

LEAP OF FAITH

a 40-day prayer experiment for Lent

from  brown line vineyard



user's manual 2014:

Cross your moat

to more excitement & more God

We're excited!

We're excited to launch our Leap of Faith prayer experiment to mark the historic church season of Lent - the 40 days between Ash Wednesday and Easter Sunday (not counting Sundays). You're probably wondering: why all the excitement?

Well, the rhythm of setting aside the 40 days of Lent every year is a way to remind us to recall and re-engage the power of God shown in Jesus' death and resurrection. If the death of this Jesus of Nazareth really, truly did accomplish what he claimed, and if he really, truly was raised and is alive - available in a spiritual sense even today to any who seeks to pray to him or follow his model - then we're talking about some significant power! That potential for power is why we're excited.

What's the goal for Leap of Faith?

The goal for Leap of Faith is that all of us risk whatever necessary to put ourselves in position to tangibly experience God's power. We want to be able to tell amazing stories of an active Living God.

A chat with one of you recently comes to mind. We had a couple from out of town as guests at one of BLV's Sunday services. They had reached a point of real discouragement as they'd been trying to get pregnant for a long while to no avail. They were prayed for during our service, and it was an emotional yet really encouraging experience in the moment; but more than that, about a month later, we heard from them that they were expecting!

Or there's an experience one of you told us about having on BLV's winter retreat. This person had recently felt in prayer an encouragement to take a major (seemingly foolish) financial risk, as God was promising provision beyond what could ordinarily be pulled off. Unsure about the riskiness, this person set the last night of the retreat as God's cut-off to back up his promise in some tangible way. With the night having come and then almost over, it seemed best to ask for prayer one last time that God would make himself clear. And a remarkable thing happened: Someone else in the room had been praying and feeling like God was saying, "I want you to cover the cost of this specific expense for so-and-so." Literally 5 minutes later, though oblivious to what the other had been praying about, the two were together and marveling at the timing of what had just happened.

Could these just be coincidences or strokes of luck? Sure; there's of course no way to prove for certain they're in any way miraculous. (That's just the point of miracles, isn't it? They're, by definition, not traceable, repeatable things.)

But, even if we do happen to be wrong sometimes chalking up certain changes in circumstance to God's miraculous intervention, suppose with us for a moment that there is a powerful Living God behind *some* things in our lives. How much could your own tangible experiences of God's power increase your sense of being loved and cared for and considered by a Being bigger and more resourced than you are? How much could they dial back the anxieties and fears in your life? How much could they increase your faith? When we really feel the backing of a God with power who wants to show us his goodness and love, we start to experience life differently!

What's with the "Cross your moat" title for Leap of Faith?

This is the "risking whatever necessary" part of our goal for Leap of Faith. Surprise! - we have to actually *leap*; otherwise we won't ever be in position to see if this supposedly Living God has anything more to offer us than we have to offer ourselves.

Our theme for Leap of Faith will help us do that. The theme is actually one of the major themes carrying through the entire Bible, and particularly through the life of Jesus.

A pastor friend of ours explains the theme with a really helpful image: suppose—if you will—each person on earth lives on an island. And, let's say, this island is surrounded by a *moat*. On our island is everyone we relate to—our family and friends, maybe people in our church, maybe some really close friends from work. *Over the moat* is the entire rest of the world. These are people who are, as it were, optional for us. We could take the initiative, say, to meet that person who lives two houses down from us, but we by no means have to. We don't need that stranger to be our friend—we have friends, and they're all on our island.

Jesus (and essentially the entire Biblical story) seem to make the case that a good deal of the meaning of life, an irreplaceable component of what will fulfill us comes as we cross over the moat in his name.

For instance, in his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says quite intensely:

If you love only those who love you, what good is that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much. If you are kind only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even pagans do that. (Matthew 5:46, 47, NLT)

We don't think he's saying here that we shouldn't love those who are "on our island." We think he's saying that of course we love those people! But perhaps the real power comes as we start to notice and love people who are over the moat, who are optional, whom we don't need.

So, how do I participate?

What you have before you are four action-steps to be a part of this prayer experiment. Our hope is that they'll get you *more excitement and more God!*

1) Pray daily...

FIRST, FOR MY BIG ASK

A heck of a lot of what we're hoping will happen in our lives can't happen unless God gives it to us. We all need to learn what it looks like to look to God to give us the things we really need in life. If we don't directly and consciously look to him in such a way that we'll know *he did it* when the thing actually happens, that means we'll look to other sources to give us those things. And, even if we manage to get some neat things when we haven't looked to God to give them to us, those neat things rarely pan out with the kind of joy and life we were hoping for from them.

God likes to be the giver of all good things. When we learn how to take him up on that offer, it seems that he doesn't only give us those gifts, he also fills the gifts themselves with this sort of hyper-life—those things just work out great and they bring joy and encouragement with them.

Why not take these six weeks to see if that can be your experience on some key things you'd like to see happen in your life?

Ask God for something specific and concrete that he'd like to do for you to make your life better.

So here you're looking for some circumstance about your life that you'd love it if God would address. For example, Vince once prayed for a 40-day stretch that he'd somehow come up with \$500 to cover all the costs of a trip to Boston for a conference he really wanted to make it to.

That's what we're talking about—something specific that, if God would do it for you, you'd be jazzed. It could be something that you hope to have answered by the end of the six weeks of Lent, or it could be something with a longer time frame, but hopefully you'd see some encouraging signs during Lent.

Now, why on earth do this? First off, *what if it doesn't happen?* If it's actually something you really care about, you're risking major disappointment! But risking being disappointed is a hallmark of actual faith. Isn't the point of faith that we take real things we actually care about to God, things we don't claim to be able to pull off on

our own? The reason is to put yourself in a position to see that God is actually *alive*; he actually listens to your prayers and he cares about you.

Now, again, that's no guarantee of anything. God can do anything he wants. But he does like it when we ask him for things. So we need to figure out how to ask in faith and--as Jesus teaches in Matthew 7:7--keep asking.

Prayer is not magic--magic being a way to control your environment (you do the ritual right and the effect is generated; at least that's the theory).

What is prayer? (or, at least, what is this type of "asking God to do things for us" prayer?) We might consider the way Jesus spoke of the Kingdom of God (or the Kingdom of Heaven) - his name for the reality we sometimes experience where prayer has power and miraculous, part-of-something-bigger things happen.

He told people that the Kingdom had come near to them: we can experience God's power today in the form of miracles or answered prayers. But, notably, he also often spoke of the Kingdom a different way - that it is delayed, or not yet here in fullness. This complexity in Jesus' grid for the availability of God's power makes sense in a lot of ways: we live in a world where prayers can be answered, but we also live in a world where many prayers aren't answered. This helps a lot of people to pray with faith (and keep praying) but also to not be devastated if prayers aren't answered.

But maybe you're not so helped. By no means is there a perfect answer. In the end, most everyone (us included) struggle with this kind of prayer because it isn't a way to control anything, and control is often what we want.

All of this means that MY BIG ASK will be a risk. Yes, you might be disappointed. But nothing ventured, nothing gained. *If your main goal is to protect yourself from being disappointed, don't do this.* But if you want to grow in risking-taking faith, why not try? If it always "worked" it wouldn't be much of a leap of faith would it? Not even a little one. So there you have it, our best (non) answer to: "why on earth do this?"

So, before we go on, if you're up for it, let's do it! What good gift do you think God would like to give you before these six weeks are done? (If you've been asking him and don't have a clear sense, you may have to punt to option number 2 and write down what, all things being equal, you'd like him to do for you.)

Write that here: _____

SECOND, FOR MY 6

The thought here is that each person in our church knows at least 6 local people who, as best as we can tell, aren't experiencing much from God. These, for the most part, will be people "over the moat," people we choose to pray for and love as best we can who are not in our inner circle. A neighbor. Your mechanic. Someone at your work or school or gym. The person who cuts your hair. Someone you always talk to at the store or coffee shop. You get the idea. That said, if your best friend fits this profile, go for it! Put them on "your list of 6."

The goal: pray for these folks that they would experience good things from God, and perhaps even stumble upon a great community of faith (do you know any?). Our theory is: if your impression is that they aren't experiencing much from God, most likely they have no one, or very few people, praying for them. Perhaps you can offer them that great gift!

So, who are your 6? Write their names down here:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

THIRD, FOR BLV

We have a BIG ASK for our whole church, as well. We're asking God to grow BLV - that knowledge that our community exists spreads far and wide, and that new people would come join us! We're also asking God to *miraculously arrange for us to part-time salary our pastors* (in a way that make us say, "Wow! Isn't God something?!"). That would indeed be miraculous, because we'll have to probably double our current regular donation income. Keep in mind, we're not asking for you to give us that money (go right ahead if you'd like to, or particularly if you feel God tells you to!); we're asking God to *arrange for this to happen* - in a way that excites us and increases our faith in his goodness and power.

Now what?

First off, congratulations! You've done a key thing—you've crystallized in your heart and on paper what you want God to do for you. Having done that can we encourage

you the following ways to help you take full advantage of this first action-step of Leap of Faith:

First, ask God for these things every day during the Leap of Faith. As you ask, he might speak to you about what you're asking for. Obviously, pay attention to that! But, mainly, just keep on asking him for them!

Second, tell someone else (best case scenario: your spouse, if you have one and/or someone in your small group, if you have one) what you wrote down and ask them to pray for you about those things too. And it would be neighborly of you if you prayed about their things! Jesus says he's uniquely present and at work when two or more people come before him with things. Your chances of seeing something happen go way up when someone else is praying too—and they might even have more faith than you do, so you can leech off of them!

Third, when you see answers to prayers, tell us!

- Send an email with your story to brownlinevineyard@gmail.com
- Or go to our website, brownlinevineyard.org, and click on "Tell us your Leap of Faith story!"
- Or just tell Kyle or Vince in person

This is a super-powerful and often-overlooked spiritual principle: when God answers our prayers, the proper response is to tell as many people as we can. Let us run just a few psalms by you that make this point:

Psalm 107:2

"Has the Lord redeemed (done something good for) you? Then speak out! Tell others he has saved you from your enemies."

Psalm 71:15-16

"All day long I will proclaim your saving power, for I am overwhelmed by how much you have done for me. I will praise your mighty deeds, O Sovereign Lord. I will tell everyone that you alone are just and good."

Psalm 40:10

"I have not kept this good news hidden in my heart; I have talked about your faithfulness and your saving power. I have told everyone in the great assembly of your un-failing love and faithfulness."

The psalms also teach us that if we don't speak out about actual things God does for us, then those things will fade in our memory. So, whenever God does something wonderful for you, always tell all your friends, and always tell us.

2) Cross the moat...

FIRST, INDIVIDUALLY, BY BLOWING SOME MONEY OR TIME ON ONE OF MY 6.

Here's the idea (which we think will be a ton of fun): prayerfully figure out some way (during these 40 days!) to generously give something to one of your 6 that might really bless them. Maybe it's gift certificate to a restaurant with an offer to babysit. Or tickets to a Hawks game or a concert. Maybe it's having them over for a meal. Shoveling their driveway. A nice chocolate bar. A fresh baked loaf of bread. A new car. An autographed picture from your celebrity 2nd cousin once removed. It doesn't really matter how big or small the gift, is, or how much it costs you in terms of money or time. What matters is that you do it prayerfully with love and no strings attached—a simple expression of God's goodness and love. Maybe even ask God to give you some kind of "aha" moment about a great gift to give or thing to do.

It can be fun to NOT do this anonymously. Not because you want the credit, but because maybe it could open the door to even better relationship, and isn't that what love is all about in the long run? Of course, if an anonymous gift would be better received for some reason, or if you feel that's what Jesus is leading you to do, by all means, go for it. Let the golden rule—do to others as you would have them do to you—be your guide.

SECOND, WITH BLV, BY HELPING ONE OF OUR SMALL GROUPS THROW A PARTY OR FUN GATHERING FOR PEOPLE OUTSIDE OUR COMMUNITY.

If you're not a part of one of BLV's small groups, can we encourage you to join up with one, even if it's just for the 40 Days of Lent? (Seriously, feel free just to join in for 6 weeks, if that's what would work best for you.) We think you will not regret it! Especially because (beyond the fun weekly gatherings for prayer and reflection) at some point during these six weeks, each of our weeknight small group will be planning some sort of fun event to invite everyone's neighbors and wider circles of friends to. If you're looking for an excuse to enjoy a poker night or a house concert or a community dinner or something like that, this is your chance!

3) Take daily advantage of the Luke Bible Guide

Another pastor friend of ours - who is nothing short of a Bible expert - has written up a 40-day Bible guide that will take us through the Gospel of Luke - one of the biographies of Jesus. This is an awesome opportunity to read through one of the most engaging books of the Bible with the help of a master tour guide to give you the background, context, and nuance we all need to get the most out of the Bible. We have high hopes that you'll love this part of Leap of Faith!

You can access the Luke Bible guide, which will be updated for you each morning of the 40 days of Lent, by:

- Subscribing to receive the day's reading in your email inbox each morning. (You will receive an email this first Sunday asking if you'd like to subscribe)
- Clicking on "Luke Bible Guide" from our website, brownlinevineyard.org
- Asking for a printed version (just send an email to: brownlinevineyard@gmail.com)

4) Consider fasting

You may know that when people really wanted something from God in the Bible, or in church history, they almost always fasted.

What does fasting do?

Fasting tells God and our own spirits that we really are eager for God to meet some need or hope that we have. As you've picked up, during Leap of Faith, we're really hoping for God to do a lot--for you personally, for your 6 and for all of us as a church. Fasting in this season is a natural fit as spiritual disciplines go.

Though fasting--in any fashion (and we'll talk about some options in a minute)--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?

Well, first off, fasting often involves abstention from food in some way. In shorter fasts, that can be a total abstention from food. These are usually called "water fasts," because water is the only thing going into us. Don't fast too long, of course, a day or two or three—if you're in good health, but talk to a doctor, or someone with a little experience if you get very ambitious on this kind of fasting.

Also, WE DO NOT RECOMMEND WATER FASTS IF YOU'VE EVER SUFFERED FROM ANY EATING DISORDER. Forgive the stern words and printing, but this is a biggie. Those in our midst who've suffered from eating disorders historically have a difficult time separating this sort of fasting from the very motivation that drove them to the disorder, and thereby risk serious health problems. So, if you've been in this situation (or, to be honest, if the idea of a water fast is in any measure sending your mind toward thoughts about weight loss or body image) can we ask that you'd pursue one of the other great fasts below?

Other food-abstention fasts involve imposing some sort of conditions on our eating over a period of time. This can involve anything from giving up some beloved food

item for a time (desserts being a popular favorite) to something more challenging, like the so-called “Daniel fast,” which involves (as it did for Daniel in the biblical book bearing his name) abstaining from everything but vegetables. People sometimes pursue “liquid fasts.” Again, this would customarily apply to shorter fasts, but it’s just like a water fast, except you’re avoiding solid foods while drinking juices, etc.

Are there any non-food-related options?

You bet! Fasting from technology is a popular choice for folks who aren’t fasting from food. These can really involve, under God’s direction, doing without anything that feels costly to give up for a season. People have fasted from criticizing, or non-essential shopping, or texting, or Facebook, or video games, and on and on.

So... how long might it take to do this stuff each day?

We, of course, couldn’t really say, not being you. Our guess is that these spiritual exercises could take as little as *half an hour each day* (though it may certainly exceed that if you’re experiencing a lot of life from it!). So that’s some real time! But, as we said, Lent is a unique season to lean into spiritual exercises with extra zeal!

Could you possibly summarize all this so that I can, like, post it on my refrigerator and be sure to do it everyday?

Consider it done! We have the four action-steps available on a single half-sheet.

And there you have it: BLV’s Leap of Faith 40-day prayer experiment for Lent 2014. May you thoroughly enjoy crossing your moat to more excitement and more God!

Your pastors,
Kyle & Vince

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