Pursuing the lost isn't about selling them our story; it's about loving them and then helping them see the connection between their story and God's story. Think of the unbelievers that are in your sphere of influence. How well do you know their stories?
32. What can you do to be more connected to their stories?
33. The best way to pursue the lost is to care as much about their individual stories as you do about your church programs. St. John offers lots of opportunities to connect with those stories, such as our Christ In Action committee, our partnership with Bryan Hill Elementary and our new initiative for a house church movement. Commit to learning more about the stories of those around you.

34. Close your FIFTEEN in prayer. Ask God to show you if any of these ministries are where He's calling you to serve in this season.

Week Three - Mobilize the Next Generation of World Changers

Deuteronomy 6:4-9

Spend FIFTEEN - Day One

1. Last week, we discovered God's priority for seeking and saving the lost. God also has a priority for how He wants His community of believers to act. Read Deuteronomy 6.
2. What significant event happened in the chapter directly before this one (Deuteronomy 5)?
3. With that context in mind, what is the main emphasis of God's instructions to His people in Deuteronomy 6? (For help answering this, look for the repeated phrase in verses 1, 2, 6, 17, 24, 25.)
4. What do you think this would look like for our community of believers today? What specific things should we be doing?
5. There also seems to be an important corollary to keeping God's commands, a secondary thing that we must do as well, in order to be faithful. What is it? (See verses 2, 7, 20)
6. Why do you think these two things are connected, in God's eyes?
7. End your FIFTEEN in prayer. Ask God to help you write his commands on your heart (v.6).

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Two

8. Deuteronomy 6 makes a connection between God's people following His commands and God's people making sure that the next generation (children and grandchildren) also know the commands. Let's explore more of why that might be in Judges 2:6-13.
9. How faithful were the people of God under the leadership of Joshua and his generation?
10. What went wrong? In other words, what problem led to the downfall of the next generation?
11. Think back on your own faith development. What started you on your path toward following God? Who had an impact by telling you who God is and what He has done?
12. How well are you able to tell the next generation about who God is and what He has done in your life (v.10)?

13. What opportunities have you had to talk to kids and grandkids (either your own or other people's)? Of what opportunities might you avail yourself?
14. Finish you FIFTEEN by thanking God for the people who made sure that you had the opportunity (either as a child or a new believer) to learn about Him and get to know Him.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Three

15. When did you come to faith? How old were you? What were the circumstances that led to you being a believer? How about your friends and family? For those who are believers, when did they come to faith?
16. If you have any friends and family who are adults now and do not believe in God, how would you rate the likelihood of their conversion?
17. An article at Christianity Today's website confirms that 85% of believers in American evangelical churches came to faith before the age of 18 (christianitytoday.com/pastors/2010/summer/outsidiersfindfaith.html). What implications does that have for the way Christians try to pass on their faith to those around them?
18. Barna, a Christian research group, has even more startling conclusions about this data: "Families, churches and parachurch ministries must recognize that the primary window of opportunity for effectively reaching people with the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection is during the pre-teen years. It is during those years that people develop their frames of reference for the remainder of their life – especially theologically and morally. Consistently explaining and modeling truth principles for young people is the most critical factor in their spiritual development." (barna.com/research/evangelism-is-most-effective-among-kids/) Now turn to Deuteronomy 6 and briefly skim the chapter. How does knowing about these studies change or highlight the way you read God's commands in this chapter?
19. The point of all this is not to ignore the need for adult evangelism and being a witness to a fallen world around us; it's simply recognizing that there is one area that provides significant return on investment when it comes to faith - investing in the spiritual growth of children and teens. In what ways is your church investing in the spiritual development of its children and the children of your community?
20. Pray and thank God for the work your church (and many, many volunteers!) does to minister to the children in your area.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Four

21. There is no question that young people are leaving the faith at unprecedented levels for American Christianity. (coldcasechristianity.com/2016/are-young-people-really-leaving-christianity/) If you had to conjecture, why do you think that is?

22. What could adult believers in the church do to reverse the trend?
23. Kara Powell, in her book Sticky Faith, has done a lot of research on why young people don't retain their faith. Startlingly (for those who have teenagers), the number one impact on a child keeping his or her faith is seeing faith modeled by their parents and talking about faith with their parents. (crosswalk.com/family/parenting/why-we-must-talk-about-faith-at-home.html) How does this match or conflict with your own experience with young people?
24. Sadly, according to research, fewer than 10% of Christian families actually have faith conversations together. Why do you think it's often so difficult for parents to talk about their faith with their children?
25. Sticky Faith says other adults have an impact, too. One of the top factors in a child keeping his or her faith, after his or her own parents was this: having other adults from church who were engaged in their lives! Whether you have kids of your own or not, what might be opportunities to invest in the faith lives of the children around you?
26. Read Proverbs 22:6. What is the benefit of starting children off early in their faith journey found in this passage?
27. Close your FIFTEEN in prayer. Pray for God to use you to influence your children and/or the children in your sphere of influence.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Five

28. We've spent a lot of time this week grappling with the importance of passing on the faith to the next generation of believers, generally in the context of our own families. But how might we be a blessing and encourager in faith of children who are not related to us?
29. The Bible makes what appears to be a very odd statement in James 1:27. Take a moment and read it. Then check out a slightly different verse: Jeremiah 22:16. What is the common theme of these two verses?
30. How do these verses differ on the results of taking care of orphans?
31. This quote has often been ridiculed by Christians, but in at least one sense, the Bible agrees with Secretary Hillary Clinton that it takes a village to raise a child. What point do these two verses make about the Christian community's responsibility toward all children?
32. Different people have different gifts. Some people aren't necessarily great with children. But there are a variety of ways to get involved with Children's Ministry at St. John. Check out the children's needs at stjstl.net/next-steps/serve/serve-at-st-john/. See if there is a way you can support the excellent way that St. John values all

children who come through our doors.

33. Close your final FIFTEEN this week in prayer. Ask God to help you to leave a legacy of faith to the next generation.