LEAP OF FAITH:
An Introduction
Inspiration for Leap of Faith

In the summer of 2011 I visited another Vineyard church in Boston. The Greater Boston Vineyard (GBV) is led by Dave and Grace Schmelzer. Dave is a long-time friend of mine and a number of folks in our church have been a part of the GBV before coming here. It was a great time for me of thinking about how to do and be the church, but one event stuck out for me. It was this experience they called “Leap of Faith.”

They had been doing a Leap of Faith each year, for at least ten years, during the time of Lent. The idea was to create space for the entire church to experience the living God in three different areas: for themselves, for a handful of friends around them and for the church. That first Leap of Faith was not created specifically for Lent, but the leadership knew that Easter would be a great way to celebrate their experience of growing in faith together.

This struck me as something that would be great to do in our church. As I interact with many of you, I hear and see how you want to experience more of God and see God do big things in your life. Sometimes it gets hard to keep having faith for that if it has been a difficult or dry season of life. It is also harder to have that kind of faith when you are just holding onto that hope by yourself or trying to have faith for something on your own. So, why not have a season where we ask God together for Him to do something new and fresh and big?

That is why we, the leadership of the church, invite you to take a “Leap of Faith” with us, and with one another during these next 40 days. For the following six weeks we will ask God to increase our faith and grow our trust that he can do great things in our lives. This introduction is intended to help give some practical ideas of how to participate in this “Leap of Faith” and some structure to how we will be thinking about it as a community. This is very much an experiment for us, and we hope you will find this kind of experiment exciting and energizing for your own faith.

With Affection,

Alex Van Riesen
Lead Pastor, VCFP
Why Do a Leap of Faith?

“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Indeed, by faith our ancestors received approval. By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible.” Hebrews 11:1-3

Faith is central to a spiritual life and experience. Faith is described in this passage as the “assurance of things hoped for.” This seems paradoxical. To “hope” for something, according to the dictionary, is to “cherish a desire with anticipation.” In the original biblical language it is defined as, “to wait with joy and full confidence.” So, faith, in this context, is “the waiting with full joy and confidence for your cherished desires to be fulfilled.”

Now, any of us who have been following Jesus for a while – or even those of us who haven’t – have experienced having desires that do not get fulfilled. Sure, some of them were probably things we were better off not getting, but many of them were really good things that we wanted for ourselves and others.

When we experience something like that, the natural reaction – for most of us – is to decrease our hopes and dreams, or at least the “joyful confidence” that it is going to happen. The result of having fewer things you really put your heart into hoping for is you see God doing fewer things – because you are not really hoping for them. This in turn decreases our “assurance of things hoped for” even more, which has a direct impact on our faith.

The heart, the center, of a vibrant faith in Jesus is the ongoing process of hoping – cherishing a desire – for Him to work, even if we do not see all the results we hope for. The times when we do see God provide in some amazing way are often some of the most encouraging and faith-producing times in our spiritual lives. God wants us to have the kind of faith that continues to hope, and dream, and ask him for things. He does give good gifts and we believe he will show himself to us as a community as we join together in risking to ask for more.

That is why we are doing Leap of Faith. We are asking God to help grow and increase our faith – our ability to “wait with joy and full confidence” – for a specific period of time in hopes of that influencing our faith lives for the rest of the year. Sometimes we need special help and attention to grow in our spiritual lives. This time is being set aside to focus on having “faith”. It is a time to practice the faith we see here in Hebrews – “having the assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things not seen” – and see what God will do.
What Does it Look Like to Participate in Leap of Faith?

We would like to suggest three concrete ways for you to participate in the Leap of Faith over these next six weeks.

Ask God to Do Something Specific for You

A lot of what you might want or hope to happen in your life can’t happen unless God gives it to you. It has been the experience of many of us that the greatest gifts we have received in life have come when we have asked and sought God for them.

We all need to learn what it looks like to continually 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. Even if we manage to get some neat 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 life.

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?

First, ask Jesus to give you something specific to ask him for.

Perhaps you already know what you would like Jesus to do for you in your life right now. Or, perhaps you could mull over the question, “If there was one thing that you would really want God to do for you right now, what would it be?”

There is no right or wrong answer here. The point is to have it be meaningful to you, connecting with your desires and hopes in life. Someone might want healing (physical or emotional), or reconciliation in a relationship, or to get out of debt, or a new job. Anything that you desire and want to give yourself to having faith for will work.

Now, at this point you might be asking, “Why would I do this? What if it doesn’t happen?” If you actually choose something you really desire – something that means a lot to you – then you are risking major disappointment! Yes. But risking being disappointed is a hallmark of actual faith. Remember, faith is the “assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things unseen.” The point of faith is to take real desires and longings to God – things we cannot do for ourselves – and trust Him for the result.

The reason to take this first step is to put yourself in a position to see that God is actually alive; that he actually listens to your prayers and that He cares about you.
Having said that, it is important to say that there is no guarantee on what will happen! God can do anything he wants. But he does like it when we ask him for things.

Matthew 7:7-11 – “Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!"

God wants us to ask him for things, and to keep asking. Let’s agree together that these six weeks will be a place to start or to ask in a more focused and consistent way.

What good gift do you think Jesus would like to give you before these six weeks are done? You may want to take some time now or over the next couple of days to pray and reflect on that question. When you are ready, write it here and/or on the bookmark we are handing out with this introduction.

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Second, ask God for this thing every day during the Leap of Faith.

Having decided what to ask for is a critical step, but this next part is even more important. Why? Because as you come to him each day and ask God for whatever it is you are asking for, you should expect God to interact with you over this.

Perhaps he will speak to you about what you are asking for, or what has been going on for you as you have longed for this thing, or what it might be like to have this gift. These are important and we should pay attention to that. But, in the spirit of Matthew 7 – “God gives good gifts to people who ask him” – let’s keep asking him for this thing each day during the Leap of Faith.

Third, tell someone else & ask them to pray for that thing too.

If you are married this may well be your spouse, and if you are single someone that you trust and can be in regular contact with. Ideally, it would be with someone in your small group (if you are in a small group). Obviously, it would be great if you would pray for what they are asking God for and that you both agree to pray everyday for the other.
Of course, you can choose not to do this part, but I think you miss out on one of the ways God asks us to have faith, by at least making it public to another person. It makes us step out in faith on another level. It is easier to pretend you didn’t ask if you keep it to yourself, than if you make it public to another. It is also much less fun to celebrate on your own than with someone who has carried that desire with you. Also, they may have even more faith than you, in which case their prayers for you can really be a blessing!

As we go through Leap of Faith we will refer to these people as our “faith buddy.” The point of having a “faith buddy” will be to share with one another about what we are praying for, what God does as we pray and to encourage and celebrate along the way. The method and frequency is totally up to the pair.

Fourth, when you see answers please email me or fill out a testimony card.

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 share a few psalms with 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 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.”

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, when God does something wonderful for you, share it with your friends, and please email us (LOF@vcfp.org) or fill out a testimony card to let us know what God has done. Testimony cards will be available each Sunday in the back of the theatre. You can give them to one of the staff or drop them in the offering box that is in the back as well.

**Ask God to Do Something Wonderful for Your 6**

Over the last five weeks we have been looking, in our sermon series, at how we can “love the Silicon Valley”. During that time we have talked a lot about the communities we are in: where we work; where we live; where we go to school; where we volunteer; where we have coffee and so on.

In each of those communities we are in relationships with lots of different people. Some of them know how good God is and how much he loves them, but most do not. Jesus has put us in their midst to be one of the ways that he expresses his love to them. With our words, our actions and now our prayers, we can desire that they experience something fresh and real from the God who loves them.

The hope is that God has put at least six people, who live right here in the Silicon Valley, in one of your communities and on your heart to pray for daily during the Leap of Faith. The six are people that you’d really love to see experience Jesus’s goodness and power in their lives in ways that really haven’t so far. Who wouldn’t want to see Jesus concretely bless six of our friends, if such a thing were possible?

So, along with praying for yourself, and your “faith buddy”, pray *everyday* for the same six people. Here are some suggestions for beginning to pray for your six.

**First, ask Jesus who your six are for this Leap of Faith.**

Who is God inviting you to pray for during these next six weeks?

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Second, think about what you want to ask God for each of them.

Since you are already in relationship with these folks, and probably already praying for them some, you may already have a sense of what to pray for them or what to ask God to do for them. If not, here are some suggestions for things to ask God to do for your six:

• Ask Jesus to reveal himself in a clear way to each of them.
• Ask Jesus to concretely bless them in such a way that his name would be made great in their lives – during these six weeks.
• Ask Jesus to remove any spiritual darkness in their lives, and that it would be replaced with joy, life, hope and love.
• Ask Jesus to give them positive encounters with followers of Jesus who would help them, get to know them and generally be interested in their lives. (Like Jesus with the Samaritan woman at the well.)
• Ask the Holy Spirit to draw them into a relationship with God and give them a view of a spiritual life that they have never had before.

Third, pray for your six every day.

I believe God will give us even more desire for our friends to experience the goodness of God. He may even make us part of the process, so as you are around your six be aware of how God may be opening doors to conversation or for you to tell a story about what God is doing for you.

Let’s together have faith – the assurance of things hoped for – that God will work in new and powerful ways in the lives of our six during the Leap of Faith.

Ask God to Do Something Powerful for Our Church

The third concrete step you can take to participate in Leap of Faith is to pray for our church each day during the next six weeks.

Perhaps you have desires for how our church could experience more of the goodness of God. I know I do! As we lay out our desires for ourselves and our six, it would be great to also bring to God the longings we have on our hearts for the VCFP community.

One topic we have been discussing for the past couple of years is a new location. While it has been great to be at Cubberley for these many (25) years, many of us have
the sense that we would like a new location for all sorts of reasons. Yet, at this point there has not be a clear sign of when to do this, or where to go, or how to pay for it. Perhaps some of us would want to pray for a breakthrough in this process and for some clear leading and provision of God that was unmistakably him.

Of course, you may already have something on your heart to ask God for our church. What dreams do you have for our church and its place in the Silicon Valley? Ask God to clarify that and then pray for it every day during the Leap of Faith.

Go ahead and write down what you desire God to do for our church:

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Summary
So, our Leap of Faith this year is about taking a step of faith to ask God to work powerfully in three areas:

• Our Life
• Our Six
• Our Church

As this is happening during the same time as Lent, we are aware that many of you already have certain Lenten practices that you like to participate in. We invite you to consider incorporating these prayers into your Lenten practices. This does not have to be something different or in addition, but can be woven into our experience of Lent. At the end of this document there are a list of additional resources, which includes a link to our webpage and a devotional for Lent.

As I write this now I am filled with excitement and hope – that desire mixed with anticipation – to see how God will work in our lives, the lives of our friends and the life of our church during these next six weeks. I hope you feel the same as you read this, and that you will participate in the Leap of Faith this year.
Additional Suggestions & Resources:

• **Find a Way that Works for You to Pray:**

  There is not much in this introduction that talks about when, or how, or how long to pray for these gifts. That was intentional. We are not prescribing how you do it, but that you find a way that fits into your life where you will most likely be able to pray everyday. The main idea is that we are asking God daily to work in these areas and in the lives of others.

  So, you may find a more conventional time where you sit and pray and reflect each day is what works for you. Or, you may find there is another time that might work for you each day to have time to ask God to answer these prayers. For example: maybe choosing not to listen to the radio on the way to work each day is a good time for you to pray; or, sitting in your car right after you drop the kids off at school; or, while you are in the shower; or, while you are exercising. You get the point.

  Try to find a regular time, for whatever time you have to give, that allows you to pray everyday for yourself, your six and your church.

• **Fasting:**

  *Why fast?*

  Fasting tells God, and our own souls, that we really are desperate for God to meet some need or hope that we have. You might have noticed that when people really wanted something from God in the Bible, they almost always fasted.

  The point of fasting is that when we choose to go without something, under God’s direction, we feel more desperate and wanting for that thing – and we can then direct that desperation to God. The hope is that the desperation we feel for that thing will create in us a deeper longing and hunger to see our prayers answered during the Leap of Faith. During our Leap of Faith, we’re really hoping for God to do a lot - for us personally, for our six and for all of us as a church. That can be a very rich time to consider fasting.

  It is often hard for many of us to feel really desperate for some need, when we live in a time and place where so many of our needs are so readily met. Some of us feel that desperation due to chronic injuries or situations that do not seem to change. Yet, no matter where we are on that spectrum fasting can be an excellent part of focusing our attention on what God wants to do in us during this time.

  Finally, fasting is meant to be a joyous opportunity to trust and depend on God, because we do see God meet us in the midst of those cravings and longing brought on by what he have chosen to set aside. even though in the process we may feel and see some difficult things about ourselves. 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, we 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.)

We do not recommend a water fast if you’ve ever suffered from any type of eating disorder. This is a big deal. 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?

Many times people choose to fast from eating a particular food. This can involve anything from giving up some beloved item for a time (ie. Chocolate, coffee, etc.) to eating only vegetables. Daniel, whom a book in the Old Testament is named after, abstained from eating everything except vegetables when he was taken captive by the Babylonians.

You could also consider a “**one meal a day**” fast. This can be more doable for many if you are doing a food-fast for a longer period of time. The key is to actually eat a *smaller* meal than you normally would at the time, and to make that “it” for the day.

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?**

Many. Almost anything that you feel going without would make you feel more desperate and produce some deeper hunger that could be turned toward God.

For example, for this Leap of Faith, I (Alex) am going to fast from watching TV after 8 pm at night. The reason it is so specific is that I have noticed that at the end of the day there is almost a reflex reaction to turn the TV on once the kids are down. It is like I go into immediate passive mode. As I have asked God what to fast from during this time, he spoke to me about this dynamic. I realized that he wanted to create a new pattern in me where when I am feeling washed out from the day, that I would turn to him first and engage him over how I am feeling. It is not that he hates television, or even that watching TV at the end of the day is a bad thing. It is that at that moment in the day, I stop looking for my joy in Jesus and seek to meet my needs for myself. I know this is an important time for me because TV was also a very comforting presence in my childhood, and I believe Jesus wants me to meet even some of the deeper needs that I have from my family of origin.
In that light, you can fast from almost anything. Given where we live it seems likely that some of us will be led to fast from some form of technology for some period of time in the day. Whatever it may be, the experience is to lead to God meeting us in a deeper level of desperation and hunger in our lives.

Lastly, if you want to read and think more about “fasting” I strongly recommend the following link (http://imby.net/easter/fast.html). This explanation of fasting is part of a Lenten Devotional written by a previous Associate Pastor here at VCFP, Dave Maddalena. It is very clear, helpful and thorough.

- **Journal:**

  If you like to write down your thoughts, keep a journal of your prayers and devotional studies during the Leap of Faith. It does not have to be a long or time consuming process. Especially those of us who would like to see, and have short memories, how God was at work over the course of the weeks.

- **Read Scripture:**

  The Bible is a big faith-booster. Be looking in the Word for verses, passages and concepts that connect with your faith journey and your faith goal. Capture these in your journal and meditate and interact with them throughout the LOF.

  If you are interested in a great Daily Bible Guide, you can find one at the following link: http://vcfp.org/sermons-resources/other-resources/acts-studies/ This Daily Guide has been created by the folks at the Greater Boston Vineyard for their LOF this year. They have been doing these guides for as long as they have been doing the Leap of Faith. This year they are using Acts, but there are other years that you can ask for if you are interested.

  Having a Daily Bible Guide allows you another arena to be engaging and dialoguing with God about the things you are praying for yourself, your six and the church. This can even be more powerful and enjoyable if you do this with another – like your “faith buddy” or small group.

- **Lenten & Easter Devotional Guides**

  Our VCFP website (http://vcfp.org/sermons-resources/other-resources/) has a few resources for observing Lent and Easter. Scroll down near the bottom where it says, “Devotional Resources.” We highly recommend the Lenten Devotional “Bright Sadness” by our former Associate Pastor Dave Maddalena (mentioned above). It has some excellent reflections on Lent as well as ways to think about Lent with your kids and family.
• 24-Hour Prayer on 3/22-23

And this is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. 1 John 5:14-15

The mission of our church is to be a people who “Receive, Respond, and Risk so that the transforming love of Jesus is experienced in the communities of the Silicon Valley”. Our church will enter into 24 hours of praying and listening to God for the communities of the Silicon Valley and for our church. This will happen from 5:30 March 22 to 5:30 March 23rd.

In the past, this has been a great time of experiencing the reality of God’s power and presence as well as “leaping forward” in our faith together! Please consider setting aside some time to come to the church office during these 24 hours to pray for one or more hours or to come to one of three prayer walks in several Silicon Valley locations to be announced.

In Summary

Here are the three concrete pieces of the Leap of Faith, condensed for the sake of memory:

1. **YOUR LIFE.** Ask God to do something *specific* for you.

2. **YOUR 6.** Ask God to do something *wonderful* for your 6.

3. **OUR CHURCH.** Ask God to do something *powerful* for our church.

May the Lord do great things as we move out in faith together!