

Deeper In The Lord – An Invitation Into The Waters Of God

Rev. Mike Bradley

Key Points:

- Going deeper with God requires leaving the shore and stepping out of what is comfortable, just as Peter stepped out of the boat.
- Deeper waters require greater surrender, as described in **Romans 12:1-2**, where transformation comes from within rather than from outward conformity to the world.
- God often calls us away from comfort before revealing what is possible, as illustrated by the call to pastoral ministry in Montana.
- Every step toward God requires greater trust; as long as your feet touch the bottom, you remain in control.
- Deep water is where God carries us, and it is in that place that he addresses root issues such as shame and self-hatred rather than surface-level symptoms.
- Staying rooted in God, as depicted in **Psalms 1:2-3**, produces lasting fruit and prosperity in every season.
- Deep people become life-giving people; fruit is not produced by trying harder but by staying connected to God.
- Hearing God's voice clearly is the product of consistent, devoted time spent in his presence.

5-Day Bible Reading Plan and Devotional Guide

Going Deeper: A Journey Into the Heart of God

Day 1: The God Who Finds Us

Reading: Psalm 139:1-12 — A passage affirming that God knows us completely, sees us in our darkest moments, and is present even where we feel most alone.

Devotional: Before we ever reach for God, He has already reached for us. In our worst moments — in the dark rooms of shame, regret, and broken family — God is not distant. He is watching, waiting, and ready to speak. Just as a young man lying in the dark once whispered a desperate prayer without knowing theology or doctrine, God responded not with a lecture but with a blanket of peace. You do not need to have the right words. You do not need a polished history. You simply need to turn toward Him. The God who formed you is the God who pursues you.

Reflection: Think about a moment in your life when you felt completely alone. Looking back, where do you see evidence that God was present even then?

Practical Application: Set aside ten minutes today to sit in silence. Acknowledge one area of your life where you have been trying to manage things on your own. Speak it aloud to God and invite Him into that space.

Day 2: Leaving the Shore

Reading: Matthew 14:22-33 — The account of Peter stepping out of the boat onto the water at Jesus's invitation, and what happened when his focus shifted.

Devotional: Comfort is not the enemy of faith, but it is often its greatest competitor. Peter did not walk on water by staying in the boat. He walked on water by responding to a single word: come. God consistently calls ordinary people away from what feels manageable and into what feels impossible. The invitation is not to recklessness but to trust. Every step taken in response to God's voice — even a reluctant one, even one accompanied by fear — is a step that moves you from the shoreline into the deep. The impossible only becomes possible when you leave what is safe.

Reflection: What boat are you sitting in right now? What is the one step of obedience you have been hesitating to take?

Practical Application: Identify one area where God has been prompting you to move and you have been holding back. Write it down. Pray specifically over it today and ask God for the courage to take the next step, however small.

Day 3: The Transformation That Comes From Within

Reading: Romans 12:1-2 — Paul's call to present ourselves fully to God and to allow our minds to be renewed rather than shaped by the surrounding world.

Devotional: The world shapes us from the outside in. It tells us who we are through the voices of fathers, counselors, peers, and culture. But God transforms us from the inside out.

Conformity is passive — it happens when we stop resisting the current around us.

Transformation is active — it requires surrender, the daily decision to offer ourselves to God as a living sacrifice. Renewing the mind is not a one-time event. It is a continuous process of choosing God's perspective over the one we absorbed from our wounds and our world. Stinking thinking, as it has been called, does not leave without a fight.

Reflection: What false beliefs about yourself or God have been shaping the way you live? Where did those beliefs come from?

Practical Application: Choose one lie you have believed about yourself or about God. Find one Scripture that directly contradicts it. Write both down and read the Scripture aloud every morning this week.

Day 4: Staying in the River

Reading: Psalm 1:1-3 and Ezekiel 47:1-9 — One passage describing the fruitfulness of a person rooted near living water, and one describing a river flowing from God's presence that brings life wherever it goes.

Devotional: Fruit is not manufactured — it is grown. A tree does not strain to produce fruit; it simply stays rooted near the water. Ezekiel's vision of the river is a picture of what happens when we remain connected to the source of life. Ankle deep is real, but it is not the destination. Knee deep is progress, but there is still more. Waist deep means you are in it, but your feet still touch the ground. God is calling us into water deep enough to swim in — deep enough that we can no longer touch the bottom, deep enough that He alone holds us up. That is where fruit multiplies and healing flows.

Reflection: How would you honestly describe your current depth with God — ankle deep, knee deep, waist deep, or swimming? What has kept you from going further?

Practical Application: Add one new spiritual discipline to your week — whether extended prayer, fasting, Scripture meditation, or worship outside of Sunday morning. Commit to it for seven days and note what shifts in your awareness of God's presence.

Day 5: Deep Calls Unto Deep

Reading: Psalm 42:1-8 — A psalm of longing for God, written from a place of suffering and spiritual thirst, affirming that deep within us cries out for deep relationship with Him.

Devotional: The deepest experiences with God rarely happen in the comfortable seasons. They happen in the pews of small churches during hard pastoral years. They happen at youth retreats when a broken leader finally says yes to what God wants to break. They happen when we stop negotiating with God and simply surrender. Deep calls unto deep — meaning the depth of God's nature is calling out to the depth of your soul. He is not content to stay on the surface with you. He is not satisfied with a version of you that merely attends and participates. He wants all of you, and He is patient enough to keep calling until you answer.

Reflection: What would it mean for you personally to go one level deeper with God this season? What would you have to release in order to get there?

Practical Application: End this week by writing a short prayer of surrender. Be specific. Name what you are holding onto, name what you are afraid of, and then name what you are choosing to trust God with. Keep it somewhere visible as a daily reminder that you have chosen the deep end.

Deeper In The Lord - Scripture References from the Sermon

Explicitly Cited:

Ezekiel 47:1-12 - The primary text of the sermon, describing Ezekiel's vision of the river flowing from the temple, growing from ankle depth to a depth beyond crossing, bringing life wherever it flows.

Matthew 14:28-31 - The account of Peter stepping out of the boat to walk on water toward Jesus, used to illustrate the call to leave comfort and step into the unknown.

Romans 12:1-2 - Paul's call to present oneself as a living sacrifice and to be transformed by the renewing of the mind rather than conformed to the world.

Psalms 1:2-3 - The description of the person who meditates on God's law being like a tree planted by rivers of water, bearing fruit and prospering.

Alluded To or Implied:

Psalm 42:7 - "Deep calls unto deep" — directly quoted by the pastor near the close of the sermon.

John 15:4-5 - The principle that fruit comes from remaining connected to the vine, reflected in the statement "You don't produce fruit by trying harder. You bear fruit by staying connected."

James 4:8 - The call to draw near to God, reflected throughout the sermon's invitation to pursue deeper relationship with Him.

Personal and Small Group Study Guide: Deeper In The Lord - Rev. Mike Bradley

Overview

Rev. Mike shared his personal story of coming to faith and used **Ezekiel 47:1-12** as a foundation to explore what it means to go deeper in our walk with God. Just as Ezekiel was led step by step into increasingly deeper waters, God calls each of us further from the shore of comfort and into a transforming relationship with him.

Key Scriptures

- **Ezekiel 47:1-12** -- A vision of a river flowing from the temple, growing deeper and bringing life wherever it flows.
- **Matthew 14:28-31** -- Peter steps out of the boat toward Jesus on the water.
- **Romans 12:1-2** -- Paul urges believers to offer themselves as living sacrifices and be transformed by the renewing of their minds.

- **Psalm 1:2-3** -- The person who meditates on God's word is like a tree planted by rivers of water, bearing fruit in every season.
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Key Takeaways

1. **Going deeper requires leaving the shore.** God often calls us away from what is comfortable before he reveals what is possible. Staying in the boat feels safe, but it limits what God can do in and through us.
 2. **Going deeper requires greater surrender. Romans 12:1-2** reminds us that transformation is an internal work. The world shapes us from the outside in, but God transforms us from the inside out. Surrendering our plans, our comfort, and even our self-perception is part of the process.
 3. **Deep water is where God carries us.** As long as our feet touch the bottom, we are still in control. God invites us into the kind of depth where we must rely entirely on him.
 4. **Staying in the river produces life. Psalm 1 and Ezekiel 47** both point to the same truth: those who remain connected to God bear fruit, experience healing, and become life-giving to others. We do not produce fruit by trying harder; we bear fruit by staying connected.
 5. **God knows how to speak to each of us personally.** Rev. Mike's stories -- from the grilled steak vision to the woman healed of shame -- illustrate that intimacy with God is specific, personal, and often surprising.
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Discussion Questions

Opening

1. Rev. Mike described his spiritual journey as starting from a place of deep hurt and self-reliance. How has your own background shaped the way you initially approached God -- or kept you from him?
 2. Where would you honestly say you are in the river right now -- standing on the bank, ankle deep, knee deep, waist deep, or swimming in waters too deep to stand?
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Digging Deeper

3. Rev. Mike said, "God often calls us away from what is comfortable before he reveals what is possible." Can you think of a time when God pulled you out of a comfortable situation to do something you did not expect? What happened?
 4. **Romans 12:1-2** draws a contrast between being conformed by outside influences and being transformed from within. In what areas of your thinking do you still notice the world's influence shaping you more than God's word?
 5. Rev. Mike described a season of comparing himself to coworkers who seemed happy without God, and he told God, "If this is it, I'm done." Have you ever hit a wall like that in your faith? What brought you through it?
 6. When the Holy Spirit told Rev. Mike he had been functioning in self-hatred rather than humility, it led to a moment of deep freedom. Is there a false belief about yourself that might be keeping you in shallow water with God?
 7. Rev. Mike said, "As long as your feet touch the bottom, you are still in control." What does it look like practically to let go of control in your relationship with God?
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Personal Reflection

8. Rev. Mike described spending extended time alone with God in the church sanctuary as the foundation of his ministry. What does your current rhythm of time with God look like? Is it producing the kind of depth you want?
 9. Ezekiel 47 shows that wherever the river flowed, life appeared. Who in your life might be impacted if you went one step deeper in your walk with God?
 10. Rev. Mike closed by asking: "What is keeping you in shallow waters?" Take a moment to answer that question honestly. What is one step you could take this week toward greater depth?
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Practical Applications

This week, choose one of the following:

- **Set aside intentional time.** Block out at least one period this week -- even 20 to 30 minutes -- to be still before God with no agenda other than to listen and be with him. No phone, no list, just presence.
 - **Identify your shore.** Write down one thing that is keeping you comfortable and spiritually stagnant. Bring it before God and ask him what he wants to do with it.
 - **Renew your mind in one specific area.** Using **Romans 12:2** as a guide, identify one pattern of thinking that reflects the world's influence rather than God's truth. Find a verse that speaks to that area and meditate on it throughout the week.
 - **Take one step of surrender.** Is there a plan, a fear, or a habit you have been holding onto? This week, offer it to God as an act of worship and trust.
 - **Share your story.** Rev. Mike opened by saying the Lord told him, "I want you to tell them your story." Consider sharing a part of your own story -- with someone in the group, a friend, or a family member -- about what God has done in your life.
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Closing Prayer Focus

As you close your group time, pray together using these themes drawn from Rev. Mike's closing prayer:

- Ask God to reveal any "stinking thinking" that is holding group members back from going deeper.
 - Invite the Holy Spirit to direct each person further into the river this week.
 - Thank God for his goodness, peace, love, and kindness.
 - Ask for specific opportunities this week to experience him in a deeper way.
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"Deep calls unto deep." -- Psalm 42:7