



**GETTING STARTED**

ENGAGING IN A GOD-SOAKED WORLD

STEVE WATSON, MARCH 2017

# WELCOME TO OUR ANNUAL 40 DAY FAITH EXPERIMENT!

This is an opportunity to immerse yourself in a spiritual experience with enormous potential to enrich your life well beyond these forty days. It is an invitation to interrupt the fabric of your status quo and experience life and faith on more expectant terms. It's an invitation to engage for forty days in a more intentionally spiritual way of living. It's an invitation to acknowledge some of your most significant hopes and dreams. And while it will take energy and thought and risk and time, it's meant to fit within the rhythms of your active life.

Reservoir Church has been running some form of these forty day experiments each year for over a decade now, and while the details of people's experiences have varied widely, the great majority of participants have found this experience to be illuminating and transformative.

Whether you're a past participant or are hearing about this for the first time, and whether you're skeptical or hopeful, let me invite you to read through this short guide and try this experiment out for at least a week. I think you'll be glad you did and will want to continue.

**This year we will focus on experiencing actual connection to a living God**, with the hope that each of us would find our world soaked with God's personal presence. Many religious traditions have encouraged us to think correct thoughts about God. Some have emphasized ethical principles, others theological formulas. Other religious leaders have promised powerful experiences of the supernatural if we only pray their way, live as they teach, think as they think, and donate generously to their ministry.

Many of us have learned and experienced too much to find these approaches helpful or attractive. We are rightly suspicious of manipulation and narrow-minded thinking in religion and understandably disinterested in precepts that limit our thinking while failing to deliver life to us. The Franciscan priest Richard Rohr has written, "Outside of your own inner experience of a God who is merciful, gracious, faithful, forgiving, and steadfast in love, most religion will remain merely ritualistic, moralistic, doctrinaire, and unhappy."

Jesus practiced and promised a very different spirituality, one that actually cultivates an experience of a good God. He called it a new covenant: a new kind of promise from and connection to God.

**The new covenant is for all people, not a chosen few.**

The new covenant is a vital, internal reality, not merely a matter of external compliance of belief or behavior.

The new covenant is a rich experience of God with us at all times and in all circumstances. Sometimes we experience God solving our problems and answering our prayers, other times not so much. But in all circumstances, we still have God with us.

When we engage in this God-soaked reality available to us, we find not just connection with God, but a renewed inner life and greater capacity for joyful connection with other people and our whole world as well. **In this season, we'll look to develop this rich experience of God.**

For these 40 days, from Sunday, March 5th, through Easter, April 16th, we'll look to grow in our experience of this kind of faith. We're joining in a season that Christians have celebrated for millennia, marking the forty days before Easter with increased spiritual focus, in a season called Lent, a word related to the Anglo-Saxon word for spring.

During Reservoir's 40 Days of Faith, **we invite you into a combination of practices that have been spiritually potent for millions of people** throughout the earth, ranging from centuries ago to the present day.

Think of these practices as a thoughtfully prepared prix-fixe menu. Take the freedom to try them in any combination, but know they're prepared to interact with and enrich one another as you enjoy them together. The goal of the 40 Days of Faith is a rich experience of the living God, and these practices are meant to be means to help you get there. If you do these things with anything approaching whole-heartedness, then I expect that when Easter's come and gone, you'll feel that one way or another, the results have been marvelous.

## SUNDAY MORNING GATHERINGS

Each week, **show up on Sunday mornings ready for something good to happen.** You'll get a chance to hear some music and join in if you like, pray or be prayed for, and listen to a talk given on engaging in a God-soaked world. It'll be practical, spiritual, and fun, and failing that, you'll at least get a chance to have a good cup of coffee and meet someone new. Show up each Sunday, expecting something good. This is your most basic level of participation.

## THREE DAILY PRAYERS

I recommend that these daily prayers be the heart of your 40 Days of Faith participation. The end of the guide will give you space to personalize them.

- **What do I want God to do for me?**

The scriptures tell us that faith involves believing God is good and that God rewards those who seek God. We invite you to name one particularly deep desire you have to see God at work. Consider needs you have for healing, provision, reconciliation, wisdom, practical help, or anything else. Hundreds of past participants have experienced what they can only think of as miraculous answers to these prayers. Others, well, haven't!

But in making this daily prayer, you're getting in touch with your own desire—a healthy thing in its own right. You're also making space for God to work on your behalf and fulfilling one of Jesus' baseline conditions for new covenant faith—acknowledging you aren't self-sufficient, but could use God's help.

- **What do I want God to do for my six?**

We also invite you to pray that God will do something exciting for other people, especially other people who don't seem to be experiencing much at all from God, as far as we can tell. Think of **six people who are local and that you'll actually see** at least now and then. They can be people you barely know or they can be your best of friends. Other than knowing them a bit and

seeing them around, the only other rule is that **as far as you can tell, they don't seem to be getting as much from God as they could or connecting much to God at all.**

The idea is that each day, **in addition to praying for yourself, you pray for these six folks as well.** The daily Bible guide (more on that soon) will have some structured ideas on how to do this. But you can also just pray that God will be kind and good to each of these people. Or you can ask God to direct you to pray more specifically for them. Or you can tell them you'd like to pray for them for the next six weeks and ask them how they'd like you to pray for them.

- **What do I want God to do for my church or my city?**

This presumes you have a church. If not, no sweat. Save yourself some time, and just pray for your city. Share with God your hopes for your church or your city.

## DAILY BIBLE READING WITH ACCOMPANYING SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

Each year, we produce what people have found to be an illuminating and practical daily Bible guide that helps us understand, explore, and make use of a different section of the Bible. These guides give you a smallish section of Scripture to read each day, along with interesting background knowledge, a spiritual exercise to try, and ideas for things you might pray for. This year, we'll look at passages throughout the Bible that illumine our theme of engaging in faith in a God-soaked world. The short meditations and activities at the end might be the most valuable part of the guide, where we see if God can soak into our experience through the day's passage.

You can find the Bible guides in text and audio format at [reservoirchurch.org/40days](http://reservoirchurch.org/40days).

## FASTING

Fasting is the abstention from some or all food or some other activity for a period of time in order to focus ourselves more fully on God. It's also the most traditional element of our 40 Days of Faith, something lots of churches have promoted for centuries at this time of year.

Fast from anything you like, for as long as you like, without over-compromising your physical or mental health. This could mean abstaining from a particular food or drink or habit, or radically simplifying how you eat or live or spend money. It could also be creative, like a fast from criticism or complaint.

The point of fasting is that, under God's direction, we're feeling hungry for something—not just fasting from something but fasting for what it is we want Jesus to do during the 40 Days—and we direct that hunger towards God.

Don't do anything that will do harm to you. That's not the spirit of new covenant faith. Simply choose something, or ask God to direct your choice, that will bring a shift in your life or that will add some power and urgency to your faith.

## DOING THIS IN THE COMPANY OF OTHERS

While the 40 Days of Faith is an intensely personal experience, we've found that people enjoy it most and get the most benefit from it when they participate with other people. One way you can do that is to invite a friend who's not part of this faith community to participate in some way with you—whether by joining in the prayers, reading the Bible guide, or coming to Sunday services. Another is to come to one of our church-sponsored community groups that meet throughout the week. We have dozens of community groups that meet at the church campus or in people's homes and other gathering spots throughout Cambridge and our surrounding communities. A full list is on our website at [reservoirchurch.org/community](https://reservoirchurch.org/community)

You're welcome to visit a group and never go back, or to join a group and—if you like it—to continue well past Easter. But if you're not in a group, join it just for these forty days. You'll have the opportunity to talk about what you're praying for and hear others do the same and hear all about interesting things other people are learning and experiencing during their 40 Days of Faith. Sometimes, you hear some pretty great stories too.

# HELPFUL THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND

Let me close with three words on engaging most fruitfully in these spiritual practices.

- 1) Be serious, but not rigid.** We're pursuing a God who is serious about our welfare. This season is a way to really go after that, so take it as seriously as you can, but do what you can gladly. Don't get bent out of shape about your practice; the whole season isn't about what we do; it's a means to connect more deeply with the goodness of God within a community of faith.
- 2) This is not a contest!** Don't worry about days skipped or imperfect spiritual practice. You have nothing to prove, to yourself or anyone else, and certainly not to God! If you miss a day or more of the Bible guide, don't try to go back and make it up. Just pick up where you left off. And if you slip up on your fasting or miss a community group meeting or day of prayer, don't sweat it and just jump back in when you can.
- 3) Feel free to practice what educators call differentiated learning.** Engage whole-heartedly, but keep in mind that not all people learn alike, and not all people respond to God in faith alike. Do the things you can do wholeheartedly, even if that's somewhat less than the full package recommended here.

As you enter into these forty days, our hope is that you will find your world soaked with God's personal presence for you. Here's to a great season of engaging in all we can experience of God together!

# ENGAGING IN A GOD-SOAKED WORLD: 40 DAYS OF FAITH 2017

## THREE DAILY PRAYERS:

**What do I want God to do for me?**

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**What do I want God to do for my six?**

- 1) \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) \_\_\_\_\_
- 3) \_\_\_\_\_
- 4) \_\_\_\_\_
- 5) \_\_\_\_\_
- 6) \_\_\_\_\_

**What do I want God to do for my church or my city?**

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DAILY BIBLE GUIDE: **Online at [reservoirchurch.org/40days](http://reservoirchurch.org/40days)**

## DOING THIS WITH OTHERS:

**Community Group to try:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Someone who can participate with me:** \_\_\_\_\_

## FASTING:

**How You'll Fast (if you do):** \_\_\_\_\_

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