



Leap of Faith 2017 Guide

BE Loved BE Love

JUMP INTO THE EXTRAORDINARY



Christians around the world give special attention this time of year to prepare themselves for Easter. This season, from Ash Wednesday to Easter, is called Lent. We believe that seasons in the natural and in the church provide us with an opportunity to experience God in fresh ways. As we engage in practices designed to aid and form us in our faith journey, we prepare for the glorious celebration of Christ's resurrection!

For the last seven years, we've taken this journey together in a way we call 'The Leap of Faith'. Individually and corporately in unity we pray, read the Bible, serve, and grow deeper in a sustained way in six weeks that we couldn't do over the long haul. We ask God for things for ourselves, others, and our church. We serve, give, and sacrifice. God shows up in big and small miraculous ways. Here are just a few examples that people have shared with us:

- I know God's plan is best and I have peace.
- I see people in my life as a blessing, I feel love by God more.
- I realized God is always working.
- My big ask was to trust God more. I'm not asking 'why God' anymore. I know he loves me.
- I asked God to help me pray out loud, I'm praying out loud now!
- My small group has been like a home to me
- Two people had power to be sober from drugs
- Even though my big ask wasn't answered my faith grew in sharing and praying for others and seeing God answer their asks.

TOGETHER, LET'S COME HOME TO LOVE

Leap of Faith gives us an **opportunity to gather around a theme of scripture**. We will have our Sunday messages, our small group studies, and personal soul trainings around the book of 1 John. *Often in life if we feel lost or struggle, we think God is the one who moved, but he's been home all along.* Together let's Come Home to Love. This verse from the 4th chapter sums it up well.

We know how much God loves us, and we have put our trust in his love.
God is love, and all who live in love live in God, and God lives in them. 1 John 4:16



So what do we hope for as we begin Lenten season together?

OUR HOPE IS FOR YOU TO...

- > *experience an ever-deepening of God's love for you that overflows to others*
- > *grow spiritually more than you have in any other 40 day period of your life.*
- > *receive at least one concrete gift from God.*

Most of what we hope for in our life will not happen unless God gives it to us.

Together, we learn how to look to God and ask Him for big and small things. When they actually happen... we know they come from him and we don't look to other sources to give us those things. The gifts of God bring joy and abundant life, not fleeting pleasure.

WHAT ARE YOU DREAMING ABOUT?

Let's get started. What do you want God to do for you?

We tend to think this is a selfish thing to do. Being created in God's image, desire shows us who God is as He creates in our hearts His desires for us. There are lots of people in the world with problems worse than yours or mine. But the Bible again and again emphasizes how the first step in faith is for us, personally, to come to God with all the things we need and want. The only other option the Bible allows is that we'll look for help from some other source, and the Bible is certainly not excited about that.

You do not have, because you do not ask.

James 4:2 (ESV)

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 (NLT)

So, this year, I am asking you to ask, for big and small things. In other years we have always emphasized asking BIG, this year I'm struck by how even asking for small things can be a big deal to us, others, and Christ. So, why don't you take the time right now to sit down with Jesus, and ask him to let rise in your heart the big and small things you most hope for and write them down.

Now, of course, the risk of praying every day for something you actually want is that you won't get it and you'll be disappointed. Why did you expend all that faith only to be so disappointed? And you're very right. The reality is that some of our prayers seem to go unanswered. So why pray then? We pray because as we draw close to God, He draws close to us, because sometimes a grain of wheat falls to the ground to die to be a harvest.

Truly, I tell all of you emphatically, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone. But if it dies, it produces a lot of grain. John 12:24

Even 'unanswered prayers' aren't wasted: they bring forth fruit.

WHAT DO YOU WANT JESUS TO DO FOR OUR CHURCH?

One of our dreams for Leap of Faith is for our whole church to grow deeper in our experience of God's love for us and how we are his love to others. By all means pray whatever is on your heart. But, if you're out of ideas, you could certainly pray something like: "God, would you fill our church with the power of your love and Holy Spirit? Would you encourage us to boldly be your love to others? Would you revive us spiritually in every way?" That prayer would change our lives and our city.

WHAT DO YOU WANT JESUS TO DO FOR YOUR CIRCLE OF SIX?

During Leap of Faith, it will be very helpful to think that our prayers might not only help us, but might also help our local friends, co-workers or acquaintances whom, best as we can tell, don't seem to be experiencing much of the love of God. Praying particularly for local friends has proven helpful because it helps us see the people God has actually put in front of us. By all means pray for your grandmother in Kansas. Several years ago I put my 71 year old brother in Illinois on my Circle of Six. Today he faces terminal Leukemia with peace and courage because he has surrendered to Jesus love. How happy I am I put him in my prayer circle. But consider also praying for four of your six people who are local and seem distant from all the benefits God might offer them.

Put their names on your bedroom dresser, your bathroom mirror, pray daily for them. Ask Jesus for ways to show his extravagant love and grace to them. Why don't you write their names down now:

So would you consider praying these three prayers each day?

LEAP OF FAITH GROUPS

Next, make a pre-determined decision to join a Leap of Faith Small Group

Let's be honest, it's never convenient to add another thing to our already busy lives; but together we can do what we could never sustain on our own for these few weeks. Mike and I

have found **God meets us powerfully in our groups**. We have some wonderful folks leading a variety of small groups. Take the leap.....and tell others in your group what you are asking Jesus for. You can find the list of groups on the website, in your connection newsletter, or on any of the Welcome tables.

SOUL TRAININGS

Let your roots grow deep in God's love through Leap of Faith Weekly Soul Trainings. Every Sunday there will be a small sheet of 2 to 3 different soul trainings you can do during the week to grow in God's love for you and for others.

GENEROUS GIVING

Let's celebrate Lent and Easter together by generous giving.

This year we will be working with The Outreach Program www.theoutreachprogram.org to package **10,000 meals** that will go to schools and organizations in our city to show God's love by feeding those who are hungry. We will come together with our partners, our church, our neighbors and friends on **Saturday April 29th**. It's a big goal, and we will need to raise **\$2500**. We will take a **special offering on Palm Sunday April 9**.

ONE FINAL CHALLENGE

Consider fasting. Fasting in some fashion is a very common way that faith communities throughout the centuries have experienced God during Lent. It seems to communicate to God and our own spirits that we're...well...hungry for more of God. Somehow the voluntary deprivation seems to focus us!

While food fasts of some sort are common, they're by no means exhaustive. People fast from TV or criticism or shopping, whatever is meaningful to them (and, in fact, if you've ever suffered from an eating disorder, we strongly discourage food fasts). Many people do find that fasting adds to what the ancients called "unction"—the oomph that can empower answered prayers. But it's meant to be a powerful experience unto itself as well.

BETTER TOGETHER

We're not leaping alone. This may seem like a lot, but just remember we are better together. Alone we couldn't sustain this kind of consistent focus, but together we can actually thrive and flourish as we keep our eyes on Jesus and thank him for extravagant love that transforms us to live extraordinary lives.

For Jesus and his Kingdom,
Mike and Sherri