

MARCH 4, 2018

40 DAYS OF FAITH

DESPAIR-FREE LIFE



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Monday, March 5

This week we're looking at how we can develop a "Despair-Free" life. In fact, we're encouraging you to "Fast from feeling helpless". Traditionally in the season of Lent people will give up items in order to press into God. We can fast from sweets, meat, alcohol, TV, etc. These are all good options but what would it look like for us to give up despair and helplessness this week?

Here's the passage from the Sermon on the Mount that we're zeroing in on:

Matthew 7: 7-12

Jesus said, "Ask and keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Seek and keep on seeking, and you will find. Knock and keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.

"You parents—if your children ask for a loaf of bread, do you give them a stone instead? Or if they ask for a fish, do you give them a snake? Of course not! So if you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good gifts to those who ask him.

"Do to others whatever you would like them to do to you. This is the essence of all that is taught in the law and the prophets." ([You can read the Sermon on the Mount in its entirety here.](#))

In the passage Jesus describes a spiritual tenacity and focus. He encourages us to ask, seek and knock without giving up, trusting that God is a good parent who will give us good gifts. These qualities are the opposite of despair and hopelessness.

Journal

We encourage you keep a journal this week as you process each day. Please take a moment to jot down your thoughts about the following questions:

How would I rate my own perseverance? How quick am I to give up?

Am I someone who can hang in there even when things look bleak or do I need to develop those “muscles”?

How quick am I to get frustrated when prayers don't seem to get answered?

How do I express that frustration?

Is there a particular area in my life where it's tough to stay hopeful?

Take a moment right now and talk with God about it.

Tuesday, March 6

As part of 40 Days of Faith, we have encouraged you to pursue the “Big Ask” - to seek God for something you need or want, maybe even a miracle. What is it that you’re asking of God this season? With your “Big Ask” in mind, re-read this section of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount:

Matthew 7: 7-12

“Ask and keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Seek and keep on seeking, and you will find. Knock and keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.”

“You parents—if your children ask for a loaf of bread, do you give them a stone instead? Or if they ask for a fish, do you give them a snake? Of course not! So if you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good gifts to those who ask him.”

“Do to others whatever you would like them to do to you. This is the essence of all that is taught in the law and the prophets.”

When Jesus compares God to a loving parent, he’s encouraging us to consider how we see God. This is crucially important if we are to live a despair-free life. Sometimes it’s not until we really need something from God that we think deeply about how we truly perceive God.

Journal

How easy is it for me to believe God is a good and loving parent to me even when I’m in pain, when life doesn’t feel good or a prayer remains unanswered?

Do I still trust that God is good? Do I believe that God will help me, even though I may not have seen any results yet?

Would I be able trust that God is good, even if I don’t get the thing I’m asking for?

What will it take for me to BOTH pray my heart for my out for my “big ask” AND hold it lightly?

Wednesday, March 7

In order for us to live a despair-free life and to “fast from feeling helpless”, we need to cultivate a sense of ‘agency’. Agency is this word we use to capture the sense that we have power, we can do something about our problems, we have some say in how our lives will go. Even more than the problems, it’s the lack of Agency that can lead to despair — a feeling, I can’t do anything about my situation.

Ironically, if we’re not careful in the way we approach faith, it can actually rob our sense of agency. If we believe that God is absolute control of every detail of life and that our actions don’t matter, it can lead to shutting down, withdrawing, and living a shrinking life.

A life of faith is a delightful balance between God’s activity and our own effort. Sometimes it seems that God breaks through in our lives in a way that seems unrelated to anything we’ve done — and then other times God seems to energize and bless the energy and effort WE put out and we see positive results.

Journal

Time to think big and practice dreaming a bit. If you could do anything with your life, what would it be? Try to brainstorm.

What would you most like to do with the remainder of your life?

What would the next 10 years look like for you?

What would you accomplish?

How would you grow?

Be specific. Offer these thoughts to God and see if he has anything to say about your dreams.

Thursday, March 8

Today let's read this passage from Matthew 7:7-12 from The Message paraphrase.

"Don't bargain with God. Be direct. Ask for what you need. This isn't a cat-and-mouse, hide-and-seek game we're in. If your child asks for bread, do you trick him with sawdust? If he asks for fish, do you scare him with a live snake on his plate? As bad as you are, you wouldn't think of such a thing. You're at least decent to your own children. So don't you think the God who conceived you in love will be even better? Here is a simple, rule-of-thumb guide for behavior: Ask yourself what you want people to do for you, then grab the initiative and do it for them. Add up God's Law and Prophets and this is what you get."

Journal

Yesterday, we wrote down of our big ideas, our dreams. We brainstormed about what we'd like to see happen in our life. Today let's look at the areas that aren't going the way we'd hoped. Have there been times in your life where you felt helpless? Are there areas where I've given up? What are the areas of your where you feel like you don't have much power over? Take a moment to invite God into those specific areas.

Now try to brainstorm a bit: You may not be able to accomplish all you want in these areas, but what CAN you do? Write it down.

It may not feel like you have many options open to you, but you have SOME. What are they? Write them down.

There may be areas of your life where you don't feel like you have much power over. But you have at least a little. What is it? Write it down.

You may not feel like you can do much but what ARE you capable of? Write it down.

Friday, March 9

To finish the week, let's read this section of the Sermon on the Mount one final time. But this time, let's imagine that Jesus is speaking directly and personally to us.

Matthew 7: 7-12

"Ask and keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Seek and keep on seeking, and you will find. Knock and keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you. For when you ask, you receive. When you seek, you will find. And if you knock, the door will be opened to you.

"Consider what parents are like—if a child asks for a loaf of bread, do they give them a stone instead? Or if a child asks for a fish, do they give them a snake? Of course not! So if a loving human parent gives good gifts to their children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good gifts to you.

"So do to others whatever you would like them to do to you. This is the essence of all that is taught in the law and the prophets."

[\(You can read the Sermon on the Mount in its entirety here.\)](#)

Journal

How has your "despair-free" week been going?

How is your "fast from helplessness"?

Are there areas of life where you feel more hopeful? Less hopeful?

What's on your mind today?

What is your most pressing concern?

What would you like to say to God?

Write it down.