

river

40 DAYS OF FAITH

DAILY GUIDE 2018

Spin-Free Life | Judgement-Free Life | Despair-Free Life
Status-Free Life | Exclusion-Free Life | Anxiety-Free Life

FEB 18, 2018

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SPIN-FREE LIFE



river

Monday, February 19 - Let's Begin!

An Overview: The season of Lent (the 6 weeks before Easter) is historically a time in which followers of Jesus engage in spiritual disciplines like fasting, prayer and a renewed attention to the Bible. At the River, we use this season to lean into experiencing God's goodness with spiritual power. We call it "40 Days of Faith."

We encourage you to ask God for one thing in your life that you cannot do for yourself. Over the years, we have seen many powerful God stories. But of course, there is no guarantee; miracles are by nature a "long shot." We still encourage you to push into God for your 'Big Ask,' because it has spiritual benefits regardless of outcome.

Spiritual growth is the main goal of this season, and we're focusing on the theme of "New Creation." In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus presents a compelling vision of a new type of human being who is free from the walls and alienations that get in the way of fullness of life. Jesus specifically mentions the following:

'Spin Free'

'Judgment Free'

'Despair Free'

'Status Free'

'Exclusion Free.'

'Anxiety Free'

Doesn't this sound refreshing? Sermon on the Mount is unlike any other moral or ethical system. It's a roadmap to coming alive fully by getting free from alienating walls like spin and anxiety. St. Irenaeus said, "A human being fully alive is the glory of God." So, the theme for week 1 is growing in 'Spin Free' life.. Theme for week 2 is 'Judgment Free life' and so on.

Usually, the daily guide will contain a scripture passage about the theme of the week (Judgment free life for week 2, etc.). But for week 1, the Daily Guide will introduce you to the important components of the whole faith experiment so that you can ramp into this season. It's a 'User's Manual' for this season. For example, Day 1 (today) will give you an overview. Day 2 will focus on 'Spin Free.' Day 3 will focus on 'Big Ask' and so on. This is only for week 1. Starting with week 2, the Daily Guide will focus on the theme of the week.

So, are you game for this faith experiment?

How it Works:

Please carve out a little time each day, Monday through Friday, to follow along with this Daily Guide. We'll provide lots of thoughts and suggestions to try. Every weekday, you can find the Daily Guide on our River app or our website. There will be daily reflections and suggestions to consider. Using the Daily Guide is the best way to engage with the 40 Days of Faith. And if you miss a few, don't worry; just pick up where you can. Week 2-6 will present short Bible passages, ideas to consider, and suggestions for action and prayer around the theme of the week.

Here's our first suggestion:

Make a decision today to engage with this faith experiment as much as you are able during this season. Try to come to all seven Sunday services. Pray daily. Use the daily guide. Fast each week on the focus of the week (spin, judgment, ego, despair, division, anxiety). Try a small group. All our life-groups are listed on our website: www.rivernyc.org.

I'm excited for our faith experiment, 40 Days of Faith, 2018!

Tuesday, February 20 — Fasting from ‘Spin’ this week.

Fasting has been a central element of Lent for many people over the centuries. You might have noticed that when people really wanted something from God in the Bible, they almost always fasted. It’s important to note that fasting does NOT make you more holy and acceptable before God. That’s not the point. So.

What does fasting do?

Fasting tells God and our own spirits that we really are desperate for God to meet some need or hope that we have. It is not some magic trick. But if we’re hoping for God to move in profound areas of our life, so why not fast? It’s a time-honored way of communicating to God that we are seriously pursuing Him. Though fasting is, by definition, hard, it’s actually meant to be a joyous opportunity. Suddenly we’re really serious about something with God; we’re really expecting him to come through; we aren’t just playing around. That can often be exhilarating!

What are options for fasting?

Most common options are food items. But, we can fast from anything really. Specifically, for this year, we want you to fast and pray for growth in each of the six themes: spin free, judgment free, despair free, status free, division free, and anxiety free life. In other words, fast from spin this week, and next week, fast from judgment and so on.

So this week, take practical steps to live ‘Spin Free.’ We live in a world that seems to be built on spin. A well-known quote says “Image is everything.” But, ‘spin’ generates masks that get in the way of genuine connections.

Jesus said, ‘let your yes be yes, and no be no.’ So, whenever you feel tempted to put on a ‘spin’ this week, try to do the opposite this week. This can include Social Media posts that make us look good (or bad). Stay away from consuming anything that you know to be full of ‘spin.’ Social Media, news channels, partisan websites, fast from anything that brings you towards ‘spin.’ This week, go deep into your soul to identify the places where you like to put on a ‘mask.’ They can get in the way of genuine connections.

This doesn’t mean you become ‘unfiltered.’ Don’t be rude; don’t say whatever pops into your head. Rather, try to live by your values this week inside and out in whatever situation you find yourself. In other words, live by your values, not by appearances.

Finally, you can choose to add other items for fasting. Most common choices are to give up some beloved food item for a time (desserts or sugar or caffeine or alcohol being popular favorites). But, others have chosen such things as ‘taking a taxi,’ ‘watching TV,’ etc. This is NOT to score

brownie points with God.

Rather, the point of fasting is that, we're communicating our intense desire to grow in our connection with God. For spiritual growth like getting free of spin so we can live by our values.

So, what are some of the steps you can take to fast from 'Spin' this week, (for example, fast from Facebook this week, etc.)? Take a moment to write them down.

Are there other items you'd like to fast from this season?

Last Sunday's sermon included the suggestion of exploring your deepest values and living by those values.

What are the values you would like to live by?

What would it take for you to align your life closer to these values?

May God bless you to live more by values than appearances!

Wednesday, February 21 - The Big Ask

One of the features of the River's 40 Days of Faith that people have enjoyed is what we might call "The Big Ask".

The Bible encourages us to ask God for our needs.

"You do not have, because you do not ask." James 4:2

"I will rejoice in doing them good and will assuredly plant them in this land with all my heart and soul." Jeremiah 31:42

Now, of course, the risk of praying every day for something you actually want is that you may not get it and then you'll be disappointed. And you could end up wondering, "Why expend all that energy and faith only to be let down?!" And you have every right to wonder. Miracles are by definition a long shot. So, the expectation is that our prayers won't get answered the way we want.

But, many prayers DO get answered, way more than the probabilities suggest. Second, whether our prayers get answered or not, our connection with God can get strengthened. Deeper heart-level spiritual growth can be accomplished, if approached in the right way. So, we ask everyone to pray with all their hearts, but at the same time hold it loosely, trusting in God to do what's good for us.

This means we need to relax, be open minded, and show a lot of grace to ourselves and each other.

What do you want Jesus to do for you?

We all have needs, but sometimes we can feel funny about asking God for favors. Some theologians feel that God doesn't change anything in response to prayer, because God is all-knowing and all-powerful. "We pray not to change God, but to change ourselves." This is a profoundly deep thought, full of reverence towards God. However, the Bible also declares God gives good gifts to those who 'ask and keep on asking.' God responds to prayer.

So, we don't claim that all prayers will be answered as if God were 'a prayer answering vending machine.' At the same time, we have seen so many answered prayers, we want you to keep an open mind. During this season of Lent, why not pick one personal 'Big Ask' and 'keep on asking God' about it as spiritual discipline for the season?

Let me list a couple of stories from people who tried this in the past.

I have been actively looking for job opportunities in New York for the past 2 years and nothing had worked out. For this 40 days of faith one of the things I was praying for was a job and a firm

that would be willing to petition for my visa. This past week I got a job offer with a firm I am excited to work for AND they will be applying for my work visa. This is something I couldn't have done on my own. I had an amazing community of friends & family praying with me, and that has encouraged me tirelessly. It's "our Big Ask." God has been good to me.

This year, my 40 Days prayer was for greater joy and happiness. I have been blessed with a wonderful life, but often struggled to enjoy it. Now though, I feel happier than I ever have. Among many of the reasons for this change is a complete transformation of my dream life. I used to have pretty horrible nightmares every couple of weeks that would really mess up my thoughts for days afterwards. During these 40 Days, I've been able to wake myself up before dreams turn terrible. What is more, I've also started to have dreams that are filled with God's presence. It has made such a difference!

Aren't they great stories? Why not give it a try?

So, what do you want Jesus to do for you during these 40 Days?

Take a moment and write it down here:

Congratulations! You've crystallized in your heart and on paper both what you want God to do for you during this season.

- **Ask God for these things every day during the 40 Days.**
- **Tell someone else what you wrote down and ask them to pray for you about those things too.**

Our Life Groups provide a great place for this. Your chances of seeing something happen go way up when someone else is praying too. This makes sense if the ultimate goal is more connection, that we do this in community.

Thursday, Feb. 21 – Stay Connected

A key part of the 40 Days of Faith experience is to gather with others who are giving it a go! Jesus said He would be present when we gather. If God is love, faith cannot be pursued alone. In fact, church community is described in the Bible as the key component to everything God is trying to accomplish in history.

Moreover, church is the place where we can experience the empowerment of the Living God.

Ephesians 2:19-22 (New Living Translation)

¹⁹So now you Gentiles are no longer strangers and foreigners. You are citizens along with all of God's holy people. You are members of God's family. ²⁰Together, we are his house, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. And the cornerstone is Christ Jesus himself. ²¹We are carefully joined together in him, becoming a holy temple for the Lord. ²²Through him you Gentiles are also being made part of this dwelling where God lives by his Spirit.

This is an amazing passage that declares that even Gentiles (unbelieving, secular world) have been invited to be part of 'God's house.' In the old days, the Temple was the holy ground where the veil separating the presence of God from the world gets thin. Holy of Holies was a place where God's presence could come through so powerfully, a place where the veil got so thin; it was in fact, dangerous. Only one person, chief priest could go in there, and only once a year. But now, that curtain is torn. That is what the Cross has accomplished. So now, the Church has become the temple of God. Church is where the veil gets 'thin.' Church is the 'hole' through which the spiritual dimension flows into our mundane life.

The season of Lent is dedicated to pushing into the reality of God's presence, and the church community is the best place to experience the 'shine of the Kingdom of God' flowing into this world.

So, try to come to all seven Sunday services. Not only will you get helpful sermons about how to become free of the walls that rob us of life, you will have the best chance of experiencing the 'luminous fire of the presence of God' as we gather together.

We also encourage you to check out our weekly life groups. All Life Groups will be participating in "40 Days of Faith" together. If you're not in a small group, can I encourage you to join one, if only for the 40 Days? Your experience will be significantly richer if you do. All our life-groups are listed on our website: <http://www.rivernyc.org>.

Please consider a moment to think through different ways you can stay connected (Weekly groups? Lunch after church? Volunteer more?)

Jesus said, I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Matthew 16:18

Please pray for our church as we seek to be the 'hole' through which the powers of heaven to love and connect can flow into t his world!

Friday, Feb. 22 — Pray for our #Riverlution Campaign

Yesterday, we talked about our church community. We are at a critical time as church community. We're launching the outreach campaign called '#Riverlution' to get our city to become more aware of our church: a fully inclusive church that is full of vibrant faith in the living God. Even though many churches are known for putting up walls rather than breaking them down, that does not represent God's heart. As the Bible declares, 'There is now neither Jew nor Gentile, Free or Slave, Male or Female in Christ Jesus for you are all one in Christ.' Galatians 3:28. We are dedicated to following the historic movement of God to break down every alienating wall. The following describes our church well.

1 - The River is a diverse, open and inclusive church in the heart of downtown Manhattan.

(Our community) Revelations 7:9, Acts 2

2 - The River believes God is love and Jesus is good news to everyone, everywhere at all times!

(Our view of who God is) 1 John 4:8, Mark 1:15

3 - The River believes God is moving the church forward!

(Our view of God's movement in human history) Galatians 3:28, Ephesians 2:14

- We place no limitations on women in leadership.
- We fully welcome & affirm LGBTQ persons.
- We embrace science and scholarship.
- We avoid political partisanship.

4 - The River aims to create safe space where we can have actual experiences of the living God.

(Our practice) 1 Corinthians 4:20, Jeremiah 31:34

5 - The River is casual and lively!

(Our feel) Matthew 15:18, 1 Samuel 16:7

We believe in our church! Especially today when church is known more for divisions, judgments, and alienation, a church like ours is rare. Where else can you find such a community where you can develop non-transactional relationships across diverse groups of people?

Please pray that God would grow our church, so that more and more people can witness the move of God to break down walls through His church.

In addition to praying, there are also practical things we can all do to help our church grow and move forward:

- We can share the video clips of The River stories on our social media.
Find them at www.rivernyc.org/people-of-the-river.html
- We can invite our friends and family
- We can volunteer on a Sunday team
- We can give financially to the campaign.

Please consider what ways you can help build up our church. It can become part of purpose and meaning to our life.

Finally, on every Friday, we'd like you to take some time to reflect on how the week went. Find some place quiet and write down how you think it went with 'spin' this week. Were there times when you put on 'masks?' Were there times when you recognized that 'spin' was in your life (from outside or internally)?

Ask God to speak to you about these moments and how you can be free from 'spin' in constructive ways to enjoy more of life in all it's fullness Jesus came to give.