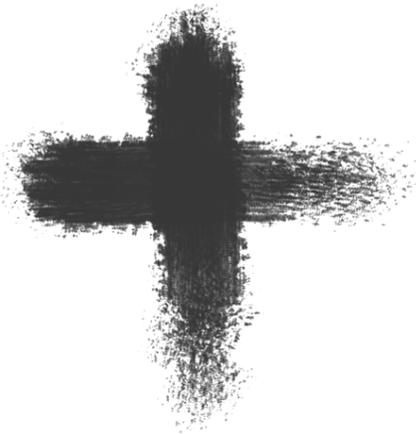




What is Lent and why do we observe it? Those are really great questions, even if you know the answers. We all need to be reminded of what's important. Lent begins on Ash Wednesday and ends about six weeks later, before Easter Sunday. **Lent is a season to prepare our hearts to receive the resurrection love and power of Jesus.** It's not a season to be dry, dutiful or filled with drudgery.

For the last ten years, we have walked this season together in a practice called the '**Leap of Faith**'. Leap of faith means, we risk together and believe God will do great things. We worship, pray, read the Bible, grow, serve and become more alive in God's love.

We practice life-giving ways of opening our hearts to God and to each other. We do for seven weeks what we couldn't sustain over the long haul, and we multiply that by seeking God together. **God shows up in miraculous ways as we worship, pray, give, and serve.**



Engaging Risk: Following Jesus

This year we are going to follow Jesus through the gospels. We will look at key accounts in the gospels, following Jesus through His life and ministry while engaging risk as He did. I know this may stir up some fear in most of us. Really, why not pick a better 'theme' than engaging risk? We are in an insurance capital city, where engaging risk isn't profitable. They may be true in every other economy, except the Kingdom economy. When Jesus comes close, following Him, even in risk, brings abundant life. Jesus' words to Peter in Matthew 14:7, when he was frightened, should expand our hearts today.

But Jesus immediately said to them: “**Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.**” Jesus risked. His disciples risked. Many people also risked. Therefore, we will risk together as well and invite the Holy Spirit to empower us.

“**Faith is spelled R-I-S-K**” is a foundational saying in the Vineyard Movement. **John Wimber, the founder of the Vineyard** exhorted us this way: “The kingdom is about ‘doing’ just as much as ‘teaching’. **If you aren’t doing the works of the kingdom the message isn’t complete.** I pray the Vineyard never stops taking the risks of the kingdom.”



Our 7 Kingdom Risks

Together we are going to take the risks of the kingdom.

Below are the 7 kingdom ways we are asking for the courage to risk and follow Jesus.

1. **Our church would be hope to our city and 7 new households would make the Des Moines Vineyard their church home.**
2. **Each of us will look for an opportunity to share Jesus’ love in conversation and action each week, with a goal of talking or praying with 7 people during our Leap of Faith.**
3. **Favor of God for growth, specifically for different people groups becoming one in Jesus mission.**
4. **7 water baptisms at Easter this year.**
5. **700 Easter invitations given out in our surrounding neighborhoods.**
6. **7 people will find their way to serve on Sunday and/or in outreach and service.**
7. **PROJECT BLESSING: 7 significant initiatives of hope for non-profits and churches in our city and beyond who risk loving in extraordinary ways. We will look for creative ways to bless the following:**

Joppa Ministries (*who will be our new neighbors here in River Plaza*) • **King Elementary** • **EMBARC** • **Tims Clube** • **FCA (Fellowship of Christian Athletes)** • **InterVarsity** • **Joshua Goeke** (*a Vineyard church planter in Springfield, MO*)

You will hear more about each of these ministries and non-profits as our Leap of Faith continues.

Risk and Ask

It's our practice to ask God for big and small things during this Lenten Season. So go ahead and ask Jesus for what may be big or small. **God cares and never tires of us asking him.** Let's not look to another source for help when God is waiting to do more than we could ask or think if we just ask him.

"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!"

Psalms 116:1-2 (NLT)

Take a risk and 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.**

My Big and Small Hopes

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.** 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. Here are just a few answers we've heard from folks over the years:

- I had been unemployed for over 3 months and right before Easter I got a job.
- We struggled to have a child and I had given up hope. God surprised us with a foster child that filled our world with hope.
- We needed a car and someone gave us a car that they could have easily sold.

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- I asked to be kinder. First, I accepted God's kindness for me and then kindness seemed to flow out of my life for others.

Risking for Others

During the Leap of Faith, it is **our practice to remember our friends, family, co-workers who are in need of experiencing God's generous love and grace.** We pray for them to know and experience Jesus' love and grace. Take a moment, now, to ask God to bring a few faces in front of you. Notice who may have needs that you are drawn to pray for. Now write their names below. Put their names on your bedroom dresser, your bathroom mirror, and **pray for them daily during these seven weeks.** Ask Jesus for ways to show his extravagant love and grace to them.

I Am Praying For

So would you consider praying in these three areas every day this Leap of Faith?

- **For our church** • **For your life** • **For the others you have listed above**

Don't Leap Alone

Leap of Faith Groups

Take a calculated risk, a bold courageous risk, and decide to go to a Leap of Faith group. God meets us powerfully in these groups. They are hosted by warm and caring folks. **God becomes larger when we experience him together in a group.**

Listen. Read. Pray.

Each week you will get a Soul Training devotional (that will also be available as an audio file). You can read or listen multiple times in the week. **When we go over Scripture and pray our prayers over and over, the truth goes deeper and deeper and transforms us from the inside out.**



Risk by Giving for the Sake of Others

Just as the early church displayed generous giving by their tithes and offerings (for their day to day local expression of God's mission in the world) we, too, can begin our generous giving by our consistent giving to support God's mission here in Des Moines. This is a wonderful place to begin generous giving; but it is not where we stop. Throughout history, the church has given 'alms', or engaged in generous giving, as an expression and reminder of God's gift of his Son.



Project Blessing is an initiative of hope in our city and beyond that will take resources. **So, this year, our Leap of Faith goal is \$4000.** This will allow us to bless each of these wonderful folks bringing light and life to our city.

This year we are risking because we will begin Project Blessing before our final offering is taken on Easter Sunday. Therefore, you may want to begin to

give incrementally. This can be done in a couple different ways:

- By using a **Giving Envelope** at one of our Services and labeling it 'Leap of Faith Offering'
- By giving **online at our Secure Giving Portal** (link to the portal is on our website: www.YourVineyardChurch.org). Simply use the '**Leap of Faith - Project Blessing**' section when giving.

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 hungry for more of God.

We don't fast from a spirit of scarcity. Rather, **we give up something to make space for God's provision and purpose in our life.** Perhaps we fast as someone shared one year, they fasted judging others to make space for God's love to flow through them.

While food fasts of some sort are common, they're by no means exhaustive. People fast from TV, criticism, shopping, or whatever is meaningful to them that can be distracting from spending time with Jesus. *(If you've ever suffered from an ea/ng disorder, we strongly discourage food fasts.)* **Fasting is meant to be a powerful experience drawing us to God.** If you have questions on fasting or would like to know more, feel free to reach out to a Pastor or talk to your small group leader.

Together for God's Glory

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 His extravagant love that transforms us to live extraordinary lives.

Just as the church in Acts together reflected the signs and wonders of the risen Christ, we together, as one, can reflect His glory.



"All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper), and to prayer. A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had. They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need. They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity – all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved."

Acts 2:42-47

For Jesus and His Kingdom,
Mike and Sherri