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## The Gift of God is God

### Leap of Faith 2011: The User's Manual

#### **I love the Leap of Faith!**

And it seems that I'm not alone! Each year, those in our church who are so inclined join together for a "faith experiment" during the season of the year that many churches have called "Lent," the six weeks before Easter.

Lent has historically served as a time of preparation for a new move of God in one's life, symbolized by Jesus' resurrection, celebrated each Easter. The wisdom of these Lent-celebrating churches is that a yearly cycle of renewing our faith, of focusing our expectancy that Jesus is in fact alive and looking to work in our lives, is very helpful in fully enjoying a life-long experience of God. We might be tempted to think that we shouldn't limit this sort of thing to Lent, that we should live this way all throughout the year! And I'd agree with you. But many people over many centuries have found that, nonetheless, one six-week cycle each year does, in fact, serve as a very powerful faith boost that can last us for many months.

And so each Lenten season, many of us ask God both to increase our faith personally and also to increase our faith as a whole church. We've found that believing God for big things for our church at large has been a wonderful way to reenergize what we're up to each Sunday.

So, over the years, we've taken Lent to believe God together for things that would have been well out of our grasp apart from all of our faith pooled together. Things like a new building, a vibrant community offerings wing of our church (last year I'm told our church worked with one in ten school-aged children in Cambridge), and a second site of our church (which opened with great power, only tragically to close upon the cancer diagnosis of our site pastor—more on that in a moment). Last year we believed together that whatever things we were experiencing of God here could help people throughout the whole country. As a direct outcome of that Leap of Faith, I just got back this morning (as I write this) from Duluth, Minnesota, where a really impressive young church is trying to put into practice some things we've experienced here, including their own Leap of Faith. There are many more like them. Just an hour ago I responded to this email from a man elsewhere in the Midwest:

*I'm sure this is nothing new for you to hear, but I wanted to thank you. Your Seek videos have helped a good friend of mine take a dramatic shift towards faith. Just a year ago, the mere mention of religion in any form was forbidden. Now, she regularly attends church with my wife*

*and I, has been regularly studying the Bible, and after the Holy Spirit day with Seek is much more open to idea of the supernatural.*

### **Faith is very powerful.**

Whenever God stirs up faith in us, good things tend to happen. About a month ago, I invited those of you who were at the Sunday service to write down any answered prayers from previous Leaps of Faith or to let us know ways you've been encouraged by God here in this church. More than two hundred of you took me up on it and I'll be sharing some of your stories throughout this manual. But often your stories were fundamental reminders of the power of faith in general.

*I found out that I had a growth on my spine that created a hole inside my back which required surgery. The Sunday before the surgery, I asked members of the prayer team to pray my surgery goes well. My surgery was eight days later and when the doctors went to operate, they found it wasn't necessary and that my back had miraculously healed almost 100%.*

*I went to the dentist and the dentist told me that I had a lot of cavities and I will need fillings and a possible root canal and my insurance wouldn't be able to cover all of it. I started going to Healing Rooms for emotional and financial prayer. The oral health was something that I prayed for and when I went back to the dentist, I did not have one cavity and didn't have any oral health problems.*

During this Leap of Faith, we'll invite you to ask God with some real persistence for something that you'd be encouraged if he'd do for you. We'll invite you to even consider things like fasting about that and joining in with a small group—even if only for these six weeks—so that you can experience the power of praying for these things with others. These prayer experiences are often very encouraging.

*I had been on a break from communicating with my family for nine months and my prayer was that we would be able to talk again. It was answered!*

*During last year's Leap of Faith, I was very thankful for "serendipitously" getting a new direction in my research, which had been stalled for about three years and for getting an answer to a relationship question I had.*

*When the Leap of Faith started, I asked God to help me fall head over heels in love with my husband. I really wanted to not just work hard at a marriage but think the highest of my husband and really admire him even with his flaws. I really think God changed something that not only built on what we'd worked hard at, but took our enjoyment of each other to another level.*

*Four or five years ago during the Leap of Faith, Dave asked: What would you do for God if there were no limitations? As he often does, he allowed for a few moments of quiet time and the answer came instantly and obviously: I would care for orphans. I'd worked with kids for years, so*

*it didn't seem too far off base, but this was different, more personal and more persistent. I spent eight months fleshing out the idea myself, with God and others. Then I took the leap and started the process of adopting a child through the foster care system. Fourteen months later I met my daughter and fourteen months after that she became my daughter in the eyes of the law.*

*Leap of Faith answer: Amazing job for my husband, better than he could have secured on his own without God's intervention.*

*During a Leap of Faith several years ago, I prayed for a suicidal friend who had been diagnosed with chronic fatigue syndrome. About half way through the Leap of Faith, she suddenly ceased to experience the symptoms she had been dealing with (constant fatigue, will to live, depression, unbearable despair) and to this day, though she has occasionally felt very tired, those chains have been broken off her. She is a healthy, lovely 23-year-old wife and mother of two and one of my closest friends. Praise Jesus for her ability to live and enjoy her life abundantly!*

*I was part of an adulterous relationship, but couldn't find a way out. I was plagued by not having the power to stay away and prayed for the Lord's strength to help me. Glad to say I have not been in any contact with that person in four months.*

*I have been praying for the last two years during our Leaps of Faith to ask if God would provide a Christian woman into my life. And all of a sudden God blessed me with someone who I feel is a perfect match. This has really changed my life. We are getting married in June.*

*We had been trying to get pregnant for 1.5 years. We had gone to the doctor to get fertility treatments and were about to start the treatment when the Leap of Faith started. The fertility drugs were sitting in our fridge ready to be used the following week if our last natural attempt failed. During the Leap of Faith, we prayed to get pregnant and we did! Without treatment. The drugs sat in our fridge until they expired a few weeks ago.*

*I've needed to have these times of intense connection to God and I look forward to Lent each year, especially how this church does it.*

### **But you want one gift from God more than any other.**

This, of course, is a presumptuous thing for me to say. How on earth would I know what would be most important for you to receive from God right now? After all, the people, above, were praying for very important things to *them*.

And yet praying for any "thing" runs a big risk—that we won't *get* that thing and we'll be disappointed. And I can speak from many years' experience of Leaps of Faith that pretty much *no one* gets the thing they're praying for *every single Leap of Faith*. Many people have yet to see their *first* overt "answer" to their big Leap of Faith prayer. Given that, maybe this whole thing is irresponsible! Whatever "hits" there might be to these prayers, do they outweigh the disappointment of the "misses?"

Yes they do. If all goes well.

Because I feel confident in saying that the gift you most want from God is *God*. And we're encouraged to pray for the things we want along the way of our life because Jesus knows that, if we do, we'll find an actual experience with the living God along the way. And Jesus knows that this will meet the need of our heart.

One noteworthy unanswered prayer from the last two Leaps of Faith was that one of our pastors—and one of my closest friends—Andrew Snekvik would be healed of stage 4 colon cancer. And yet he died shortly after last year's Leap of Faith. Such a profoundly unanswered prayer could drive one away from "faith experiments" forevermore.

And yet, while Andrew very much wanted to be healed, in many conversations with me he encouraged plunging into these sorts of faith experiments *more*, not less. Because in the doing of them we might see at least *some* of our prayers answered, but we'd be *assured* to discover the primary gift of God, God himself. And during his illness, I think Andrew himself got a healthy taste of that, experiencing God more and more even as his sickness got worse and worse. We talked about that quite a bit. Not long ago, Grace pointed out a picture of Andrew not long before his death and she exclaimed, "Look at that! He's glowing! It's the glory of God!"

In John's gospel, which I'll be speaking from a good deal during this Leap of Faith, Jesus gives us some interesting contrasts. Not long before his own crucifixion, he says:

***And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it. (John 14:13-14)***

This, of course, is a tricky passage. Really? He'll do "anything" we ask for "in his name?" That would seem easy to prove to be false, as Andrew's experience makes clear. During the sermons I'll talk more about this passage, but at the very least it seems to encourage boldly asking God for the things on our hearts—and then, having done that, to keep our eyes open for how "the Father will be glorified in the Son." As we ask these things, the Father wants to make himself more real to us through Jesus. And that is not a small thing at all. It actually is the biggest of things, the only thing that can sustain in an experience of vibrant faith for a lifetime.

**Great men and women of God have gone before us in learning to experience this.**

Many of us will read a delightful spiritual classic on this theme during this Leap of Faith, Brother Lawrence's *The Practice of the Presence of God*. Not long after I started following Jesus from atheism, churchgoing friends of my parents gave me a copy. I don't know why, but I assumed it would be dull and sentimental. Instead, it set up a great deal of the course of my life of faith.

Brother Lawrence was not a great leader. He was a low-status, late seventeenth-century French monk whose role in his monastery was cleaning the pots and pans. But he developed what he called "a

continual conversation with God” that proved to be so encouraging and life-giving that people traveled great distances to learn his secret. The short book that resulted—still in print in many editions these centuries later—was not something he wrote. Instead it’s a compilation of a few of his letters and a few short chapters of recollections of conversations with him.

So we hear things like this:

*He had asked to enter a religious order believing that he would be flayed for the clumsy actions and mistakes that he would make there, and in this way would sacrifice his life to God with all its pleasures; but God had fooled him, since he had found only satisfaction. This made him often say to God, “You have deceived me!”*

*He told me that we must establish ourselves in the presence of God by continually conversing with Him. ...(Since accomplishing that,) all his life was utter freedom and a continual rejoicing.*

In this manual, I’ll encourage you to settle on something very important to you that you’d like to ask God for during these next six weeks. But then I’ll also encourage you to pray to experience more of God himself. I’m assuming that, whatever happens with your first prayer, you’d have no objection to receiving a life of “utter freedom and a continual rejoicing.”

### **Our church has been built through BHAGs.**

Some years back I read a slew of books about organizations—because suddenly I was leading an organization and it seemed like a good idea to learn more about how they worked. One very popular book on the subject was called *Built to Last*, by Jim Collins and Jerry Porras. They studied great organizations which had lasted many decades—the IBMs and Disneys of the world. One common trait they saw in each of them was what they called a continual emphasis on “BHAGs” (which they pronounced “bee-hags”)—“Big Hairy Audacious Goals.” These world-class companies continually dared great things, and those great things motivated their people to rally towards more than they thought was possible.

Right away, I and our leaders grabbed hold of that idea. It seemed to us that this had always been true for our church—starting it at *all* had been a BHAG! And it struck us that so many people who’d found their way here *liked* exercising big faith. Maybe we should just make a point to continually do this together, whether any given BHAG “worked out” or not. That seemed like a win, no matter what.

And, in many ways, what we’ve learned through these BHAGs is that—what do you know?—the gift of God is actually *God*. *God* is who makes any meaningful changes in any of our lives.

So, in those hundreds of stories you all passed along my way a month back, this was a big, big theme of whatever good stuff people described finding in our church.

*Kind of tough to put into a simple summary, but basically my life has meaning now since I started coming to the Vineyard from a non-church background.*

*Our walk with God was on life support nine months ago. We were dead. We had come from a bad church experience and were hurt, bruised, and not at all sure that God loved us. We heard messages of God's passionate love, the importance of forgiveness and reconciliation and how God wants to personally bless us by speaking to us and through his Holy Spirit. We were blessed to find a small group where our renewed walk with God could be nourished and encouraged. Thank you! Thank you! Thank you! God is good.*

*I came to Cambridge estranged from God but have reestablished a relationship and am learning to be dependent on his faithfulness every day. My heart is always full of gratitude for finding Vineyard and finding a loving father waiting for his prodigal daughter to return.*

*My experience of the Vineyard for the last five years has been incredibly life-changing. I wandered in one Sunday after seeing an ad on the T, not knowing anyone here, not believing in God, not having set foot in a church in sixteen years. I never stopped coming back. And everything changed for the better since then.*

*Coming to Boston, I was tired of churches/ Christian culture. I had lived that life too long. I didn't want to go to church again. However, I still felt I needed to hear thoughts outside myself, so I somehow found myself coming late, sitting in the back with my coffee every Sunday at the Vineyard. And I listened to thoughts that resonated within me every Sunday. No Christian-ese, no "exclusive worldviews," but instead a love for one's neighbor. And on a personal level, God always seems to be one step ahead—it's often as if on Sunday the message has been tailored for my current state. Long story short: Vineyard has been a key instrument in God becoming real to me again.*

*I was brought up in a church and did not feel much from that. However in my first times at the Vineyard I have felt a huge rush and warmth that I now know to be the Holy Spirit. I feel opened up to love others and to God.*

The best gift God brings turns out to be himself.

And most of our BHAGs have, in the end, boiled down to expanding the possibility of people *experiencing* that God...in, say, an actual, permanent church home...or in another site in Boston...or on the streets of Cambridge...or in other parts of the country.

From many, many conversations, a BHAG for *this* Leap of Faith has become clear. For the last several years, I've heard from what seems like countless people that their non-churchgoing friends would be most open to trying out a church like ours if it met in the evening. They were late-night people on Saturdays and doing *anything* on a Sunday morning was less-than desirable. But the evening was another story.

So we started doing some informal polling among many leaders, the folks who were putting on our Sunday morning services. Almost to a one, they said, “Oh absolutely. If we had an evening service, I’d go to that one.” Which posed a problem, because, again, they were the people *running* our morning services.

So this Leap of Faith, everyone who’s willing will ask God together to empower us to start up a successful evening service that could offer an experience of God to many, many people who aren’t presently experiencing God.

### **So are you game?**

My prayer for **you** during this Leap of Faith is that:

1. You’ll **experience the presence and comfort of God** at a new level.
2. You’ll be encouraged as you **ask God for something important to you**.
3. You’ll see God offer **some surprising new gifts to your six**.
4. You’ll feel **a new level of faith as we all seek God together**.

And my prayer for **our church** this Leap of Faith is that:

1. We’ll **collectively experience faith** in this living and active God **at a new level**.
2. We’ll **joyfully prepare to launch an evening service** that will meet the spiritual needs of hundreds.
3. We’ll find that **hearing God’s voice is commonplace**.

### **What might you actually *do* during this Leap of Faith?**

I’d encourage you to consider doing a number of things this Leap of Faith. I’ll go into detail on these things in the rest of this user’s manual.

1. **Read and pray through Brother Lawrence’s short book *The Practice of the Presence of God*** with your small group.
2. **Daily pray** for several things:
  - a. For **the thing(s) you’re asking God to do for you** during this Leap of Faith.
  - b. That God would **become more real to you each day** during the Leap of Faith.
  - c. That God would **show himself real to each of your six**
  - d. That God would **pave the way for our Leap of Faith BHAG: a joyful launch of an evening service** that would meet the spiritual needs of hundreds.
    - i. That God would **show you your role** in empowering such a thing.
3. **Enjoy the daily Bible guide** on the life of David as he discovers that “the gift of God is God.”
4. **Consider fasting** in some way for the things you’ll be praying for, above.

Let's briefly look at each of these things.

**Read and pray through Brother Lawrence's short book *The Practice of the Presence of God* with your small group.**

Our hope is that this short, very encouraging book will offer you a huge gift during this Leap of Faith, the gift of an immediate, encouraging connection to God. Each moment. This is a bold hope!

I think you'll really enjoy the book if you have a moment to look at it. I've looked at some recent editions of it and I have a couple of suggestions of versions you might read. But you can feel free to find the book, in any edition, at your local library if you'd like, and I think most editions would work fine. And, if you have a Kindle or another e-reader, one of the editions I like is available for a whopping \$0.99.

This Sunday, we'll have a few copies available at our bookstore of:

[\*Practice the Presence of God\*](#), a translation by a missionary to Germany named Jim Johnson. The strengths of this edition are: It's the cheapest of the editions. It's the shortest of them (90 pages with lots of white space on each page). It has the simplest and possibly clearest language. The weakness of this edition you might find to be: It's not the nicest-looking or feeling book. Its simple, clear language isn't the most elegant, artful language. It has minimal information about Brother Lawrence himself.

The other edition I've enjoyed reading, and one that I've been especially studying just this week, is:

[\*The Practice of the Presence of God \(Paraclete Essentials\)\*](#), with a foreword by Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove and a translation by Robert J. Edmonson, CJ. This is a modern Catholic edition. The strengths of this edition are: It has quite a bit of interesting background material on Brother Lawrence. The book itself is a nice, elegant paperback. Its translation is a bit more complex than Johnson's version, but is more artful. The weaknesses of the edition you might find to be: It's longer, with additional text—like a eulogy actually preached at the time of Brother Lawrence's death that I find to add very little (and it's long) and two additional chapters of reflections on Brother Lawrence from the era. It's about \$2 pricier than the other version. However this is the one that has the \$0.99 Kindle version.

But whatever version you read, I'm hopeful you'll get the gist of what Brother Lawrence so powerfully offers.

Can I recommend:

1. That you **participate in a small group** during the Leap of Faith, even if you drop it immediately after Easter?
  - a. I think you'll find that you get much more both from reading Brother Lawrence and from everything else in the Leap of Faith if you experience these things in a small group.
  - b. You can find a listing of our 45 or so small groups at the information kiosk or at our website. Each group listed there would love to welcome you during this Leap of Faith.

2. That you **plan to discuss Brother Lawrence** in your group **during the fourth week** of the Leap of Faith, **the week of April 4?**
  - a. This would give us a target to finish our reading (again, it's pretty short and simple). And it would give us the ability to refer back to Brother Lawrence's insights for the remaining two weeks of the Leap of Faith.

**Daily pray for the thing(s) you're asking God to do for you during this Leap of Faith.**

*A few years ago during the Leap of Faith I was praying for a job—I found one and got it just after the Leap of Faith and it was actually a career-founding job for me.*

*My prayer request for the Leap of Faith last year was for more peace. During the time of prayer and fasting, God taught me a lot about how to trust Him to give me more peace. I realized how I was taking on a lot of worries and trying to solve them in my own strength. I learned how to catch when I was worrying and to give over my worries to God. I'm not stress-free, but I have come a long way and have noticed how my migraines, headaches and chest pains have reduced in number and intensity.*

*At the time of last year's Leap of Faith, I was in the process of studying for my doctoral qualifying exams after having failed them once and having only one more chance to take them. It may seem like a problem of much less importance than other things going on in the world, but it was an incredibly trying experience for me. In the midst of this, I just asked God to help me out somehow through the Leap of Faith. I didn't know what to expect, but I have been so blessed by what came out of that one. By constantly immersing myself in the Word and holding frequent conversation with God, I learned to rely on Him so much. Every day I felt reminded that my brain was no longer enough to sustain me in this life. I am a small person with limited power and God is almighty and my sustainer!*

*A Leap of Faith prayer for me was to have God open up ways for me to be a better friend and wife, to be more relational with those who surround me. Since then, God has shifted the relational paradigm in my life to open my eyes to those around me and to have more energy and patience. Since this, my husband and I have started a neighborhood small group focused just on having faith discussions (loosely following the Seek platform). It's been amazing! And encouraging to think it started with a Leap of Faith prayer.*

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)***

***“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)***

Or, heck, dash over to the Psalms, which are full of shameless *asking*, even for things that we might hesitate being so forward about, like, for instance:

***Please, Lord, please give us success.***

***(Psalm 118:25b)***

***I love the Lord because he hears  
and answers my prayers.***

***Because he bends down and listens,***

***I will pray as long as I have breath!***

***(Psalm 116, 1-2)***

These and other scriptures tell me that God is honored whenever we ask *him* for the things closest to our hearts. Again, the idea is that, if we don't go to him, we *will* go to other sources.

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 next 40 Days? (Maybe there's more than one thing.)*

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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 Leap of Faith in reference to the things you've just written down?

**1) Ask God for these things every day during these next 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!

**3) Consider fasting for these things in some way.**

At the end of this manual, I'll offer some suggestions for what that might look like.

Now please do remember how we began this manual. I'm eager for God to very much give you the things you're praying for! I've experienced some very encouraging next steps in my life through my own prayers during previous Leaps of Faith. But, as you do this, a KEY part of your Leap of Faith will be praying this next prayer.

**Daily pray that God would become more real to you each day during the Leap of Faith.**

This, again, might be our biggest hope for your Leap of Faith, that you'd get the gift of God's real presence through all your highs and lows. If you miss every other aspect of this Leap of Faith, I'd encourage you not to miss this.

**Daily pray that God would show himself real to each of your six.**

*This church has transformed the way I view my responsibility for serving God in helping others come to faith and experience of Jesus. I am both much more awake to my role in collaborating with God in this endeavor in every relationship I'm in and much more free and relaxed in doing so, confident that it doesn't depend on me and my knowledge, but on paying attention to the evidence of God's acting in others preceding my engagement with them.*

*Recently my daughter has opened her heart to Jesus. She had come to the Christmas Eve service. Jesus is healing her of many illnesses. She also accepted a Bible I bought her at the bookstore and she's been reading it. Praise God!*

*I've seen my wife follow Jesus and big changes happen in her life.*

We have a theory that now, happily, has a long track record behind it that seems to bear it out. It's that each of us, whatever our own level of faith in God or lack thereof, knows at least six local people who, best as we can figure out, don't seem to be experiencing much from God. Our theory, additionally, is

that there's a good chance that nobody is praying for these people. So, during each of our Leaps of Faith, we've invited participants to take at least these 40 days to pray each day for their six.

These prayers can take whatever focus seems best to you. My prayers often invite God to make himself real to my six, to encourage them however God sees fit, to remove any blinders over their eyes that might keep them from truly seeing what God is doing around and in them. A friend of mine tells me he prays that God will bless his six at exactly the place they need blessing, and that they'll have a strong sense that they owe those blessings to God. The daily Bible guide will have daily suggestions of how to pray for your six. Pray whatever works for you. But pray each day and see what God does.

Before last year's Leap of Faith, I realized that my six had all moved on and each one was now out of my life. I didn't know who my six should be. God had an intriguing suggestion. I felt God's encouragement to just pray for "my six," not knowing who they were, but believing that God knew. So, feeling foolish, I did that for a week or so, each day, and then, in a flash, I knew who each of the six was. I've kept it up since then, and I've seen some really encouraging things happen with them.

So take a minute to ask God: who are your six?

1) \_\_\_\_\_

2) \_\_\_\_\_

3) \_\_\_\_\_

4) \_\_\_\_\_

5) \_\_\_\_\_

6) \_\_\_\_\_

**Daily pray that God would pave the way for our Leap of Faith BHAG: a joyful launch of an evening service that would meet the spiritual needs of hundreds.**

*I have been able to have community/friends/relationships since becoming a Christian again following a long-term hiatus. Isolation has gone and I now feel love where I couldn't previously.*

You'd think starting an evening service wouldn't be that hard. But you'd be wrong.

Several years ago, I had a provocative conversation with a pastor of a large church in Europe who, hearing about our church, said that he was confident the single most effective choice we could make to empower non-churchgoers in our area to connect with Jesus' benefits would be to start a Sunday night service. He was quite persuasive.

So I started asking around our church. Was this man right? Many of you quickly said you thought he was. So I started working with some of you to see if we could find enough leadership to start such a thing. It wasn't easy, not least because we didn't want to cripple the leadership teams of our existing two services. But, after many months of teasing this out, of figuring out how to balance the competing demands of this proposed new service and the demands of our existing services, we were just about ready to launch. And then the tenuous team we had in place fell apart. People moved and suddenly it looked like it could work if, on my own, I could preach, make the coffee, play all the instruments on the worship team, do the slides and pass out the programs. So no service.

Our department heads worked hard on this dilemma earlier this year and came up with a different plan. It too seemed like it was only one or two small steps from working. But those one or two steps turned out to be bigger ones than we could cross.

Meanwhile I found myself in an *increased* number of conversations with many of you about this. Literally, one of you would ask, "Dave, have you ever thought about starting an evening service?" And I'd have to hold myself back from responding, "If you only knew..."

And so it finally crossed our minds: This is Leap of Faith territory. If this is really something on God's heart for us, it will take more than the power of my prayers or the staff's prayers. It will take the faith of all of us.

So, if this opportunity grabs you at all, could I ask you to pray daily for this during the Leap of Faith? I'd like to see if all of our prayers would be enough to fill the so-called "Bowl of Prayers" (in the Revelation 8:3-5 sense) for this. If by some chance God would open up this opportunity and it were indeed to be a great gift to hundreds of people who otherwise wouldn't be exploring God, I can only imagine the joyful celebration we'd all feel. *We had a part in that! I prayed for that! Wow!*

Now there is a part 2 to this section.

- **Daily pray that God would show you your role in empowering such a thing.**

Were this to happen and were this to take off in the way we're dreaming of, two things would have to happen at this point.

First, God would have to do it. It's beyond our power, evidently. That's why I'm so excited for those of you who will be praying for this.

But, second, we'll need to rally as a whole community. It will have to capture our hearts profoundly and collectively.

Because perhaps our central problem is people. We'll need both folks who'd be thrilled to be part of a launch team for this and also folks to joyfully join Sunday *morning* teams. Why, you ask, would we need more people helping out on Sunday *morning*? Because many people currently on Sunday morning teams would be eager to switch over to making a Sunday evening service happen. But if they leave and no one replaces them, hello collapse of the morning services.

So I'd love, as you pray for this, for you to ask God: How excited should I be about this possibility? Should we pursue this BHAG as a church? Might we see many more people encounter Jesus if we do this?

And so, **on the fifth week of the Leap of Faith**, we'll see what our collective faith for this is telling us. We'll check in and see if we have both the faith for this and the eager buy-in of our whole congregation. If so, I think we'll be quite a powerful force in getting this service underway. **(For what it's worth, one group just contacted us asking if they could bring 500 young adults to an evening service at our church in late August to see if our church might be able to meet the needs of many of them. I'm just saying...)**

**Enjoy the daily Bible guide on the life of David as he discovers that “the gift of God is God.”**

Among the most-popular aspects of each Leap of Faith is a daily Bible guide that Brian Housman and a team put together. This year we'll follow our focus as we look at the life of David together. You should have received the first week's guide with this manual on the first Sunday of the Leap of Faith. After that, they'll be available in the back or online. This is always one of my favorite parts of the experience.

**Consider fasting in some way for the things you'll be praying for, above.**

*Last year during the Leap of Faith, I learned the value of fasting! I am such a food person. I never wanted to fast, but I did. Now I feel God pulling me closer, meeting me, answering prayers through the fasting and prayer that I have done since that time.*

*I decided to fast from caffeine and found out that I could get up in the morning better. So, although my prayers weren't answered, I've had a wonderful year after decaffeinating myself. Mornings are no longer painful and sleep comes much easier.*

As you pursue these things, you might want to **consider fasting in some way**—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.

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. If you participate in this year's 40 Days, you're hoping for profound vision for your *life*. That sounds like “fast territory” to me.

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. Most people find themselves **fasting from one or two particular things**, like caffeine or desserts. However many people are helped by more-aggressive choices. So, for 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. You can also feel free to call our church office for more suggestions about fasting.)

***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?

Again, 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 (again, with desserts or sugar or caffeine being popular favorites) to something more challenging, like the so-called **“Daniel fast,”** which involves 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. Or **computer games**. Or **catalogues**. Or whatever you’d notice.

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 from *criticism*!

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 this Leap of Faith?" category. So, for instance, during one 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.

### **So there you have it: the battle plan for this year's Leap of Faith!**

I'll pray for you that you'll have as powerful an experience of connecting to God as you've yet had. May you find at least a taste of that Brother Lawrence "utter freedom and continual rejoicing." Here's to a great next six weeks for you!

**The Gift of God is God: Leap of Faith 2011**

**My fast (if any) will be from:**

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**My daily prayer(s) for myself are:**

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**My daily “gift of God is God” prayer for myself is:**

- That God would become ever more real to me every day of the Leap of Faith

**My daily prayer for my church is:**

- For a vibrant, well-attended, growing evening service to be in place by the fall

**My six are:**

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_\_

6. \_\_\_\_\_