

Cross That Moat (to Your Destiny)!

40 Days of Faith 2007

The User's Manual

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Take a moment to dream with me.

Most people who've experienced something of Jesus' power find themselves, if only for a moment, dreaming of banding together in a church that really makes a difference in the world around them. In these dreams at least, that seems heartening and appropriate and even fun.

We all recognize that, at least in theory, a great church should make some real difference in the lives of those who *come* to it! We at least hope that enough great stuff can happen through the community and the prayer and the teaching and that great sense that the Holy Spirit is alive and active there that everyone is encouraged, and many are profoundly changed.

But, we wonder, what if enough of that great stuff was happening that it *spilled over* like a flood to the community around it? Maybe we read about really big thinkers, like those at Rick Warren's Saddleback Church, who took on an entire *country*—Rwanda—to rebuild and bless, with the full blessing and cooperation of that country's government.

Or maybe you'll hear about some amazing things like what's happening with our own Vineyard church in Columbus, Ohio. One of our largest Vineyards—led (by definition) by one of our great leaders, Rich Nathan—has been in ongoing talks with Columbus' mayor about how they can tackle—as a church!—the toughest problems the city faces. Over the years, they've discovered that a lot of the professionals in their church (lawyers, doctors, aerobics instructors, gym teachers, dentists, social workers) were eager to find a translation between what they did for a living and the mission of God's kingdom. So they just opened a community center that, to me, seems like Oz. It's probably the size of our whole Cambridge campus and will offer a range of services (in all of those professional areas, plus dozens more) to anyone in Columbus who makes less than double the poverty level there. They're as well-loved in Columbus as any believing church I've heard about anywhere in the country.

Or maybe you see a movie like the recent *The Pursuit of Happyness*, this harrowing, largely true story of this San Francisco man, played by Will Smith, who's looking after a young son and trying to stay out of homelessness as he tries to make a vocational way for himself. One of the great characters in the movie is a whole church—Glide Memorial—a legendary church in San Francisco (my wife Grace and I moved out here from San Francisco, so we know Glide Memorial well) that reaches out to the homeless as well as any church in the country. Glide Memorial is actually *not* especially well-regarded for faith in Jesus. But they're legendary for their passion for Jesus' words that apply to making an actual difference for people in need. And I think you'll agree if you've seen the movie, they come across incredibly well there.

Or maybe you've wondered, if only in passing, about your own neighbors. In some parts of the world, believers in Jesus are known as the most hospitable people on their street. They're the ones who

have people in and help people know each other. They're the ones who befriend whoever will accept their friendship and then who love them and pray for their real needs in Jesus' name.

And yet...who actually *does* that? (Except, of course, for the folks in all those great churches I've just mentioned and other churches like them.) Perhaps this really is part of the picture Jesus gives of the good life, the overflowing life, but how on earth does one get from here to there?

Here's some cuttings from a letter I just got from a woman in our church who not that long ago started to follow Jesus and, to her surprise, found herself reaching out to some neighbors.

I'm not writing because I think I know much about this, but because I used to be someone who did not want to reach out to my neighbors at all—I used to feel I wouldn't have the time or energy or wouldn't like it if I did—and then I have been so hugely blessed by it. I so much want whatever people experience these 40 Days to bring joy, which is why I can't help thinking about this. The dynamite blast for good in my life that came from this is something that I will be forever grateful I didn't miss—all because our church encouraged it.

So, just for grins, why don't you dream with me about this for a moment? Because we've found that these 40 Days before Easter, traditionally called "Lent," are—who knew?—actually a fantastic time for dreaming.

This is a great time of year for dreaming!

Four years ago at this time, we stumbled upon this surprisingly-powerful idea—that banding together as a whole church to believe God for new things in our own lives and in our church had a lot of power!

Perhaps we could have figured this out if we noticed passages in the gospels like those where Jesus says that where two or more of us band together to ask God for things, God will do them. Maybe that should have been a hint!

It seemed that we could sustain this level of agreed-upon big faith for about 6 weeks—40 Days—and then we'd be served by a breather until the same time next year.

Many—most?—of you all who have been with us during that whole time have by now seen some of your personal 40 Days prayers answered. Last year, just before the 40 Days started, I surveyed you all to see if you had any stories to tell. A couple hundred of you responded. If it's all right, I'd love to revisit some of those stories here. So, for instance:

40 days of faith was an amazing experience for me. I asked God to give my brother a job (who was unemployed for 2 years) and for my parents/family to find some kind of happiness after a terrible car accident that happened in '03. After 40 days of faith, in the same week my brother got a job, I got a job and my parents bought a new house—a sign from God that, despite trials and tribulations, he still has enormous blessings awaiting us.

Or:

I prayed that my loans would be completely erased and I got a stamped letter with all my loans returned. The stamp said "Paid in Full."

Or:

I prayed that I would be healed from anorexia and am now at a healthy weight and have rejoined the track and cross country teams at my college.

Or:

Saved my aunt and uncle's marriage:

At the beginning of the 40 days, I found out that my aunt and uncle's marriage was unraveling due to an affair. After fasting and praying for 38 days, I was contacted by my uncle. He was about to sign a lease on an apartment to move in with his lover. Before he could sign, he felt an almost audible voice in his head say "stop." He went back to my aunt and started to see how their marriage could be saved. She found a way to forgive him. He was calling me to find out whether this voice was Jesus. It's been about three years and they (my aunt and uncle) are happily together (and my 11-year-old cousin is doing great). They are both following Jesus now and have, since then, encouraged me in my faith.

Or:

I prayed that God would bring me a husband. Hasn't happened yet. But I can definitely say that God has given me more peace and assurance on this topic than I've ever experienced.

Or:

I was praying for a friend to come to know Jesus. About a year later he did and now he attends the Vineyard too!

Or:

I was in the last year of my job, with no prospects and not even sure I wanted to continue in that path. I also had/have quite a bit of debt. I prayed for God to give me a job that I would love that would allow me to serve him and to help me pay off my debt. Two weeks before my contract ran out, I got a promotion to a better job. And, to top it off, the job is residential. I have an apartment with all utilities provided! So I can work off my debt! God is truly amazing!

Or:

I found my wife!!!

Or:

An idea of what God wants for my life

And you all gave us maybe two hundred more of those. So, all to say, many of us have found quite a bit of power in this process!

And, *also* to say, many of you *haven't* had your 40 Days prayers answered. That's one of the perplexing and challenging things about faith, isn't it? We put ourselves on the line with it with no guarantees. But many of us find that, if we persevere through all the encouragements and all the disappointments, things very much do take a good turn for us.

My very first 40 Days prayer for myself, those four years ago, was a huge prayer that would take a miracle-working God to pull off. On the one hand, I had some great encouragements along the lines of my prayer. But it wasn't answered on its own terms. The next year I prayed about something else, which largely did seem to be answered. A so-so result the next year. But then last year I went back to my first year's seemingly-impossible prayer. At the end of the 40 Days, nothing. Then, maybe a week later, an opening. Was this God's answer? And, yes, it was. The impossible thing I asked for has since, astoundingly (to my mind), happened.

So, all to say, it may take some persistence and some willingness to risk disappointment, at least in the short term. And the hope is that you'll richly experience God along the way, whatever the immediate "result" of your prayer. So, *also* from the survey responses many of you sent back about your experience with 40 Days prayers, we hear:

I prayed for a job for my husband, then boyfriend. God didn't answer that prayer in 40 days, but he did provide and was faithful to his promise of good things.

I participated in the 40 days for the first time last year. I prayed for a job and I got it! Yay! (But I asked for a bunch of other things I wish God had also answered, but the job was great!)

Last year my small group prayed and fasted together during the 40 days of faith. I think more than anything else the best part wasn't some huge thing God did, but more the transformation that took place in our lives and our group as a whole. It was as if our whole group just fell in love with Jesus all over again. I can't wait to do it again this year.

These are big journeys for our whole church.

Along with the personal benefits many of us have found, we've also taken these times to dream some big things on behalf of our whole church. Often these have been dreams we've had to learn about together during each 40 Days.

So, most-notably, in our first 40 Days, we asked whether God would have us move into a building of our own—a seemingly-impossible thing. With a few twists and turns, we—incredibly—have a home of our own at our Cambridge site.

Last year one of our dreams was to see if we could pull off a second site of our church in downtown Boston. It would take perhaps a hundred new leaders stepping up. It would take a place to meet in downtown Boston (by that point, we'd spent maybe three months looking for a site—working with realtors, the whole bit—and had come up with nothing). It would take perhaps half a million dollars. It would take vision for how we could run two sites and still keep our existing site moving forward well. And it would take new people *coming* to this new site, and to our existing site, if only to replace those who left for Boston.

So we invited our whole church to pray for:

- The new meeting place for this site
- The money needed to launch it
- The leaders to make it work, while we continued strong in Cambridge.

We also phrased our larger dream this way:

That, within a year of its founding, we'd have a new site in Downtown Boston with 500 people in attendance and no loss of attendance in Cambridge.

And:

That we'd found a third site within two years.

Here's how God answered those prayers.

Not long after the 40 Days, I was meeting with Andrew Snekvik, who was to be the site pastor in Boston, if a Boston site, in fact, came into being. Each possible site we'd looked at had now fallen through, and we were within a few weeks of needing at the very least to postpone a Boston site, for lack of a place to meet. As we were talking, Andrew had a surge of faith and he said to me, "I'm going to leave this room, get on the T, get off in downtown Boston, and find a site *today*." That seemed bold, given that we'd had teams of realtors working—fruitlessly—on this for months, but, hey, it couldn't hurt.

That afternoon, Andrew returned with a site in hand. As he got off the T and began walking around, he noticed a technical college and felt a strong prompting to go knock on their door and see if they'd have anything for us. He immediately met a friendly woman who said: sure, let's see what we've got. She showed him an impressive auditorium (a one-third scale model of Symphony Hall, actually),

plenty of kids' church space, a great lobby for hanging out after services. All of this in a great location. And then it quickly worked out.

You all gave more than enough money to launch the site.

And, while there's certainly been strain on our leadership systems due to the site, it's very much happening, and there's lots of enthusiasm in both places.

We have not met our aggressive attendance dreams as of yet, which is a disappointment. Our numbers, across both sites, are roughly where they were pre-launch, so we've got a ways to go here. Maybe this will be a 40 Days prayer like the one of mine I mentioned earlier that took a few years to come to pass. But we'll keep praying! (And, now that I think of it, we still do have six months to go until the year anniversary of the site's founding comes to pass. Who knows? Maybe our prayers will still come to pass on schedule!) And we remain dreaming for a third site.

Our church dream for *this* year? Utter transformation!

Let me run a couple of scriptures by you that have really been helpful for those of us on staff as we've been praying for you all—and for our whole church—this year. (We've actually been really *into* prayer this year, praying about two and a half hours each staff meeting.)

The first is a parable Jesus tells in Luke.

¹⁹ Jesus said, "There was a certain rich man who was splendidly clothed and who lived each day in luxury. ²⁰ At his door lay a diseased beggar named Lazarus. ²¹ As Lazarus lay there longing for scraps from the rich man's table, the dogs would come and lick his open sores. ²² Finally, the beggar died and was carried by the angels to be with Abraham.* The rich man also died and was buried, ²³ and his soul went to the place of the dead.* There, in torment, he saw Lazarus in the far distance with Abraham.

²⁴ "The rich man shouted, 'Father Abraham, have some pity! Send Lazarus over here to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in anguish in these flames.'

²⁵ "But Abraham said to him, 'Son, remember that during your lifetime you had everything you wanted, and Lazarus had nothing. So now he is here being comforted, and you are in anguish.

²⁶ And besides, there is a great chasm separating us. Anyone who wanted to cross over to you from here is stopped at its edge, and no one there can cross over to us.'

²⁷ "Then the rich man said, 'Please, Father Abraham, send him to my father's home. ²⁸ For I have five brothers, and I want him to warn them about this place of torment so they won't have to come here when they die.'

²⁹ "But Abraham said, 'Moses and the prophets have warned them. Your brothers can read their writings anytime they want to.'

³⁰ "The rich man replied, 'No, Father Abraham! But if someone is sent to them from the dead, then they will turn from their sins.'

³¹ "But Abraham said, 'If they won't listen to Moses and the prophets, they won't listen even if someone rises from the dead.' "

(Luke 16:19-31, NLT)

Clearly there are some crucial justice questions that Jesus raises here (which, if they grab you, you'll have the chance to address a bit during these 40 Days). And there are some warnings! Part of our 40 Days experience will be an opportunity to read through all of Luke's gospel under the able leadership of one of our pastors, Brian Housman, so you'll have a chance to take more time with this parable as it arises then.

But for our purposes here, I'd mostly like to draw your attention to this **chasm** separating the rich man from Lazarus. That's why he can't get the small thing he asks for in the afterlife (a drop of water) and Jesus' point seems to be that this chasm actually mirrors *another* chasm that was in place during their times on earth—namely, the *gate* that separated them.

If I can press the image a bit: Jesus, along with much of the rest of the New Testament, seems to make the case that—if you will—all of us live 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 seems to make the point that a good deal of the meaning of life, an irreplaceable component of what will fulfill us (as per the excerpt from my friend's letter, above) comes as we cross over the moat in his name.

So, for instance, he says seemingly harsh things like this (from his Sermon on the Mount):

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)

I don't think he's saying here that we *shouldn't* love those who are "on our island." I 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*.

The plan for these 40 Days

The plan for these 40 Days falls into **4 action steps** and **2 questions**.

One hopes that these steps and questions will do three great things for us. They'll empower you to believe God for something *big* and *concrete*, something big enough that it would *require* 40 Days of sustained faith and prayer. Our hope is that, every Lent, as many of us as possible will be reminded that there is a *real, living God who is eager to encourage and empower us*. Nothing we talk about or believe in this church amounts to anything unless the last sentence is true! Sure, we have modest amounts of folk wisdom that are probably helpful on their own terms. But the sum total of that could

most likely fit into a pamphlet. Everything rises and falls on a living and active God who loves you and is eager to act on your behalf. This 40 Days is your chance to plunge into those waters in a fresh way. Don't miss that chance!

Second, we're hopeful that you can *encounter God devotionally* during these 6 weeks in a fresh and lasting way. So we'll provide a wonderful Bible devotional and we'll resource our small groups to see if that could indeed happen!

Third, we have the big dream that these 40 Days could transform us still further into a church that, member by member, loves to cross over the moat and into our destiny. That we could be a church where love for those over the moat is every bit as common and natural for each member as is, say, a belief in God's Holy Spirit to speak to and work through us.

So, the action steps and questions.

These 40 Days, could you consider 4 action steps?

- 1. Ask God each day for your concrete 40 Days personal dream.**
- 2. Take daily advantage of the 40 Days Luke Devotional.**
- 3. Blow money on—or show extravagant hospitality to—one or more of your 6 during the 40 Days.**
- 4. Cross the moat with your whole small group at least once during the 40 Days.**

I'll explain each of those in more detail in just a moment. But, before I do, let me flag the 2 questions we'll be considering as a church during these 40 Days.

2 questions we're considering as a whole church during these 40 Days.

- 1. Should we adapt our membership covenant to give at least small attention to crossing the moat?**
- 2. Should we start a non-profit targeted towards serving the city?**

Ask God each day for your concrete 40 Days personal dream.

- 1. I prayed that God would give me more of a prophetic gifting. One day I prayed for a couple who were trying to have a baby. I thought I felt something "jump" in my stomach, and it happened again the next day, so I told them. 2 days later, they discovered they were pregnant and now they have a baby boy!*
- 2. I prayed that God would get us out of exhaustive credit card debt from school and emergency medical bills. We made the last payment in about 6 months! Despite both of us being out of work at times and a near-death medical emergency. It was a miracle.*

I have no money or dental insurance and have prayed for years so I could go and take care of lots of broken teeth, etc. A very unexpected source has enabled me to take care of my entire mouth. A real miracle, believe me!

One of the strange, wonderful truths of faith in Jesus is that he wants us to come to him with the things we want and need, knowing that if we don't, we *will* go elsewhere. Off the top of my head, here are a few of the places where we're told that. (These quotes will all be from the New Living Translation unless noted.)

*You do not have, because you do not ask.
(James 4:2, ESV)*

*"Keep on asking, and you will be given what you ask for. Keep on looking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened. For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And the door is opened to everyone who knocks. 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! 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."
(Matthew 7:7-11)*

*"I also tell you this: If two of you agree down here on earth concerning anything you ask, my Father in heaven will do it for you."
(Matthew 18:19)*

*"If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer."
(Matthew 21:22)*

*"You can ask for anything in my name, and I will do it, because the work of the Son brings glory to the Father. Yes, ask anything in my name, and I will do it!"
(John 14:13, 14)*

So take a moment, pray if you want or just get still. And then jot down:

What do you want Jesus to do for you during these 40 Days?

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, a very important thing. Having done that, can I encourage you to do a few things in order to take advantage of the 40 Days of Faith in reference to the things you've just written down?

1) **Ask God for these things every day during the 40 days.**

As you ask, he might speak to you about what you're asking for. Obviously, pay attention to that! But, in the spirit of Matthew 7, God gives good gifts to people who "keep on asking" him for them!

2) **Tell someone else what you wrote down and ask *them* to pray for you about those things too.**

This might be your spouse, if you have one and/or someone in your household or your small group, if you have one.

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 (Matthew 18:20). 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!

Take daily advantage of the 40 Days Luke Devotional.

Okay, I'm over-hyping him. But Brian Housman is broadly considered by many in our church, myself included, to be a devotional-writing genius. There, I've said it, and I'm not taking it back!

One of the great gifts during our past 40 Days has been a devotional guide, broken down into daily chunks, around a part of the Bible, though with a focus on the things we're all looking at during the 40 Days in question. This year it will focus on a source you just can't beat—Luke's Gospel. I mean, if you're going to spend 40 Days as a whole church looking at one great biography, could you do better than to look at one about Jesus? And Luke in particular has been the source of a good deal of what's motivated us into the things we're looking at this year. This will be a key way for you to feel like a part of the whole experience—and for you to have a great encounter with Luke's Gospel!

Blow money on—or show extravagant hospitality to—one or more of your 6 during the 40 Days.

First, a word on "your 6."

Our thought 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. That said, if your best friend at work fits this profile, go for it! Put them on "your list of 6." Largely what we do is pray for these folks that they would experience the power and love of God, and might perhaps even

come to follow him themselves—hopefully among a great community of faith! 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. So perhaps *you* can offer them that great gift!

Here are some thoughts that might help you **pray** for them.

As we've learned about people around the world who see a lot of great results in praying for their friends in this way, we've learned that they pray in consistent ways that perhaps haven't come naturally to us. They often use lots of *commands* rather than requests in their prayers. They often use these two key words: "**bind**" and "**loose**." "Binding" things in prayer means pretty much, well, "tying them up", stopping them from having power over the person we're praying for. And we often do this just by using those words: "I bind 'x' over my friend Bob..." This comes from the belief (and usually the experience) that there are other spirits in the world other than God's Holy Spirit. And that, if we're following Jesus, we've actually been given authority to stop them in their tracks, which we often do with these "binding" prayers. "Loosing" things means inviting God to flood our friend with whatever good things we're praying. "I loose the experience of God's abundant love over my friend Bob..."

Keeping that in mind, a friend in our church recently passed on a way that one of the great churches in the country in these things encourages their people to pray. Here's my adaptation of what they suggest, which I'd like to suggest to you for your 6 during these 40 Days.

- 1) **Pray that the Father would draw them to Jesus.**
(John 6:44)
- 2) **Bind any spirit that blinds their minds to Jesus.**
(2 Corinthians 4:4)
- 3) **Loose the Spirit of becoming a child of God.**
(Romans 8:15)
- 4) **Pray that followers of Jesus will cross their paths and enter into positive relationships with them.**
(Matthew 9:38)
- 5) **Pray that they would join us for our Easter service.**

In terms of (5), experience among churches, and our experience here, tells us that people who ordinarily don't go to church often *do* want to go to church at Easter. (If we customarily run, including kids, at about a thousand people each Sunday, we had about 1,300 last Easter. People like to go to church on Easter!) Let's believe God together for your 6!

So! *Who are your 6?*

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____
- 4) _____

- 5) _____
6) _____

But what about this “blow money on—or offer hospitality to—your 6 idea? Here’s another parable from Luke that you’ll get much more about in Brian’s 40 Days’ Devotional. But it’s pretty helpful here.

Jesus told his disciples: "There was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions. So he called him in and asked him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your management, because you cannot be manager any longer.'

"The manager said to himself, 'What shall I do now? My master is taking away my job. I'm not strong enough to dig, and I'm ashamed to beg—I know what I'll do so that, when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses.'

"So he called in each one of his master's debtors. He asked the first, 'How much do you owe my master?'

" 'Nine hundred gallons of olive oil,' he replied.

"The manager told him, 'Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it four hundred and fifty.'

"Then he asked the second, 'And how much do you owe?'

" 'A thousand bushels of wheat,' he replied.

"He told him, 'Take your bill and make it eight hundred.'

"The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light. I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.

"Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own?"

(Luke 16:1-12, TNIV)

This is one of my absolute favorite of Jesus’ parables, because—to me at least—it’s utterly shocking. (If you, by any chance, had an interest in hearing a more-full treatment of this passage, you could go to our website and download or stream a sermon of mine on the subject from December 6 of last year that I called, in this spirit, “Why Jesus Likes to Mess With Your Head.”)

What seems shocking about this parable is that the master *commends* the “DISHONEST manager.” By all appearances, this guy is openly robbing his employer for his own selfish gain. He’s buying friends for himself so that, when he is kicked out of his house, they’ll give him a place to stay. And then Jesus not only *commends* this, he *amplifies* it. “Use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourself, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.” And then his seeming point is that *we’re* all in the position of this manager, managing money that is not our own, that has been entrusted to us to manage by God, the actual owner of all the money we have. And God is looking to

see if we manage it well. And the way we'll do that is by extravagant generosity towards people who, otherwise, would not be in heaven. What a twist!

I've known many, many people who've taken this to heart. Since the December sermon alone, I've heard many stories of people in our congregation who gave it a try. Usually the story ends in either (a) joyous tears or (b) statements like, "No one's ever done anything like this for me before!" You'll hear some of these stories before the 40 Days are over.

One form this generosity to peoples' 6 often takes is in **hospitality**. You'll hear stories along these lines during these 40 Days, from phenomenally bold hospitality to a whole neighborhood from one member of our church to more-modest things. Grace and I have a broad circle of people we've been praying for and trying to show generosity to in our neighborhood, but we don't get much relational time with them. So we're doing our best to throw large-scale monthly "family fun nights" just to get to know the families we cross paths with better and see if God moves in any of those relationships.

Some small groups throw hospitality together for their 6's, hosting parties or fun nights together.

So... which of your 6 do you want to blow money on or show hospitality to during these 40 Days?

What do you propose to do?

Cross the moat with your whole small group at least once during the 40 Days.

If you're not a part of one of the small groups in our church, can I encourage you to join up with one, even if it's just for the 40 Days? (Seriously, feel free just to join in for 6 weeks, if that's what would work best for you.) Most people find that the ability to pray with each other about our personal dreams from God, and then to pray with and take steps with each other about the larger dreams gives the time a lot of the power and effectiveness that it has. If you're going to try the 40 Days anyway, I think you're cheating yourself if you don't join in with a small group for that time.

We'll be having a small group fair at both of our sites on the first Sunday of the 40 Days, February 25, so it should be quite easy to find some nice person whose group meets at a convenient place and time.

Also on that first Sunday, we'll provide you with a small brochure of fun, low-key ways for whole groups to try a "crossing the moat experiment" together! If we're going to try out this most-powerful of steps that Jesus commends to us, I'd guess it will be the most fun to do it together.

So, to reiterate: pick one of those ideas—or come up with a better one—and do it during at least one small group time during the 40 Days. And then you might want to spend the next session debriefing the experience.

Two questions we're considering as a whole church during these 40 Days.

1. Should we adapt our membership covenant to give at least small attention to crossing the moat?

Our church has a *membership covenant* which we walk through as a part of our fun Vineyard 101 class (which gives an overview of being a part of our church—the next of these is this Sunday, Feb. 25). This has been just great for us, as it's helped make clear what we are and what we're hoping for as a church. And it's helped give shape to our small groups and to hosting a Sunday service that can really welcome our neighbors.

That said, we don't take adapting it lightly, because our hope is that our membership covenant really reflects our bottom line understanding of what membership not just in our church, but in the family of God looks like. And, because we do ask for concrete things in the covenant, we certainly want to make sure we're not asking for more than we feel is intrinsic to following God with us.

All that said, an idea has been sweeping through our staff of late that there's one key omission in our membership covenant that we just hadn't seen with this kind of clarity before. Namely, is it intrinsic to being a part of Jesus' body (as we're described when we join in with a church) that we actually devote any small amount of time to folks who never walk through the doors of our church? Is there a fundamental love of the community around us that is a part of being a follower of Jesus, or is the bottom line exclusively about how we relate with people who go to our church? Suddenly that just seemed like a no-brainer to many of us. We wondered how we'd missed it.

And yet no one wants to overtax anyone. Could this prospective addition to our covenant, with whatever time it might require, be something that small groups would do together during a small group time (as small groups will in fact do during the 40 Days)? That would solve it, since small group involvement is part of our membership covenant.

So the suggestion on the table is that we match in community outreach what we ask every member to do to serve the Sunday morning service. Every member is asked for an hour and a half a month on a

Sunday morning to help serve and host that service. What if we agreed together to give an hour and a half a month to outreach beyond our walls?

To my mind, this type of outreach could fall in any one (or more than one) of three areas:

1. **Evangelism** (reaching out to friends and neighbors in hopes that they'll experience Jesus)
2. **Compassion/ Justice** (loving the underserved in our community in tangible ways or helping advocate on their behalf)
3. **The Environment** (as there's endless biblical precedent for taking care of the created world)

So, during this hour and a half a month, you could...host gatherings for your 6, or the 6's of your whole small group. Or...visit and love folks in Jefferson Park, or mentor at-risk kids, or...the sky's the limit. Or you could, I suppose, pick up trash on the side of the road as an act of love to your city. Or endless other things in this spirit.

But we'd have to want this as a church. So we'll do our best to figure it out together during the 40 Days.

2. Should we start a non-profit targeted towards serving the city?

Here's another thought that has really gripped us as a staff along these lines, but which would require more faith and passion than we could provide. This would really have to be something we were excited about as a whole community.

Let me give you a sense of how this came up.

In all of our previous 40 Days, we've done some sort of generosity blitz, where we've invited everyone in our community to ask God if they should give towards some worthy thing. Those worthy things have come from within our community itself—thing like buying a church campus or starting a new site.

We don't need to do that this year. Thanks to your tremendous faith and generosity, we *have* a church campus and we *have* a new church site! Thanks!

But, at the same time, a lot of the fun of each 40 Days has been, frankly, monetary. It's been fun to believe God for resources to see great things happen. The very uncertainty of it has been fun—what will happen? Will people give? How much are we talking about? What might happen as a result? And so we wondered if, perhaps, we should have a generosity blitz this year too, but one that we'd *give away*, one that would go into the community.

We thought about lots of interesting stuff, like giving to nearby schools in need or a nearby housing project. Maybe we could give to some great local charity we believe in. Or maybe we could give the money to some place internationally that's in crisis. We spent lots and lots of time on all of those possibilities.

But, the more we tried to listen to what the Spirit seemed to be saying to us, we realized that it all seemed to revolve around this dream we had for ourselves as a community, that we'd be a place where it would be hard to be a member here for long without discovering oneself crossing the moat to our neighbors often. So we found that we were less interested in giving money to a far-flung—if entirely worthy—place in order that *others* could cross a moat *on our behalf*.

And here's a challenge we've found as small groups have connected with many different awesome non-profit outreaches in our city. They've almost always fizzled. The culture-gap between the nature of the small group and the culture of the ministry in question has pretty much always ensured that the ministry itself didn't really know what to do with any volunteers we'd send.

Danny Tao, on our staff, is in touch with what churches all over the country do in response to this challenge. The answer: most often, they start their own non-profit, or several non-profits. That way, they're the ones helping their people make real connections with need in their community. Non-profits also open up doors for fund-raising and grant-writing that couldn't happen directly through a church. So might this be a great thing to do a generosity blitz on behalf of?

Perhaps! But this too would be something that we'd want to be on board with and having faith for as a whole community. Because there really is no point to raising money to get a non-profit up and running and funded...with no one actually volunteering in it. A non-profit that's an empty shell doesn't sound like any of ours' dream.

We'll talk lots more about this on Sunday mornings during the 40 Days! But, just to say, this will be a fun thing to find out together.

Why don't you ask God if he would have you give to such a thing? And, if so, how much? We'll plan—unless the process derails us—to take an offering towards this on Palm Sunday, April 1. And we'll let you know what the offering amounted to on Easter Sunday, April 8.

So...there you have it! This year's 40 Days of Faith!

I'm praying that this will be a life-changing time for you—and for us all as a community!

If I might throw in one final tip that some people who are trying to believe big often find helpful.

1) Consider fasting in some way.

You might have noticed that when people really wanted something from God in the Bible, they almost always fasted.

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.

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. For the most part, I don't recommend these at any length beyond a week's time, because after that, health problems can ensue. (Clearly God can speak and call you into anything—but I'd just be aware of the risks if you water fast for more than a week, and be in good touch with a doctor.)

Also, I do not recommend water fasts if you've ever suffered from an eating disorder. 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. There are other great fasts that will do you a lot of good, if you've been in this situation, and can I ask that you'd pursue those?

Other food-abstention fasts involve imposing some sort of **conditions** on our eating over a period of time. (Some folks prefer not to call these “fasts”—reserving that title for water fasts—but prefer to call things like I'll suggest here “**consecrations**.” Choose whatever terminology works for you!) This can involve anything from giving up some beloved food item for a time (desserts being a popular favorite—I'm actually in the middle of another one of these) 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.

For longer fasts, I've sometimes done a “**one meal a day**” fast. It's pretty much what it sounds like. The key is to actually eat a *smaller* meal than you normally would at the time, and to make that “it” for the day. If you ever know I'm on a “one meal a day” fast and it looks after awhile as if I haven't lost an ounce, have a little talk with me.

People often pursue “**juice fasts**.” Again, this would customarily apply to *shorter fasts*, but it's just like a water fast, except you're allowed to drink juice, which will keep your blood sugar up and actually allow you to function at near-normal capacity.

Are there any non-food-related options?

You bet! Fasting from **television** 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. I've heard about fasts (or, again, “consecrations”) from *criticism* or from *catalogs*!

The point of fasting is that, under God's direction, we're feeling desperate for something and we direct that desperation towards God. It's just hard to truly be desperate for God and what he might do for us when our bellies are full and all our needs are abundantly provided for.

What does it mean to fast "for" something?

If you fast, I'd encourage you to let God know, frequently, what it is you're fasting *for* which, I'd think, would at least tie into the "what do you want Jesus to do for you during these 40 Days?" category. So, for instance, during my last long fast I realized in, like, Day 3 that I didn't really have a specific *focus* for my fast, and I asked God. He seemed to tell me that it was a fast primarily on behalf of a close friend of mine who was really far from God. Not long thereafter, that friend plunged himself into a life of pursuing Jesus for the first time in his life.

Does fasting help us lose weight (and I know you're asking that on behalf of a friend)?

Isn't this one of life's colossal bummers? The answer, from all reputable sources, is, "No, not really." There are 2 problems that keep this from being, for most people, about weight loss. First, once we've fasted (from food) for awhile, our metabolism slows way down (a good thing if we were ever to face famine!). Second, sadly, it seems to be human nature that, whatever weight we lose in fasting, we quickly put back on once we resume our previous diet. One national level leader who's known for his frequent long fasts actually seems to have gotten significantly *more* overweight as the years have rolled on.

Now, the upside of this truism is that we really *can* let God know that we're doing this because we want deeper desperation for and connection with him. This really is about more than body image.

Here's to one of the great 6-week stretches of your life!

I'll include a summary sheet (for your refrigerator, if such things help you) after this one.

Cross That Moat (to Your Destiny)!

40 Days of Faith 2007

These 40 Days, could you consider 4 action steps?

- 1. Ask God each day for your concrete 40 Days personal dream.**
 - a. Ask God for these things every day during the 40 days.
 - b. Tell someone else what you wrote down and ask *them* to pray for you about those things too.

- 2. Take daily advantage of the 40 Days Luke Devotional.**

- 3. Blow money on—or show extravagant hospitality to—one or more of your 6 during the 40 Days.**
 - c. *How might we pray for our 6?*
 - 1. Pray that the Father would draw them to Jesus.**
(John 6:44)
 - 2. Bind any spirit that blinds their minds to Jesus.**
(2 Corinthians 4:4)
 - 3. Loose the Spirit of becoming a child of God.**
(Romans 8:15)
 - 4. Pray that followers of Jesus will cross their paths and enter into positive relationships with them.**
(Matthew 9:38)
 - 5. Pray that they would join us for our Easter service (on April 8).**

- 4. Cross the moat with your whole small group at least once during the 40 Days.**

2 questions we're considering as a whole church during these 40 Days.

- 1. Should we adapt our membership covenant to give at least small attention to crossing the moat?**

- 2. Should we start a non-profit targeted towards serving the city?**
 - i. **Ask God if (or how much) He'd have you contribute towards this.**
 - ii. **Unless something derails us, we'll take an offering towards this on Palm Sunday, April 1.**

One final thought:

- 1. Consider fasting in some way.**