



USER MANUAL

CHILDREN OF GOD IN A FRACTURED WORLD  
STEVE WATSON, FEBRUARY 2018

# 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.

Back in 2003, our church needed a building to meet in and then when a building came on the market, needed an impossibly large sum of money to be able to purchase it. During the forty days leading to Easter, people were invited to pray that God would do something extraordinary to make the impossible possible, in the life of the church community and in the big dreams and concerns of individual people's lives as well. People were also invited to embrace the historic tone of this season, and to interrupt the usual fabric of their life and practice spiritual formation disciplines to go deeper in faith and move closer to God.

By the end of that season, millions of dollars were raised, a gorgeous church campus was ours, and dozens of other miracles were reported by members of the community. And in addition to all those things that felt like results, people really enjoyed the ride.

Ever since then, we've continued the practice of breaking our ordinary rhythms, entering into some spiritually formative practices, and asking God to do some big things on our behalf. Results of the prayers have been mixed, but it's been consistently rewarding and often pretty fun too.

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 our identity as children of God in a fractured world.** More and more of us these days are in touch with how broken things are around us. Old human evils we thought had

gotten better assert themselves in new ways. Painful scandals break day after day. Our civic leadership enrages us. Regions of our country and sometimes races and even families are divided. In the United States, our military and economic might still promise security and happiness, but those promises seem empty. What does it mean to be a child of God and a follower of Jesus in times like these?

We are not the first people to ask these questions. In fact, these same dilemmas form the backdrop to much of early Christianity, including the weirdest and most troubling book of the New Testament called Revelation. Revelation has been used to predict the future and to defend all manner of crazy judgments and ideas. But read in its original poetic, symbolic, imaginative genre called “apocalyptic”, we discover something different. Revelation invited some of the first followers of Jesus to tune out the propaganda and violence and seduction of the mighty Roman Empire in which they lived, and to find their courage and love and perseverance that was theirs as God’s children.

And as odd and difficult as it is, Revelation remains in our Bibles to help us do the same.

On this 40 Days of Faith, we invite you to step further into a counter-cultural and courageous journey to follow Jesus as God’s child and to find hope and courage to resist the worst of our times, letting Jesus – and not our crazy-making world – center us.

For these 40 days, from Sunday, February 18th, through Easter, April 1st, we’ll read Revelation and worship and gather and pray together. We’re joining in a season that Christians have celebrated for millennia, marking the forty days before Easter with increased spiritual focus, in a time 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 really thoughtfully prepared prix-fix 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 — 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.

## A) SUNDAY MORNING GATHERINGS

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 hear a talk given on following Jesus as a child of God in a fractured 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 for worship, expecting something good. This is your most basic level of participation.

## B) 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.

*o 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.

*o 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 the 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 too 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.

*o 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. If Reservoir is your church, pray for our bold dream that our community would grow in numbers and impact this year, that Reservoir will be well known in our region for a Jesus-centered faith community that pays enormous dividends in this life and is accessible to absolutely everyone, without exception.

## C) 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, as I mentioned, we'll read the last book of the Bible, Revelation. This year, each week we'll practice the same spiritual exercise for five days, giving you a chance to try it on for size for a while before moving on to something new.

## D) 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, and if you've had a complicated relationship to food over the years, by all means choose a non-food form of fasting. Choose anything, or ask God to direct your choice, that will break your usual rhythms of consumption and help you pay more attention to what the Spirit might say to you or do during this season.

## E) 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/connect/\*\*community-groups\*\*](https://reservoirchurch.org/connect/community-groups)

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 just soaked with God's personal presence for you. Here's to a great season of engaging in all we can experience of God together!

CHILDREN OF GOD IN A FRACTURED WORLD:  
40 DAYS OF FAITH 2018

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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