

A NEW MIRACLE

40 Days of Faith 2006

*And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth."
(Genesis 1:28a, ESV)*

Dave Schmelzer

A New Miracle!

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You all are nuts!

I say that in the best sense of the word.

You might or might not know this, but you have become closely watched by lots of people. I was at the Vineyard National Leadership Meetings a few weeks back, and every time I saw someone's eye linger on me a beat longer than normal, usually folks I didn't know, I came to expect them to approach me and say something like this (these are real quotes, give or take):

"How much money did you all raise for your building again?"

(This from a national leader.) *"You all are the talk of the whole Vineyard. You won't believe how often your name comes up."*

"Could you take a minute and explain to me how you all have grown so quickly? Particularly in an urban area? And in a blue state?"

"Tell your wife thanks for me." (When asked what I should be thanking her for.) "I stole her whole sermon last week."

"How have you managed to become so ethnically diverse?"

I'll talk a bit more about this before we're done with this user's manual, I hope not in the sense of self-congratulation, but to emphasize that you're in the middle of something—and are creating something—that, in my frame of reference, is truly extraordinary. And to whatever degree that's true, it's taken unprecedented sacrifice and commitment, vision, passion, shocking cheerfulness, patience, leadership, boldness, perseverance and—most of all, *faith* from you. I've had to dabble in one or two of those things myself, as has Grace, as has our outstanding staff, but the great bulk of it has come from you.

A lot of the surges forward that we've experienced in our brief existence (eight years this Easter) have happened during our last three 40 Days of Faith. During these times, together we've taken a breath and dived headfirst into a sea of faith, believing together for great things for our church, our city, our friends whom we don't sense are experiencing the great benefits of God, and also ourselves.

I took a little survey about a month ago in which I asked those of you at the services to take a minute and jot down answers to prayer you've personally experienced during past 40 Days of Faiths, and a few hundred of you did. I also, maybe just to make myself feel good, asked you all to jot down any ways in general you feel your life has improved as a result of joining in with this church, and a few hundred of you took me up on that as well. It seems selfish of me to hoard those utterly inspiring stories, so I'll pepper this user's guide with a few quotes from

that survey. And I did edit a bit both for length and to smooth out some of the specifics in a few stories so that they could be shared more widely. But, to kick us off, for instance:

Here are some answers to prayer I've received to previous 40-days-of-faith prayers:

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.*

Our first 40 Days of Faith was in 2003, and its theme was *Jesus is Really Good!* It sounds sort of like something a bright second-grader might say, doesn't it? And yet... my goodness, it's true! *Jesus is really good!* Like, for instance:

Here are some ways my experience here has made a difference in my life:

Completely changed my life.

- *Provided me hope and introduced me to a God I really didn't know or understand.*
- *Allowed me to experience miracles. I've been a part of God healing a woman of cancer.*
- *Experience a relationship in reality with God, not the distant feeling I had previously.*
- *Introduced to good friends.*
- *Me before: No friends, into pornography, broken marriage, horribly burdened at work, can't sleep at night, detached from my own emotions, complete lack of hope for the future, favorite saying (no joke): "every day is worse than the one before."*

Me after: Great friends, incredible hope, sexually pure, conversations with my creator, sleep eight hours a night, improved relationship with my now ex-wife, have seen my

daughter, mother and sister accept Jesus, seeking God's will in my life and know He will fulfill it.

Jesus flat-out changes lives! He's eager to do that for everyone on the planet... and then to *keep* changing our lives year in and year out, in times when we're amazed at the dazzling pace of his gifts to us, and in times where we're having trouble even *remembering* an answered prayer ever in our experience even once. He's right there for us in both cases.

40 Days of Faith is a time to focus faith as a whole church about things that matter to us:

- *Individually*
- *Collectively*
- *And as residents of this great city*

So, for instance, along with the individual stuff, during that first 40 days we did our best to walk in faith together that God would do something truly miraculous: ***find us a building of our own and provide us with the funds with which to purchase it.***

Let me give you a sense of the scope of the boldness of that faith journey.

We'd need, for instance, to raise at least four times our annual budget just for a down payment, while not—of course—diminishing our normal operating budget as we did this. I mean, think about that. I met with a group of pastors of larger churches in New England just before we launched into the time and told them about it. When I was done, one of the three pastors who was listening to me said, "I hate to put it this way, but it's hopeless." That seemed severe, but I asked him to fill that out. "Well," he said, "you're a very young congregation. (*True. Our average age is still just under 30—though we do have folks in all stages of life!*) That means that, while you've got lots of smart people in your church, they haven't yet become captains of industry. They're graduate students or on their first jobs. And let me give you a sense of the scope of what you're looking at. A church in the richest county in America, whose congregation *is* filled with captains of industry, took an offering for a new building awhile back. They raised a million dollars in cash and several million in pledges over three years, about what you'll have to do. That was an incredible offering! One of the best in American church history! And they additionally at the time had about 5,000 people coming on the average Sunday. You have about 700! (*Which was our size at the time; at this point we run about 1,000.*) Their average giver gave \$6,900 over three years, a huge amount! I want to be nice about this," he concluded, "but you have no chance."

So. That was daunting, and I went back to our staff and some leaders and passed that wisdom on. But we felt as though we had little choice. While it was awesome meeting in local schools, as we had for our whole history, we were now meeting in the largest available local school space, and we were running three services, along with countless midweek gatherings. It wasn't clear we could ask them for any more than that, and we'd had a scare earlier that year when it appeared the school would be consolidated with another school, and a whole new administration would be brought in—one that, in all likelihood, wouldn't take as kindly to offering so incredibly much to this crazy church.

So we went forward. And you all gave a million dollars that first Sunday and pledged another three million over the next three years (adding in still another million a short time later). The

average giver gave, take a breath, \$22,000 over the three years! Two weeks after the 40 days ended, we got a call about this Catholic cathedral for sale on the other side of Cambridge that, while a mind-stretcher for us, would actually cost dramatically less than other spaces we were looking at (granted, they all seemed to be coming in at about twenty million dollars, so it wouldn't take much to be less than those). So suddenly our huge 40 days faith dream was upon us: a home to call our own, and the funds with which to purchase it.

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.

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

Faith. It's great...and sometimes challenging!

I'll be honest. Not everyone loves 40 Days of Faith. And you know why? Because it often forces us face down into the most painful aspects of our lives! No *kidding* not everyone loves this!

For lots of us, reading all these inspiring answers to prayer is mostly *hard*. Because *we've* prayed for things that matter to *us* every bit as much as those things matter to *those* people, and we haven't seen a thing in response! How should we *interpret* that?

Here's an image I've shared with many of you that has really helped me. Be warned that it's just an image! It's taken from this wacky book at the end of the Bible called Revelation. Revelation is chock-full of intense visions and is often, understandably, interpreted impressionistically. So I'm not suggesting these images "mean" what has been so helpful for me from them. But I *am* suggesting that they *suggest* this meaning. And that's been enough to super-help me and lots of my friends. Maybe you as well.

*And as he took the scroll, the four living beings and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp, and they held gold bowls filled with incense – the prayers of God's people!
(Revelation 5:8, NLT)*

*Then another angel with a gold incense burner came and stood at the altar. And a great quantity of incense was given to him to mix with the prayers of God's people, to be offered on the gold altar before the throne. The smoke of the incense, mixed with the prayers of the saints, ascended up to God from the altar where the angel had poured them out. Then the angel filled the incense burner with fire from the altar and threw it down upon the earth; and thunder crashed, lightning flashed, and there was a terrible earthquake.
(Revelation 8:3-5, NLT)*

Imagine that each thing you pray about has a bowl ready for it in heaven. And that each time you pray, your prayer goes into that bowl. And that, when the bowl is full, shazam!, great power is released and things change for the better. And that each bowl is a different size: healing, say, my caffeine-headache might have a smaller bowl than achieving peace in the Middle East. But both *have* bowls, and every prayer for each of them counts.

All to say, it does take perseverance as we pray for things that matter to us. I believe that your (and my) prayers for things we really want have all been heard. But some bowls are bigger than others. The blessing many people find in the 40 Days is that we tend to fill the bowls a lot faster than we would otherwise do.

And, of course, God might have different things in mind for us than whatever it is we're praying for. Had God answered my intense prayers in my era when I was a playwright, I would not have participated in starting this church, and I'm so very glad I didn't miss out on that.

So one thing we're looking for during the 40 Days is ***closeness to God our Father*** one way or another, a kind of closeness that can help us in every aspect of our lives, when our prayers are being answered, and when they seem not to be. Either way.

I had not been to church in over 15 years and felt throughout my 20s that there was something missing. When I first walked into the Vineyard, I immediately felt home. It felt great to be in a worshipping community again and I loved the sermons. My faith in God has become so strong and is now a factor in everything I do. I have never been happier and more fulfilled and I thank God every day for leading me to the Vineyard!

One year ago last January, I ran into a girl who invited me into her church, The Vineyard. I came at first apprehensively, but slowly let my guard down and got to know people. The Vineyard has brought me from a life of depression and loneliness to a life full of love and happiness.

I am a totally different person since I began to follow Jesus here.

A New Miracle!

Perhaps you won't be shocked to know that our dreams in God have not ended now that we have an awesome building of our own.

In fact, if you've looked at our website or attended our Vineyard 101 class, you know that we have a bushel full of big dreams, dreams that we feel God has put on our heart. So we dream of 10,000 wonderful people of all races and classes attending here each weekend and 200 new church plants coming from us in the next fifteen years or so and a 24/7 round-the-clock center for prayer and worship and being widely known for effective compassion, justice and reconciliation and being widely known as a center for supernatural power and taking the

lead in pastoring secular America and offering great hope and help to hundreds of families in our area, and more. Crazy stuff, but it's *our* crazy stuff, and we keep feeling encouraged by God to believe for this.

Now some folks, including some good-hearted graduate students who did a study on us and our core dreams, have suggested that these dreams are out of proportion to reality. It's great to think big but, just to name one, how could we *fit* 10,000 people here on any given Sunday, even were we somehow to attract them? Excellent point!

This leads me to our core scripture for this year's 40 Days of Faith. It's from the very first chapter in the Bible, and it's the very first time we hear what God wants from people, what our purpose on earth is. And here's what God says about that.

***And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth."
(Genesis 1:28a, ESV)***

As if this is what people have been created to be about—increase and multiplication on God's behalf. As if this is a huge part of the reason we're alive.

And so we dream about growing as a church—*increase!* And we also dream about growing in all sorts of ways that show *depth*, like that you and I would experience more joy and less fear and depression and that we'd love people better and that we'd see our woundedness and brokenness healed. Yes!

But what about the "and multiply" part? As my wife, Grace, pointed out in (if I may say) a powerful sermon a few weeks back, it seems from looking at the creation story that everything on earth has been created to multiply, to reproduce for God according to its own kind. So this is procreation, but then very quickly—by the time of the Abraham story in Genesis 12 at the very latest—this gets expanded to spiritual blessing through us to others.

All to say, what if our big dreams were always intended to involve *multiplying* ourselves, not just growing and growing and growing right where we are? Multiplication offers lots of great benefits, such as that more and more people get to give their hearts and passions and leadership at a deeper level than they ever would without it.

So we're dreaming about starting a second site of this church in Downtown Boston in the fall of this year—a big dream! I don't know of another Boston church with more than one site (although the largest church in town, the awesome Jubilee Christian Center in Mattapan, is right on our heels as they plan for their second site).

At this point, about a hundred of you have talked not only about joining this site, but about leading in it, and perhaps another hundred are on our email list wanting to be kept posted.

That opens up *a hundred* leadership opportunities. It's still not clear how we'll, for instance, handle the preaching. Most likely I'll be at both sites a fair amount and the opportunity will open up for others to preach a bit more, and perhaps we'll do some things with video. But everything we do here—worship teams and prayer teams and logistics teams and intercession teams and kids church and on and on—will be run by other folks. And, should we keep multiplying sites, we'll have the challenge of training up many, many preachers who,

God willing, will keep our quality of preaching—as with all these other ministries—as high or higher than it presently is. “Be fruitful and *multiply!*”

And so this 40 Days, we’re asking God for a **new** miracle:

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.

The opportunity to help people in Boston experience the things of Jesus is immense. It’s one of the least-churchgoing major cities in America. Our dream is that ultimately we’d have a site wherever we could be helpful to people inside the 128 Loop.

But this will take way more than my faith or the faith of our staff or the faith of the folks who are interested in participating in this new site. And, of course, this was true when we were believing God for this miraculous building! My faith or any small group’s faith wasn’t enough for that—that required us to believe together as a body.

But let’s backtrack for a few moments. Over the next few pages, I’d love to look at:

During these 40 Days

- **What do you want Jesus to do for *you and your household?***
- **What do you want Jesus to do for *your city?***
- **What do you want Jesus to do for *your church?***

And, as a bonus section,

- **What do you want Jesus to do for *Vineyard churches throughout America?***

What do you want Jesus to do for you?

I was in the last year of my academic 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 university 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!

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

- 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.*

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)*

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!
(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. 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. Again, 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?

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. It's been up and down with them since then, but with their help the second novel did get written and my other novel *did* end up getting a small publishing run. So that's been a mixed bag! Last year my 40 Days prayer for myself was for some expanded leadership opportunities, which have indeed come. 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.

Like, for instance:

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.

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!

3) When you see answers to these two things, tell me.

You could do that either by e-mailing me at mail@cambridgevineyard.org or by filling out a testimony card on Sunday.

As you may note with the stories I've included in this manual, 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! As you think about it, if God has answered other big prayers for you and you've never told anyone about it, do that today! 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!

What do you want Jesus to do for your city?

If there's one thing we've learned in our brief history, it's that God loves to answer prayers!

So we thought it would be fun to believe God for our whole city together, do some praying, and see what might happen.

This is being tried all over the world, and there are some pretty great stories. One church in Colorado Springs is famous for this sort of praying, and crime statistics in their city have gone down each year that they and other churches have prayed. (We actually have a few copies of a book their pastor wrote about this available on our book table during the 40 Days, if you're interested.)

So this year during the 40 Days, we'd love to prayer walk a bit through our city. I mentioned this to some other Cambridge pastors, and now at least five other churches will be joining us. Together, we'll perhaps pray on site for a majority of Cambridge households, along with households and schools and businesses around your small group, in Downtown Boston, and perhaps in some other place near and dear to you. We'll come together on Good Friday to celebrate what God's done through all of us.

Here's how we'll do it.

1) Join a small group, if only for the 40 Days, if you're not already in one.

All but one of our prayer walking activities will happen through the small groups. (We'll tell you about that one in the next section.)

The first Sunday of the 40 Days we'll have a small groups fair to help you make this happen. Any small group in our church would love to have you, whether just for the 40 Days or longer.

2) Prayer walk twice with your small group during your normal meeting time, and—hopefully!—once on your own.

You'll also debrief the experiences together and, we hope, have some great experiences together. The small group leaders will let us know whatever you experienced and we should have some great stories to pass onto you.

What do you want Jesus to do for your church?

It is the first time in my life I have felt truly connected to God.

My life has never been better. I have never been this happy and content before. It's the first time I've ever been a member of a church.

I'd gone to churches a couple of times and got nothing out of it. When I started coming here three years ago I found something completely different—I heard about the possibility of joy in my life. I learned about Jesus. Somehow I had previously missed out on Jesus even though I'd been brought up religious.

It has saved our marriage through the Living Waters group.

I came here over the summer and prayed with a member of the prayer team after hearing Dave speak on forgiving parents. I never connected with my dad and I realized I had never forgiven him for leaving the family. I prayed about this with a member of the team, and I felt myself let go of my anger towards him. I

started writing him letters and sent him a gift even though it wasn't a holiday. I feel better and I believe we will grow closer now.

I came here the first time last Sunday. I closed my eyes and thought that this was what it was going to be like in Heaven.

Again, here's our core scripture for this year's 40 Days:

***And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth."
(Genesis 1:28a, ESV)***

We're stepping out in faith together and believing God to help us *fulfill* that key scripture just a bit more. We're hoping to believe together that God will empower us to start a thriving second site of our church in Downtown Boston and will also empower us to believe for still more sites than this as we look to love the folks who live inside the whole 128 Loop.

Or, as I mentioned, the way we're putting it more specifically:

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.

If you're game, here's how you can become a part of this faith dream during these 40 Days.

1) Pray daily for this miracle we're believing God for!

There's a bowl of prayers for this too—and it strikes me as a sizable one, one that will require all of our prayers and faith!

Lots needs to happen for this to happen in a way that will be a great and healthy next step of our being fruitful and multiplying without it substantially hurting our awesome *existing* site here in Cambridge.

Our leadership will be taxed in ways we never have been before. We're not planning to add *many* new staff—perhaps not *any*—so that will require new levels of leadership for all of our staff and for many of our leaders. Obviously we'd love for there to be no diminishing of the quality of the experience you and others have at this site. So that will take God!

2) Pray for a location for this new site to meet in.

We may have one. But we may not. We've looked at a number of sites. Right now we're hopeful that a school in the area would work. It's got a great location and perfectly good facilities. It would be substantially (and I mean substantially) more modestly priced than rental space. But it's not wrapped up yet. So I'd

love your prayers for it, and that, if our new site does end up meeting at this school, that God would powerfully use this location for his purposes.

3) Pray that we as a church could keep the financial pledge we made to God during our last building campaign.

As I've said, as a church, you all—along with some others who no longer live in the area—gave astoundingly to make this building a possibility. Many people asked God for more faith than they'd ever had. Here are a few of those stories:

I believed God that he would give me enough money to back up my building pledge and he did!

2003:

Gift of children

2004:

Gift of money to completely meet our church building commitment on time (\$90,000)! Wow! We had none of this money at the start.

2005:

The right job, under great conditions: work from home, flexibility, international travel, high salary.

My wife and I were praying for a new job for her and increased finances as things were getting tight. We also felt to give money to the building fund, which we did. Right after the 40 days, in May, my wife got a higher-paying job and we got a surprise money gift!

Grace and I believed God to give a year's salary. And then, a year in, we gave \$10,000 more. Each year as I looked at our finances, I had no idea how God would help us meet our pledge, and each year he came through (last year was especially miraculous, but that's another story).

As I mentioned, as a church we learned how to do this as we went. One thing we learned a little late in the game was what percentage of the money that was pledged we should expect to actually receive at the end of the pledge cycle. Evidently the average is about 80%. By this time, though, we'd given the pledge amounts to the bank, and they took us seriously, using the entire pledged amount to be able to determine how much they could loan us.

As things stand, we're at a little bit less than the 80% mark, though the end date for the three-year pledge cycle is this Easter, so my guess is that, one way or another, we'll hit that mark.

We know that some of the folks who'd pledged significant amounts have moved to other cities and decided to discontinue their pledge commitment. Others took big faith steps and God hasn't yet supplied them with the money to fulfill their pledge.

Let me give you some numbers. At this point, the remaining pledge balance is about \$1,200,000—not a small sum! That said, here's some awesome good news. Some of you who were not here when we believed God for this money have decided to contribute nonetheless! The total of your unpledged gifts currently stands at about \$370,000. So that's hugely helpful! Bless you!

So during this year's 40 Days, we'd like to, as a church, *fulfill our pledge to God*. Some folks simply can't fulfill their generous pledges, other folks have opted out, but we're believing that, as a congregation, we can fulfill what we promised God.

If I'm doing my math right, that means we're believing God for \$830,000 during these 40 Days.

In that spirit, Grace and I have decided to put off some renovations we'd hoped to do in our home, and will give an additional \$15,000 to help cover this remaining balance.

Here's how this impacts the Downtown Boston site and future sites. If we as a congregation are able to be faithful to what we've already pledged towards this building, we should have the funds to plant additional sites from our operating budget. If we're not able to be faithful to this pledge, it's—at the very least—iffier, because those operating funds will need to go into the building.

A number of projects have been put off as we wait to see where we'll end up with these pledges, things like making the fenced area next to the Ministry Center useful for kids and families, a sprinkler system, an alarm system, a rejiggering of the parking lot to make it both more pleasant and to comply with city regulations, some re-mortaring and possibly air conditioning for the sanctuary (if you were with us over the summer, you noticed it can get a little toasty).

So would you pray daily with us for this big prayer request?

And, if I can ask, would you ask God whether He'd like you to take part in this aspect of the miracle we're believing him for?

On **Palm Sunday, April 9**, we'll all bring our gifts to church, so plan to bring whatever you feel led to bring on that day.

And then, on **Easter Sunday, April 16**, we'll find out together how God has answered our collective prayer to be able to be faithful to him for this pledge.

4) Join us on Saturday, April 8 to pray on site.

We're eager, given that we're prayer walking this 40 Days, to pray Downtown as a congregation! So save this date, and we'll get you specifics sometime soon.

5) Pray for these 500 non-churchgoing people.

Who will these 500 people be who will be either joining in with the Downtown site or taking the place of the folks from Cambridge who will be leaving?

We're hoping that a good percentage of them will be non-churchgoers! Would you pray for these folks?

And perhaps you find yourself believing for non-churchgoing friends of *yours* to be in that number! Pray for them! And invite them at the appropriate time!

And, our bonus section:

What do you want Jesus to do for Vineyard churches throughout America?

As I mentioned, we're very much noticed by other Vineyard churches, which is encouraging and humbling. Each Monday, our sermons on our website, for instance, get about 500 hits. Many of these, of course, are from you all when you've missed church for some reason or another, but a ton are from all around the country and the world. I get e-mail from Singapore and Spain and Korea and England and Australia, along with all those folks I meet at Vineyard gatherings who listen faithfully.

Just recently, we've gotten an amazing compliment and an amazing challenge from the national board of the Vineyard. After a series of conversations with our national director, Bert Waggoner (he flew in from Houston a month or so ago just to meet with me and Val Snekvik to continue the conversation), the board asked if I'd head up a national Vineyard task force with the goal of making the Vineyard more ethnically diverse. I suspect a corollary to this would be that the Vineyard movement would also become more effective in and focused on cities.

The board is putting some real weight on this. It was a significant focus of the national leadership meetings. And Bert suggested that, if this thing gets rolling at all, he wants to put some real money behind it, possibly up to (if I'm doing the math right) up to half of the national budget of the whole movement of churches. That's pretty staggering.

Why us?

Believe me, I've asked that question again and again. For one, I'm white, as you've no doubt noticed. But there are some very humbling reasons the board is looking our direction. One, I believe, is they've noticed our faith in things like we've been talking about. Second, they've noticed that we are ethnically diverse. We could be a LOT more diverse than we are, yet at about 60% Caucasian, 17% Asian, 10% black (African and African-American), and 13% composed of other ethnicities, from what I now know (and I'll soon know a lot more), we're perhaps the most ethnically diverse larger church in the Vineyard. (From what I now know, perhaps the most ethnically diverse church of *any* size in the Vineyard is the church we

planted in Manhattan just under two years ago. It—along with being pastored by a Korean-American couple—is about 40% Asian, 40% Caucasian, and 20% black [African and African-American].) And then, finally, we're one of the relatively few Vineyards that's had success in an urban area, which seems key to this enterprise and is a worthy goal on any terms. That's actually one of the reasons we're so excited about this second site in Downtown Boston. When we moved from the BU Bridge area, we became modestly *less* urban, though still situated in a dynamic city. (Again to toot the horn of The River Vineyard in Manhattan, I believe it's already the largest Vineyard that's yet existed in Manhattan, after only about a year and a half of public ministry.)

How does this affect you?

Well, you'll be shocked to hear that I'd love your prayers!

1) Pray that the Vineyard USA would become a diverse, cutting edge movement of churches that thrives in cities.

This is a significant task! In its short history, the Vineyard has often been among the most cutting edge church movements in the Western world, but I do think this current challenge is key to it reclaiming that mantle. The Vineyard has become a very white movement, nationally, well above 90%. That's not—as you've seen—its desire! But it is where things have drifted, and it will be a challenge to turn that tide. And the Vineyard has become largely suburban and rural, and there's nothing wrong with that. But the original popularizer of Vineyard churches, John Wimber (who died in 1997) strongly believed that Vineyards were called to be effective in urban centers. I agree! But that will require a significant culture shift.

2) Pray for surprising allies in this, and for an influx of top-quality ethnic and urban young leaders into the Vineyard USA.

My role in kicking this process off is a bit daunting (pray for my travel schedule, as it will have to be somewhat limited both because I do, after all, pastor my own beloved church, and also because I have lots of young kids). And I'm believing God will lift up surprising allies who will make this possible in a way it could never be without them.

And pray for an influx of top-quality ethnic and urban young leaders! Perhaps that's *you*! There's real opportunity—I'd think *historic* opportunity—right now in the Vineyard for gifted and visionary young people, non-white and white. For many, it will take a fair amount of sacrifice—but that's part and parcel of the job. (As you'll have noted, Grace and I have sacrificed a fair amount, for instance, for this building. Goes with the territory.) But there may also be new and substantial resources available. Could you e-mail me if you're wondering if this might be you?

Some final things to 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.

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 book of Genesis each day.

Brian Housman has put together a 40 day look at the early chapters of Genesis that I think you'll find just gripping. He led us through a dynamic study of much of this material as a whole staff team, and that time was among the most well-received things we've ever done together. Our hope is that this will teach you more about faith and about God's primary purposes for your and my life than you've yet known.

I asked for boldness. During my job interview I told them my crazy God dream: to study theology and teach it in China. As crazy as it was, they offered me the job on the spot.

A lot:

- 1. We prayed for a great job and we got it.*
- 2. After a miscarriage, your prayer counselors helped release depression from me. I became pregnant during the 40 days. (Meanwhile my small group member was praying for prophecy gifting. And she prophesied that I was pregnant several days before we knew it. A woman on the women's retreat also prophesied about it.) Joshua was born healthy in November.*

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!

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.

Having just moved to Boston at the beginning of the last 40 days, I prayed for a job and friends and God blessed me with both!

I found my wife!!!

An idea of what God wants for my life

Healing from anxiety about public speaking.

I secured salary, tuition and fees to complete my PhD program. All these sources of money came unexpectedly and out of nowhere, even from places that had been closed to me before asking for God's provision.

I've enjoyed a vastly improved way of communicating with my wife.

I prayed that I would persevere in my relationship with Jesus. Here I am three years later happier than I have ever been in my life.

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!

A NEW MIRACLE!

40 Days of Faith 2006

Our core scripture:

And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.” (Genesis 1:28a, ESV)

The new miracle we’re asking for during these 40 Days:

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.

3 QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

What do you want Jesus to do for you and your household?

- 1) Ask God for this every day during the 40 days.
- 2) Tell someone else what you wrote down and ask *them* to pray for you about this too.
- 3) 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 city?

- 1) Join a small group, if only for the 40 Days, if you’re not already in one.
- 2) Prayer walk twice with your small group during your normal meeting time, and—hopefully!—once on your own.

What do you want Jesus to do for your church?

- 1) Pray daily for this miracle we’re believing God for!
- 2) Pray for a location for this new site to meet in.
- 3) Pray that we as a church could keep the financial pledge we made to God during our last building campaign.
- 4) Join us on Saturday, April 8 to pray on site.
- 5) Pray for these 500 non-churchgoing people.

A bonus question:

What do you want Jesus to do for Vineyard churches throughout America?

- 1) Pray that the Vineyard USA would become a diverse, cutting edge movement of churches that thrives in cities.
- 2) Pray for surprising allies in this, and for an influx of top-quality ethnic and urban young leaders into the Vineyard USA.

Some final things you might consider:

- 1) Consider fasting in some way.
- 2) Study the book of Genesis each day.