

40 DAYS OF FAITH 2005
The User's Manual

Welcome to the Hero's Journey!

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This will be our third time together as a church looking to see what God might do for us individually and collectively during the time that's traditionally called "Lent," the six weeks before Easter. Though I didn't go to any church until later in life, I'm aware that Lent historically has been a time for followers of Jesus to take time to recalibrate their lives towards the things God can bless. And the hope is that Easter, which closes out the Lenten season, will be a time of "resurrecting," of bringing to life, or *back* to life, things which will take your life awesomely forward.

And some pretty fun things have happened for folks during our first two Lenten 40 Days! People have found spouses and jobs and windfalls of money. People have gotten clarity on their purpose in life. People have prayed for friends to experience a rich, life-changing faith...and those friends *have*! So we've become fans! And we thought we'd give it another go starting this week (if the week you're reading it happens to be the week of February 13).

What are the dreams of 40 Days of Faith?

Let me detail some for **you** and some for all of us together in **this church**.

My prayers for you during the 40 days:

- 1) *That you'd experience at least one concrete gift from God.*
- 2) *That you'd experience an ever-deeper joy of finding your purpose in God's work on earth.*
- 3) *That you'd grow spiritually as much as you have in any other 40 day period of your life.*
- 4) *That you'd see God work in a fresh way in the life of someone you love.*

My prayers for our church during the 40 days:

- 1) *That we'll come to a new level of faith for what God could do in and through us as a community.*
- 2) *That God will pour fresh life into our church at every level, from Sundays on down.*
- 3) *That God will spiritually prepare the way for hundreds of people to find their way to him shortly after we move into our new facility.*
- 4) *That God would grow a new passion in many of us for how we could be key players in his purposes for greater Boston.*

Some thoughts on why you like movies (or novels or TV or stories your grandfather told you)

A couple years back I shared with some of you sort of a quirky thought that was interesting me. You may recall that I've written some plays and have started writing novels. As I was studying up on that, I got really taken with an observation that C.S. Lewis and J.R.R.

Tolkien made about stories, and that recent people like Joseph Campbell (who, granted, pretty much hated hated hated anything to do with faith in Jesus...but, nonetheless, he was on the same page with Lewis and Tolkien on this point) also made. They argued that pretty much all people at all times in all settings have had one common myth—a hero myth which has lots of common characteristics. What was one to make of that? they all wondered. Lewis and Tolkien, noticing another common ancient myth, made an intriguing conjecture. They noticed that many, many ancient cultures had a harvest myth, where a harvest god would die—much like a seed dies—and then would be resurrected with each new crop. Lewis, before coming to faith in Jesus, rejected the story of Jesus as being just another example of this myth. Tolkien presented another possibility—that God had implanted that myth in every culture to prepare every culture for what he called the “myth become fact,” of Jesus. He asked Lewis whether to him, the gospel seemed like a myth or seemed like actual history. Lewis answered honestly that it felt like history—no myth had ever felt like the gospel story felt. And, later that day, he realized he did in fact believe in Jesus, the “myth become fact” whose way had been prepared in all cultures by God his Father.

So what about this hero myth? I actually read a book about it—two books in fact (one much more scholarly). Why does pretty much every culture in *all* eras include a hero myth with very common elements. Why does that myth continue to this *day*, mostly intact in almost all particulars, in infinite movies. Why have we as humans been telling ourselves the same story over and over and over for our entire history?

Well, just asking, what if God himself implanted that story in each culture to tell us something profound about ourselves and about the human condition? What if God intends for each of us to take that hero's role in our own journey? What if, if we do, we'll find out why we've been created, find out more about the actual stakes of the world around us (which always happens in every hero's journey—Frodo didn't know what was *really* going on in Middle Earth until he started on his quest)? What if this journey is intended to apply—probably with a fair amount of customization—to men and women, teens and senior citizens, dads and moms? What if that's why we like movies (or sports)—because we're vicariously watching our own destinies played out rather than fully playing them out ourselves?

I told some of you about a catalyzing moment for me in thinking about this. I was watching this bomb animated film of a few years back, *Sinbad: Legend of the Seven Seas*, with one of my sons, then six. (Seriously—apparently *Sinbad* was one of the biggest money losers of any movie that year, despite—or perhaps because of!—voice talents like Brad Pitt and Catherine Zeta-Jones.) Anyway, I thought it was awesome, and realized right away that it was classic hero myth stuff. These guys had read the same books and myths that I had. The screenwriter was the same guy who wrote *Gladiator*, another classic hero myth movie. After the movie, my son—who was so totally struck by the experience that he was actually shaking a little bit—turned to me, looked me in the eye, and said, “Dad, will you teach me to be a hero?” This stuff cuts pretty deep!

So this 40 Days, I've sweet-talked our staff into focusing a bit on my son's question. Does God have a hero's journey for you that is what your whole life has always been intended to be about? Might it be fun to focus a bit on this together?

A conversation versus a product

I'm praying that these 40 Days will be astounding for you! I'm praying that they'll be astounding for *me*! I want your hopes and expectations to be sky high! Why *not* believe that God will use this to focus you squarely on his will for you and then validate that by giving you some things you've really been hoping that he might give you (or maybe haven't even quite had the faith to *hope* that he'd give you)! This is one of the great and unique qualities of doing this experience together, so can we agree that we'll believe for this together?

That said, we've thought we might go a little lower tech this year. We've had glossy publications and some pretty specific means by which we've hoped you'd be helped or changed by virtue of doing these things. This year—while we'll have some of those, which I'll tell you about in a minute—we've more thought of this as a conversation we all might have together rather than a “product” that we're hoping will be produced in each other. We're wondering if a lot of how God works is by way of drawing us into lots of great conversations with people we love and respect. Conversations often don't have “products,” but many of them *do* take our lives entirely unexpected places. And if we have an interesting conversation that *doesn't* quite do that...well, at least we've had an interesting conversation and that's not half bad.

So one of our senior staff people, deeply excited after a rip-roaring conversation on the hero's journey and how it might apply to his and others' lives, asked me if I could pin down what exactly this journey was supposed to do for us and how exactly it would do that. And my answer was nuanced: “No,” was the first part of my answer. “I'm sorta hoping the conversation will have its own dynamic and take us someplace great, but I guess we'll find out together.”

But, deep down, what do I think this hero's journey stuff could do? That's something I'll only say very softly and you have to promise not to tell, because it's wacky. But I can wonder if the hero's journey is God's specific invitation to all of us to join in with his great task of widespread spiritual revival...leading, I suppose, to the end of the world and the beginning of his heavenly kingdom. But what do I know? That's why it's a conversation.

So what sorts of things might this 40 Day conversation involve?

Lots of great stuff! And, I suppose, a little *less* great stuff than years past—by design (“a conversation, not a product”—keep saying that to yourself).

But let me start us out by focusing us on three questions that have helped us out in each of the 40 Days, although in slightly different forms. These, I hope, will be your friends during these 40 Days.

- 1) **What do you want Jesus to do for you?**
- 2) **What do you want Jesus to do for your 6?**
- 3) **What do you want Jesus to do for your church (and your city)?**

What do you want Jesus to do for you?

We get all sorts of scriptures suggesting that Jesus is looking to prove himself to us as we ask him for things we really want! Let me, off the top of my head, give you a few of these. (All of these scriptures will be from the New Living Translation.)

"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)

"Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing. Anyone who parts from me is thrown away like a useless branch and withers. Such branches are gathered into a pile to be burned. But if you stay joined to me and my words remain in you, you may ask any request you like, and it will be granted!" (John 15:5-7)

"You have sorrow now, but I will see you again; then you will rejoice, and no one can rob you of that joy. At that time you won't need to ask me for anything. The truth is, you can go directly to the Father and ask him, and he will grant your request because you use my name. You haven't done this before. Ask, using my name, and you will receive, and you will have abundant joy." (John 16:22-24)

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:

*Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love,
so we may sing for joy to the end of our lives.
Give us gladness in proportion to our former misery!
Replace the evil years with good.
Let us see your miracles again;
let our children see your glory at work.
And may the Lord our God show us his approval
and make our efforts successful.
Yes, make our efforts successful! (Psalm 90:14-17)*

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!
...What can I offer the Lord
for all he has done for me?
...I will offer you a sacrifice of thanksgiving
and call on the name of the Lord. (Ps. 116:1-2,12,17, NLT)*

These and other scriptures tell me that God is honored whenever we get in touch with what we really want and ask him for it. Now, certainly, there's more context behind each of these scriptures. Are there any specific sorts of things to ask for that are being talked about here? Well, maybe. But for our purposes, I'm entirely confident they *also* mean we should go to God asking for the things we really want. The idea is that, if we don't go to him, we *will* go to other sources.

So what do you want Jesus to do for you?

What would encourage you as a gift from God during these 40 days? I recently heard from a group of women who, two years ago during the 40 Days, asked God for husbands. None were dating at the end of the 40 Days...and then, only a few months later, each had met the man they would marry.

Two years ago during the 40 Days, the thing I asked God for was a literary agent for this novel I'd written. It's very hard to *get* a top literary agent for fiction. The numbers I read were something like for every 400 novels written, one is published. I didn't get a literary agent. But, just after the 40 Days, I *did* start a relationship with one of New York's top literary agencies. They liked my book quite a bit, but felt I'd made one key mistake in it. They asked to see other work, which I gave them and they were enthused over, and they've continued the relationship, helping guide what sort of book I write. And my other novel *did* end up getting a small publishing run. So, hey, there are no guarantees, but many people *do* find this a very helpful question to ask, if only to put themselves in a position to learn about prayer and discover a God who's eager to show himself real to us.

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?

First, 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!

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 (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!

Third, when you see answers to these two things, tell me, either by e-mailing me at mail@cambridgevineyard.org or by filling out a testimony card on Sunday.

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—most particularly "in the sanctuary," where God's people come to worship. Let me 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 108:3 (and Psalm 57:9)—"*I will thank you, Lord, in front of all the people.*"

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 73:28—"*I will tell everyone about the wonderful things you do.*"

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 unfailing love and faithfulness.*"

The psalms also teach us that, if we *don't* do this, if we don't speak out to about actual things God does for us, then those things will fade in our memory and we'll ultimately *forget* them! It seems that God's one central purpose in the Bible is that his "name" would be known throughout the earth. His "name" here is, essentially, "the God who does great things for those who call on his name." (One representative scripture would be Habakkuk 2:14—*But the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD—everyone would know that he does great stuff for people who trust him!—as the waters cover the sea.*) So when we tell others—even the whole congregation on occasion—about whatever great thing God has done for us, we're then participating in his ultimate occupation on earth!

So, *whenever* God does something wonderful for you, always tell all your friends, and always tell *us* (if you're still in this church!).

What do you want Jesus to do for your 6?

It seems that a big part of how God can give us great lives comes as we see him do great things, through us, towards other people.

In Mark 4, Jesus tells his very first parable, his very first story intending to show us something significant about faith in him. He's talking about the effect that genuine faith in him should have on responsive people (and being responsive is a good thing in this parable—its opposite is death!). Responsive people are called "good soil" on the terms of the parable. Here's what he says about all of the soils, good and bad:

The seed (representing faith in Jesus) that fell on the hard path represents those who hear the message, but then Satan comes at once and takes it away from them. The rocky soil represents those who hear the message and receive it with joy. But like young plants in such soil, their roots don't go very deep. At first they get along fine, but they wilt as soon as they have problems or are persecuted because they believe the word. The thorny ground represents those who hear and accept the Good News, but all too quickly the message is crowded out by the cares of this life, the lure of wealth, and the desire for nice things, so no crop is produced. But the good soil represents those who hear and accept God's message and produce a huge harvest—thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times as much as had been planted. (Mark 4:15-20)

Maybe you identify a bit with one of the other soils, which is a helpful thing to note! If we notice this about ourselves, that becomes a great thing to pray about and ask for help with.

But you'll also notice that good soil, truly responsive people, can expect to "produce a huge harvest"—30, 60 or a hundred times as much as we ourselves represent! You can understand this in terms of plants: healthy plants are usually seed-producing, and so they produce a lot *more* healthy plants. For *people*, this seems to mean that healthy, responsive followers of Jesus can expect to produce a lot more healthy, responsive followers of Jesus.

This observation—not a new one for most veteran followers of Jesus—can freak us out a bit. It seems intimidating! But, interestingly, most veteran followers of Jesus I know who *are* intimidated by this say something else interesting at the same time. They say that their deepest dreams in life have something to do with this being true in their lives. We all want lives that matter.

So we've been trying something out as a church over the last few years as a means of inviting God into this all-important but often-intimidating part of following him. We've called it:

Praying for your 6.

The hope is that you know and love *at least* 6 people (you're certainly allowed to have more) who live right here in the Boston area, people that you'd really love to see

experience Jesus's goodness and power in their lives in ways that really haven't, so far as you can tell, been true for them to date. Maybe you're not entirely sure what that you've experienced Jesus's goodness and power *yourself*! Can I encourage you to pray in this fashion for your 6 friends as well? After all who *wouldn't* want to see Jesus concretely bless 6 of our friends, if such a thing were possible? And you may well get some of the answers *you've* been looking for along the way!

And it's pretty fun to meet folks who were once included in someone's 6! I have a new friend who vividly talks about how she wasn't consciously pursuing the things of Jesus at all, but these friends of hers were praying for her as one of their 6...and things started to happen for her, good things, things which are picking up momentum now!

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, New Life Church in Colorado Springs, encourages their people to pray. Here's 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 the spirit that blinds their minds.**
(2 Corinthians 4:4)
- 3) **Loose the Spirit of adoption (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) **Loose the Spirit of wisdom and revelation on them so they may know God better.**
(Ephesians 1:17)

Having prayed that, let's specifically pray that each of your 6 would join us for our Easter service! (We'll pray for our 6 in small groups as well during the 40 Days.) Common 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 just under 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! (And you'll hear more about this in your small group.)

So! Who are your 6?

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____
- 4) _____
- 5) _____
- 6) _____

What do you want Jesus to do for your church (and your city)?

Here's something odd and wonderful about this church.

Most of you all are transplants. (For instance, *I'm* a transplant!) That's one of the great gifts of living in Cambridge or greater Boston—you can meet people from anywhere! So a lot of you came here for school or a new job. With that comes lots of expectations, like you're just here until your schooling is done or for a few years on your job, and then you'll go back to your *real* home.

For those of you for whom that's exactly what happens, God bless you! My big dream for you will be that you take something profound from your time with us as you go back to your "real home." Maybe you'll even plant a brand new church back in your real home, and we'd love to help! Or maybe you'll just go back as an agent of God's Kingdom in a way that never would have crossed your mind before your time with us. If so, that's just the greatest thing ever and it warms my heart and makes me really happy we planted this church in the first place. Man alive, it'd be just great if thousands of people returned to their homes all over the world after a significant connection with us that hopefully made a difference for them and, here's hoping, could even make a difference in that home town.

But a lot of you who are assuming that you'll be here for a few years and then head back to your "real home" are, I believe, in for a surprise! Because I believe you'll discover that it was no accident that God brought you here, and it *wasn't* primarily about your schooling or your new job! It was about connecting with this church. That was God's plan for you all along!

And, for what it's worth, if you talk to about two dozen of the most prominent prophets in the U.S., they'll tell you the same thing: as they pray, they believe God wants to start his next great wave of his spirit in Boston, Massachusetts. And if you ask a handful of those great prophets to clarify, they'll tell you that, more specifically, it will be in Cambridge. One of those famous prophetic men actually moved his whole ministry from outside of

Dallas to New England because, among other reasons, he wanted to be as close as he could when God's revival hit. And he specifically praises our congregation to the skies when he gets the chance. One common thread among praying people in Boston is that God's revival here will include hundreds of people he sends from outside Boston who will be crucial to what he wants to do here. Picking up any common themes here?

So if only for these 40 Days, I'm believing God that he'll give you a profound passion for what he might do here in greater Boston, that you'll find yourself caring and praying more than you ever expected to—again, if only for these 40 Days.

So each day during the 40 Days, could you:

- 1) **Ask God to pour out his spirit on greater Boston and bring spiritual revival.**
- 2) **Tell God that, so long as you're in the area, you'd love to take a role in that spiritual revival!**
- 3) **Ask God if you're called to stay in Boston longer than you've anticipated.**
- 4) **Ask God to pour out his spirit on our church to empower us to be a part of that spiritual revival.**
- 5) **Ask God to use our moving into our new building to reach hundreds of new people.**

And then, having done that, jot down any ways he's speaking to you about greater Boston. Get it on paper!

How the hero's journey fits in

God willing, we'll be talking about this at some length in sermons and at least on one of our two retreats, but let me give you a feel for this.

The classic hero myth involves a "reluctant hero." He lives in what, to him or her, is the ordinary world, the world that's everything he knows. Little does she know that that world is actually in dire jeopardy, and that she'll be called upon to take tremendous risks to battle that threat and return with the special gift that will heal this ordinary world of hers. (If you're familiar with *The Lord of the Rings*, think Frodo in the Shire, unaware of the

tremendous storm of evil that's on the verge of sweeping over the whole planet.) A call to adventure comes our hero's way. (Gandalf tells Frodo the significance of the ring, and that Frodo himself must be the ring bearer.) Our hero—much like Moses, as we'll see in the awesome Moses study Brian Housman is putting together for this—says “No way! Send someone else!” But often a mentor helps her past those initial obstacles. (Gandalf to Frodo, God the Father to Moses.) Often a “threshold guardian” pops up about now (the black riders, Pharaoh) to throw an obstacle in the way of our hero's destiny to cross out of the ordinary world into a “special world,” where he doesn't know any of the rules and will have to improvise constantly. (The world outside the shire. The desert.) But ultimately our hero does indeed cross the first threshold into the special world. (Crossing the Brandywine River into Bree. Crossing the Red Sea into the desert.) He faces tests and finds surprising allies and new enemies. (The tests are too many to list here in each case, but, in terms of allies and new enemies: the fellowship versus Saruman; Jethro and Joshua and Caleb versus the Edomites and the Israelites themselves.) Midway along, she approaches an “inmost cave” that embodies some of her deepest-held fears, and indeed she faces an ordeal there that might all-but kill her or *actually* kill her. (Shelob's Lair. Perhaps for Moses it's returning from Mount Sinai with the Ten Commandments only to discover the people worshipping a golden calf.) Then there's some kind of resurrection and reward, ultimately followed by a journey back home to the formerly-ordinary world to which you bring an “elixir”—the thing that will heal your land. (Perhaps it's the newfound courage and warrior spirit of the returning hobbits—now they can repel enemies from the Shire! And perhaps it's the Law for Moses.)

(Take these illustrations only as suggestions. We'll talk about both examples more before the 40 Days are over.)

So here's what we're wondering—or perhaps proposing!

You're called into special world for God, a world that will seem strange to you where you'll need to improvise constantly. You're on a great quest which only you can fulfill and which has huge—if currently veiled—stakes for you and people you love. But to say yes to that call is a scary thing. There will probably be real suffering that you wouldn't face if you just stayed in the Shire, in the ordinary world. Saying yes will mean going into a world where you don't know the rules, where you're constantly forced to improvise. But there's an unseen battle raging around you and you have a key role to play in that battle. And what if that hero's journey, despite its difficulties, despite the nearly-irresistible urge to stay where it's familiar, is what you've been created for, what will call out qualities in you that you'd never see any other way, what—for all its hardships and challenges—would bring the satisfaction you've been created to experience?

So this will be some of the conversation we'll be having during these 40 Days. Maybe it will be a life-changer for some of you! Or maybe it'll be interesting but won't suggest anything immediate. Either way, our hope is that it at the very least will be a provocative addition to your experience with God during this season!

Some final things you might consider:

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. 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. 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. This can involve anything from giving up some beloved food item for a time (desserts being a popular favorite—I 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.

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 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.

2) Study the life of Moses each day.

Brian Housman has put together a 40 day look at the life of Moses that I think you’ll find just gripping. He’s also done it from the perspective of Moses’s life as a hero’s journey. Our hope is both that you’ll encounter God from one of the most pivotal stories in the Bible, but also that you’ll get fresh perspective on how your

life might fit into God's hero's journey. How are you called to be the hero of your own life? Our hope is that this will help you with that question.

3) Join a small group, if only for the 40 Days.

The most powerful spiritual experiences—and we're hoping this will prove to be one for you!—almost always happen when we do them with other people. Jesus directly tells us that this will be true when he says:

"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. For where two or three gather together because they are mine, I am there among them." (Matthew 18:19-20, NLT)

Our small groups will focus on elements of the 40 Days each week—and, hopefully, will ask God together to *do* this good stuff for each other, and then God will *do* it! I'm entirely confident that your experience of the 40 Days will be more powerful if you're in a small group than if you're doing it on your own.

We have small group brochures in the lobby on Sundays, or you can check them out at our website (www.cambridgevineyard.org). Any group listed there would be eager to have you. Call our office (617-252-0005) if you're looking for suggestions!

So there you have it!

This year's 40 Days of faith. I'll try to summarize things on the sheet that follows. Here's to a great and memorable next six weeks of your life!

40 DAYS OF FAITH 2005

My prayers for you during the 40 days:

- 1) That you'd experience at least one concrete gift from God.
- 2) That you'd experience an ever-deeper joy of finding your purpose in God's work on earth.
- 3) That you'd grow spiritually as much as you have in any other 40 day period of your life.
- 4) That you'd see God work in a fresh way in the life of someone you love.

My prayers for our church during the 40 days:

- 1) That we'll come to a new level of faith for what God could do in and through us as a community.
- 2) That God will pour fresh life into our church at every level, from Sundays on down.
- 3) That God will spiritually prepare the way for hundreds of people to find their way to him shortly after we move into our new facility.
- 4) That God would grow a new passion in many of us for how we could be key players in his purposes for greater Boston.

3 QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

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

- o Ask God for this every day during the 40 days.
- o Tell someone else what you wrote down and ask *them* to pray for you about this too.
- o When you see answers to these two things, tell me, either by e-mailing me at mail@cambridgevineyard.org or by filling out a testimony card on Sunday.

What do you want Jesus to do for your 6 during the 40 Days?

Who are your 6?

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____
- 4) _____
- 5) _____
- 6) _____

➤ Pray daily for each of your 6.

1) Pray that the Father would draw them to Jesus.

(John 6:44)

2) Bind the spirit that blinds their minds.

(2 Corinthians 4:4)

3) Loose the Spirit of adoption (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) Loose the Spirit of wisdom and revelation on them so they may know God better.

(Ephesians 1:17)

➤ Pray that they'd accept your invitation to join you at our Easter service.

What do you want Jesus to do for your church (and your city)?

Each day during the 40 Days, could you:

- 1) Ask God to pour out his spirit on greater Boston and bring spiritual revival.
- 2) Tell God that, so long as you're in the area, you'd love to take a role in that spiritual revival!
- 3) Ask God if you're called to stay in Boston longer than you've anticipated.
- 4) Ask God to pour out his spirit on our church to empower us to be a part of that spiritual revival.
- 5) Ask God to use our moving into our new building to reach hundreds of new people.

Some final things you might consider:

- 1) Consider fasting in some way.
- 2) Study the life of Moses each day.
- 3) Join a small group, if only for the 40 Days.
- 4) Go to the church retreat!