

MARCH 11, 2018

40 DAYS OF FAITH

STATUS-FREE LIFE



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Monday, March 12

Welcome to the third week of our 40 Days of Faith study guide!

Over the next few days, we'll be looking at our desire for status – and how that can lead us to pursue goals that might not be good for us or other people. But we won't just be examining the pitfalls. As we look at passages on status from the Sermon on the Mount, our cornerstone for this year's 40 Days of Faith, God will reveal exciting, deeper and much more nourishing ways of living.

We ought to start out by recognizing that status is not a bad thing. It's okay to work hard to obtain a good position at work, or to do something that happens to earn the praise and respect of others. The problems begin when we want a title just sake of it, or for the power and spoils it brings. The same applies to having the respect of others. If it is earned incidentally, quietly accept it. But if we do something good primarily to gain praise, our beneficial acts lack authenticity and may soon peter out.

So, let's get started by looking at our passage for Monday. Here is Jesus warning about status-love.

Matthew 6: 1-2 *“Watch out! Don't do your good deeds publicly, to be admired by others, for you will lose the reward from your Father in heaven. When you give to someone in need, don't do as the hypocrites do—blowing trumpets in the synagogues and streets to call attention to their acts of charity! I tell you the truth, they have received all the reward they will ever get.”*

Comments on the passage: Jesus's meaning is strikingly clear. There is also a seriousness about his words. This is communicated by the warning that we may lose our rewards. Don't take that as a sign God is waiting to snatch away good things if we are sometimes vain. Instead, think about it affirming our belief that a good God is always good. Good things done for shallow or selfish reasons simply can't gain traction with our Father in heaven. Jesus also underscores the importance of our social networks – we are social animals and we have found out that we can advance by doing good things.

Each day this week, we are going to supply three questions to think, journal and pray about.

1/ In my work, how much do I look forward to the praise and recognition of others?

2/ Am I or was I deprived in some way that might make me seek attention?

3/ Does using social media make me happy or more insecure?

Tuesday, March 13

Here's our passage for today. Jesus continues on from what we looked at yesterday.

Matthew 6:5-6 *"When you pray, don't be like the hypocrites who love to pray publicly on street corners and in the synagogues where everyone can see them. I tell you the truth, that is all the reward they will ever get. But when you pray, go away by yourself, shut the door behind you, and pray to your Father in private. Then your Father, who sees everything, will reward you."*

Comments on the passage: At the end of this passage, Jesus has an attractive and practical suggestion for us. We can spend quality time with God, asking for things and hearing him speak. Peace will grow from the quiet. Our bond will deepen as communication deepens. Then Jesus throws in a reminder that can send shivers down our backs – our Father sees everything. He's with us and takes interest in us. That is a sign of His love. Why do we need to be seen by others if we know God never stops seeing us?

The 3 questions:

- 1/ Do I get enough alone time with God?
- 2/ Does talking to God make me feel less nervous?
- 3/ What is the longest period I can go without looking at my phone?

Wednesday, March 14

Here's our passage for today:

Matthew 6:7-8 *"When you pray, don't babble on and on as the Gentiles do. They think their prayers are answered merely by repeating their words again and again. Don't be like them, for your Father knows exactly what you need even before you ask him!"*

Comments on the passage: We babble when we think people aren't hearing what we have to say. But God does notice us. Indeed, Jesus says our Father knows exactly what we need before we ask him. That's a profound invitation. Jesus is indicating that our needs are just one part of what we can talk about with God when we pray. He wants to discuss those and so much more. It's as if a favorite aunt invites us over to her house, where she feeds us well and makes sure we are warm and cozy – and, once we are relaxed, she sits down with us and asks us how we are really doing. God looks forward to that conversation.

The 3 questions:

- 1/ What deep concern would I like to discuss with God today?
- 2/ When do I babble and why?
- 3/ To whom can I send a thank-you note today?

Thursday, March 15

We take a diversion from the Sermon on the Mount today as we keep looking at how to not live for status. You'll see why.

Genesis 2:15 *"The Lord God placed the man in the Garden of Eden to tend and watch over it."*

Comments on the passage: Our jobs are not easy. For all we put into them, we need to get something in return, something more than the money we earn. Often, that extra payoff is derived from the power or attention we get from holding a position or mastering a task. That can make us feel better about ourselves. But the thrill can pass quickly, and the thirst for recognition, if we are honest about, causes us to see the world in a narrow, self-seeking way. Our line from Genesis points to a way forward. It promises an aspect of paradise in our work. It is a reminder of the joy that can come from simply doing daily tasks well. If we access that joy in our jobs, we will still do well, and avoid the exhausting quest for attention.

The 3 questions:

- 1/ Do I get significant contentment just by doing my core tasks well?
- 2/ Could I work more slowly and still get everything done?
- 3/ Am I excited about any upcoming vacations?

Friday, March 16

Here's our passage for today. This is not from the Sermon on the Mount, but it echoes it.

James 3: 16-17: *“For wherever there is jealousy and selfish ambition, there you will find disorder and evil of every kind. But the wisdom from above is first of all pure. It is also peace loving, gentle at all times, and willing to yield to others. It is full of mercy and the fruit of good deeds. It shows no favoritism and is always sincere.”*

Comments on the passage: This is a good passage to end our look at how to avoid the status trap that Jesus vividly describes in the Sermon on the Mount. James lists qualities that can neutralize and dissolve selfish ambition, characteristics like peacefulness, gentleness, mercy, sincerity and a willingness to yield to others. Often, the presence of good things provides is enough to persuade us of the folly of going after something like status or social standing. God will happily cultivate such qualities in our lives.

The 3 questions:

1/ Am I gentle in my work relationships?

2/ What do I feel when I read James telling us to be willing to yield to others?

3/ Have I seen someone who is ambitious, but not selfishly ambitious, do well at my work?