



“Growing In The Love”
Leap of Faith
The Users Manual

Adapted with permission by the North Brooklyn Vineyard

Welcome to Leap of Faith!

This is a faith experiment that we here in the North Brooklyn Vineyard will be undertaking throughout the six weeks leading up to Easter. These 40 days are called Lent, the traditional time the Church prepares for Easter. Our theme of **Growing In The Love** will include daily activities that we engage in as a unified community, in hopes of seeing **God's love at work** in unexpected ways in our lives, in the lives of those we care about, and in our church as a whole.

These six weeks will involve stretching our faith to pray for BIG and specific things; a daily Bible guide called "Jesus Is Really Good" that will take us through the gospel of Mark together; a sermon series entitled "How can I know God loves me?... Because of Jesus"; and small group participation.

We'll be partnering with other Vineyards who have undertaken ventures like this before. They've banded together, had exciting experiences and have seen God answer prayer in amazing ways. We look forward to partnering with them in this season, as we grow in God's love in our individual lives and together as a church community.

We're believing God that between now and Easter, this could be the best 6 weeks ever for all of us here in the North Brooklyn Vineyard! This manual should walk you through everything you need to know to get going. My guess is that the introductory material will take you, give or take, maybe a half hour to get through, **but it's worth it!**

What are the goals of Leap of Faith?

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

My goals for you during this next 6 weeks:

- 1) That you'd experience God's love in a greater way that will transform and empower your everyday living.
- 2) That you'd experience at least one concrete gift from God.
- 3) That you'd experience an ever-deeper joy of finding your purpose in God's work on earth.
- 4) That you'd grow spiritually more than you have in any other six week period of your life.
- 5) That, because of these six weeks, you'll never worry about money again.

My goals for our church during this next six weeks...

That as a result of experiencing more of God's love together, we'll:

- 1) Come to a new level of spiritual maturity and unity.
- 2) Come to a new level of loving others in our community.
- 3) Share God's love with a growing number of people who will call the NBV their home
- 4) Become financially stable.

What does it look like to participate in Leap of Faith?

Okay, let's not kid ourselves: it's going to take some faith.

Hebrews 11:6 says, "Without faith, it is impossible to please God." Jesus says to a woman who's been healed by his touch, "Your faith has made you well."

We worship a God who *acts*, and because of that we should praise God *for all the things he has done*. And yet it can be very painful to live a life with that kind of faith! Maybe it seems as if we've tried that before and he didn't come through. Maybe hard things have happened to us and God hasn't seemed to bail us out. Maybe you're wondering "What if God doesn't answer my prayer in these 40 days?"

So much of a life of heartfelt pursuit of God involves learning how faith *does* and *doesn't* work. What should we do when our expectations aren't met? Look at the Psalms for instance. The writers themselves are often in desperate situations as they call out to God—but they still *are* calling out to God

(rather than cursing him for allowing them to have gotten into desperate situations in the first place), and they often experience his amazing answers.

The Leap of Faith has been designed to accomplish just a slew of objectives in all of our lives—maybe too many! But very much at the heart of what we're hoping for is that many of us would experience a **revitalization of our faith and our hope in the God who loves us**, who laid down his life for us, who wants us to look to him to do awesome things in our lives. We think it will be a lot of fun—and will provide a lot of extra faith and support—for us all to do this **together**. Psalm 116 puts it this way:

*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)*

We love God because he actually *hears* and *answers* our prayers. And our response to those direct and awesome answers should be that we *thank* him—and *call on him* in our next experience of need.

Let me walk you through what that might look like for you during these next six weeks (40 days). We'll talk about **3 concrete steps** to consider, and then about **2 more things** you might pursue in order to grow in your spiritual life and power.

3 STEPS TO CONSIDER

Step 1: Go hard after what you're hoping God will do for you.

A heck of a lot of what you're hoping will happen in your life *can't* happen unless God gives it to you.

You need to learn—as we all do—what it looks like to look to *God* to give you the things you really need in life. If you don't directly and consciously look to him in such a way that you'll know that *he did it* if the thing actually happens, that means that you'll look to *other sources* to give you those things. And, even if we manage to get some good things when we *haven't* looked to God to give them to us, they rarely pan out with the kind of joy and life we were hoping for from them. God likes to be the giver of all good things. When we learn how to take him up on that offer, it seems that he doesn't only *give* us those gifts, he also *fills* the gifts themselves with this sort of hyper-life—those things just work out great and they bring joy and encouragement with them.

So why not take these six weeks to see if that can be your experience on some key things you'd like to see happen in your life?

Here are two categories of things that, if I were you, I'd ask God for during these six weeks.

1) Ask Jesus for *something specific* that he'd like to do for you during these 6 weeks to make your life better.

So here you're looking for some *circumstance* about your life that you'd love it if God would address. So, for instance, I'm a closet artist. I've always found sketching people an enjoyable outlet for the creative energy in my life. At one time I was pretty good at it and found it very fulfilling. But over time the demands of starting up this church and my everyday pastoral responsibilities have dried-up this flow of energy leaving me somewhat stifled. So what I'm asking Jesus for is to renew this artistic flow in my life and that by the end of the six weeks I would be sketching again.

So that's what I'm talking about—something specific that, if Jesus would do it for you by the end of the six weeks, you'd be jazzed.

Now why do this? First off, **what if it doesn't happen?** If it's actually something you really care about, you're risking major disappointment! But risking being disappointed is a hallmark of actual faith. Isn't the point of faith that we take real things we actually *care about* to God, things we don't claim to be able to pull off on our own?

The reason to take this first step is to put yourself in a position to see that God is actually *alive*; he actually listens to your prayers and he cares about you.

Now, again, that's no guarantee of anything. God can do anything he wants. But he does *like* it when we ask him for things (Matthew 7:7-11). So we need to figure out how to ask in faith and—as Matthew 7:7 says directly—*keep* asking. But let's agree together that these 40 days will be a place to start!

So, before we go on, let's do it! What good gift do you think Jesus would like to give you before these 40 days are done? (If you've been asking him and don't have a clear sense, you may have to punt to option number 2 and write down what, all things being equal, you'd *like* him to do for you.)

Write that here:

2) Ask Jesus for how he'd like to make your life *feel* better during these 6 weeks.

A surprising truth is that what makes or breaks our lives is not so much what happens to us as how our life *feels* to us. Isn't that a stunner? You might think, "I'm lonely and miserable because I'm 'x' age and I'm still unmarried. Nobody loves me!" But a moment's observation will tell you that there are people older than you are who've never married who are *not* lonely and miserable. And there are married people you know who *are* lonely and miserable! Jeremiah 29:11 tells us that God's *ultimate* work in us will be to give us a sense of an utterly hopeful future. We're not sure what the *circumstances* of that future will be (Jesus, for instance, promises his disciples a life of persecution!), but we *do* know what that future will *feel* like.

So how would Jesus like to make your life *feel* better during these next 40 days? Here's what I'm asking for, for what it's worth. I realized a few months ago that the stress caused by our church's financial woes and the sorrow of saying goodbye to so many church friends that have moved away over the past year had caught up with me. I noticed "church work" had become just that, work and wrestling with bouts of anxiety and sadness had become more and more regular. I know this is not what God wants for me so I'm asking him to restore my joy, enthusiasm and hopefulness.

So... let's do it! How do you think Jesus would like to make your life *feel* better over the course of these next 6 weeks?

Now what?

First off, congratulations! You've done a key thing—you've crystallized in your heart and on paper what you want God to do for you, a very important thing. Having done that, can I encourage you to do a few things in order to take advantage of the Leap of Faith in reference to the things you've just written down?

First, ask God for these things every day during these six weeks.

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, join one of our small groups. While it's true that everyone in our church can participate and benefit from this 6 week faith experiment whether or not you are part of a small group, doing it as a group will make your experience even better. Agree together to carry out this experiment to its completion. Being able to check-in regularly and compare notes with one another will be encouraging and help keep everyone on track.

Third, 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!

Fourth, when you see answers to these two things, tell me, either by e-mailing me at info@northbrooklynvineyard.org or by dropping a note in the offering basket.

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!).

Okay! Let's go onto:

Step 2: Go hard after what you're hoping God will do for your 6.

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. I'd suggest that, if there really is only one thing God is focused on here on earth, as a friend of mine, Dave Smelzer said,

– He's determined that everyone on earth would know that he does awesome things for people who trust him—and, presumably, the "everyone" would consist largely of people who don't currently know that—

then participating in this one thing is at the heart of what will satisfy us in life, and is at the heart of what we all really want.

If there's really only one central thing happening on the earth, only one thing God has given himself to accomplishing, which of us really wants to be about some *unrelated* thing?

[For what it's worth: here's another of many, many passages that gives a picture of this one purpose of God's and how we fit in. One whole Psalm paints a pretty compelling picture of it.

96 ¹ *Sing a new song to the LORD!*

Let the whole earth sing to the LORD!

² *Sing to the LORD; bless his name.*

Each day proclaim the good news that he saves.

³ *Publish his glorious deeds among the nations.*

Tell everyone about the amazing things he does.

⁴ *Great is the LORD! He is most worthy of praise!*

He is to be revered above all the gods.

⁵ *The gods of other nations are merely idols,*

but the LORD made the heavens!

⁶ *Honor and majesty surround him;*

strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.

⁷ *O nations of the world, recognize the LORD;*

recognize that the LORD is glorious and strong.

⁸ *Give to the LORD the glory he deserves!*

Bring your offering and come to worship him.

⁹ *Worship the LORD in all his holy splendor.*

Let all the earth tremble before him.

¹⁰ *Tell all the nations that the LORD is king.*

The world is firmly established and cannot be shaken.

He will judge all peoples fairly.

¹¹ *Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice!*

Let the sea and everything in it shout his praise!

¹² *Let the fields and their crops burst forth with joy!*

Let the trees of the forest rustle with praise

before the LORD!
For the LORD is coming!
He is coming to judge the earth.
He will judge the world with righteousness
and all the nations with his truth.

So we've been trying something out as a church recently 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 who live right here in the New York area, people that you'd really love to see experience Jesus' goodness and power in their lives in ways that really haven't, so far as you can tell, been true for them to date. Our hope is that each of our small groups will pray for their 6, in pairs, each meeting. Who *wouldn't* want to see Jesus concretely bless 6 of our friends, if such a thing were possible?

In these 40 days, we'd love to up the ante a bit, in the whole spirit of taking a season of faith together. So I've got two suggestions you might want to explore during these 40 days.

1) Pray daily for each of your 6.

Ask Jesus to reveal himself to these great folks. Ask him to concretely bless them in such a way that his name would be made great in their lives—*during* these 40 days. And ask him to give you as much of the following "steps of faith" for each of your six as possible during the 40 days.

2) Believe God to bless each of your 6 as much as possible with the "steps of faith."

During this time, why not ask God to show you ways you can concretely hope he might even use *you* to be a blessing for folks included in your 6? In that spirit, we've got 6 "steps of faith" to propose you dream about with your 6 during these six weeks.

- 1. Initiate social time with one of your 6.**
- 2. Ask one of your 6 for prayer requests.**
- 3. Tell a story about how Jesus has blessed you.**
- 4. Pray for one of your 6 in person.**
- 5. Invite them to Sunday service or your small group.**
- 6. Invite them to get together to talk about Jesus.**

I'm sure you get the sense that these folks you're praying for are not just abstractions whom you're hoping *Jesus* will bless, but *you're* too busy for! If God would be so gracious, certainly it would be great if *you* could be part of the process, if you could be in on loving them in Jesus' name.

So don't miss out on connecting with this deepest of all purposes during these 40 days! Believe God for your 6 and go for it!

Step 3: Go hard after what you're hoping God will do for our church.

We've got big dreams for what God might want to do for us and through us as a whole church this coming year.

In brief, we're believing God to **help us love lots and lots of people** in the North Brooklyn area and beyond who otherwise would have no access to all of his benefits. We're believing that God will cause us **to grow in numbers and become a significant influence for his kingdom** especially among the non-religious neighbors. We're believing God to bless our morning and Trash Bar congregations with **a fresh sense of unity and purpose**. We're believing him for **the financial health of our church** – not just to break-even but with abundance so together we become generous givers. We're believing him to help us **love the poor and serve our neighbors at an entirely new level**. And there's plenty more where that came from.

I'd love it if you could **pray for our church** each day during these six weeks! Pray that some of these dreams would come to pass, maybe even sooner than expected! Pray about **your** role in seeing these things come to pass!

2 DISCIPLINES THAT WILL HELP YOU GROW IN GOD'S LOVE

Wouldn't it be awesome if you came out of these 40 days closer to Jesus than you've ever been? And obviously filled with more spiritual power than you've ever had? And freed from any worry about his financial provision for you for the rest of your life? Our motto for these six weeks is *Growing In The Love!* And our hope is that you will experience this for yourself! (Tying our themes together, I'm sure you can see how God's love, becoming more and more a reality in your life, accomplishes God's one great activity of "making his name great" in *you*.)

We have a couple of thoughts about things that—we hope!—will dramatically help you accomplish this.

1) Study the life of Jesus each day.

To help us all experience more of God's love we will be providing you with a very helpful and manageable walk through Mark's gospel that we're calling, "**Jesus Is Really Good**" that you **will find each day online**. This study will go along nicely with the Sunday sermon series we have planned during this time called, "How We Know God Loves Us" which focuses on Jesus, the living demonstration of God's love for us.

We have broken the 16 chapters of Mark down into 40 sections, spread over the six weeks, so you'll be reading about a third of a chapter a day. Pretty manageable we hope!

What better way to experience God's love than spending some time reading and praying through Jesus' story? And we're thinking it will be uniting and fun to do this **together** as a whole church. We are recommending that our **small groups** use this as a guide in their discussions during the six weeks of Leap of Faith.

2) Learn more about giving.

This part is the basis of my goal that you'll never worry about money again.

There's a resource about how God blesses our use of money, by way of how we give, that I'd love you to take a look at in the next week or so. It's a tiny little book that will *cost* you some money: about \$10. It's called: **Tithing by R.T. Kendall**. Don't let the title put you off. I found it very helpful. It answered a lot of my questions about biblical giving. You can buy it on Amazon, just log on to: http://www.amazon.com/Tithing-R-T-Kendall/dp/0310383315/ref=sr_1_4?ie=UTF8&

SOME FINAL THOUGHTS

First, congratulations! You've made it though the whole roadmap for Leap of Faith!

Now, of course, there's *doing it!*

How long might it take to do this stuff each day?

I, of course, couldn't really say, not being you. I'd think these spiritual exercises could take as little as **half an hour each day**. Or they could take as much more time as you chose to give them.

So that's some real time. But, as we said, this is a unique season of growth in God. I'm really not sure how to accomplish that apart from at least **some** time.

And, that said, if you're like my friends throughout the Vineyard, you'll get a total kick out of every minute. You'll love learning more about Mark's Gospel—not to mention that you'll love just spending some time immersed in Jesus' story each day. You'll love praying – for your six, for yourself, for our church - and believing God. You'll love joyful financial giving—something that carries more promise of joy in scripture than almost any other act of faithfulness.

So, hey, if it's going to be a whole half hour a day, at least it will most likely be one **awesome** half hour each day!

Could you possibly *summarize* the steps so that I can, like, post them on my refrigerator and be sure to do them?

Sure but before I do that, let me just close by reiterating how excited I am for this season, and how eager I am to see what God does for all of us. I'm praying for you!

LEAP OF FAITH

My goals for you during the 40 days:

- 1) That you'd experience God's love in a greater way that will transform and empower your everyday living.
- 2) That you'd experience at least one concrete gift from God.
- 3) That you'd experience an ever-deeper joy of finding your purpose in God's work on earth.
- 4) That you'd grow spiritually more than you have in any other six week period of your life.
- 5) That, because of these six weeks, you'll never worry about money again.

My goals for our church during the 40 days:

- 1) That we'd come to a new level of spiritual maturity and unity.
- 2) That we'd come to a new level of loving others in our community.
- 3) That we'll share God's love with a growing number of people who will call the NBV their home
- 4) That we'll become financially stable.

3 STEPS TO CONSIDER

Step 1: Go hard after what you're hoping God will do for you.

- Ask Jesus for *something specific* that he'd like to do for you during these 40 days to make your life better.
- Ask Jesus for how he'd like to make your life *feel* better during these 40 days.
 - Ask God for these things every day during the 40 days.
 - Tell someone else what you wrote down and ask *them* to pray for you about those things too.
 - When you see answers to these two things, tell me, either by e-mailing me at info@northbrooklynvineyard.org or by dropping a note in the offering basket.

Step 2: Go hard after what you're hoping God will do for your 6.

- Pray daily for each of your 6.
- Believe God to bless each of your 6 as much as possible with the "steps of faith."
 1. Initiate social time with one of your 6.
 2. Ask one of your 6 for prayer requests.
 3. Tell a story about how Jesus has blessed you.
 4. Pray for one of your 6 in person.
 5. Invite them to Sunday service or your small group.

Step 3: Go hard after what you're hoping God will do for your church.

1. Pray each day for the dreams of the church.

2 DISCIPLINES THAT WILL HELP YOU GROW IN THE LOVE OF GOD

- 1) **Study the life of Jesus each day.**
 - a. **Completing the "Jesus Is Really Good" online Bible study**
 - b. **Go to our church website at www.northbrooklynvineyard.org and follow the instructions.**
- 2) **Learn more about giving.**
 - a. *Tithing* by R.T. Kendall