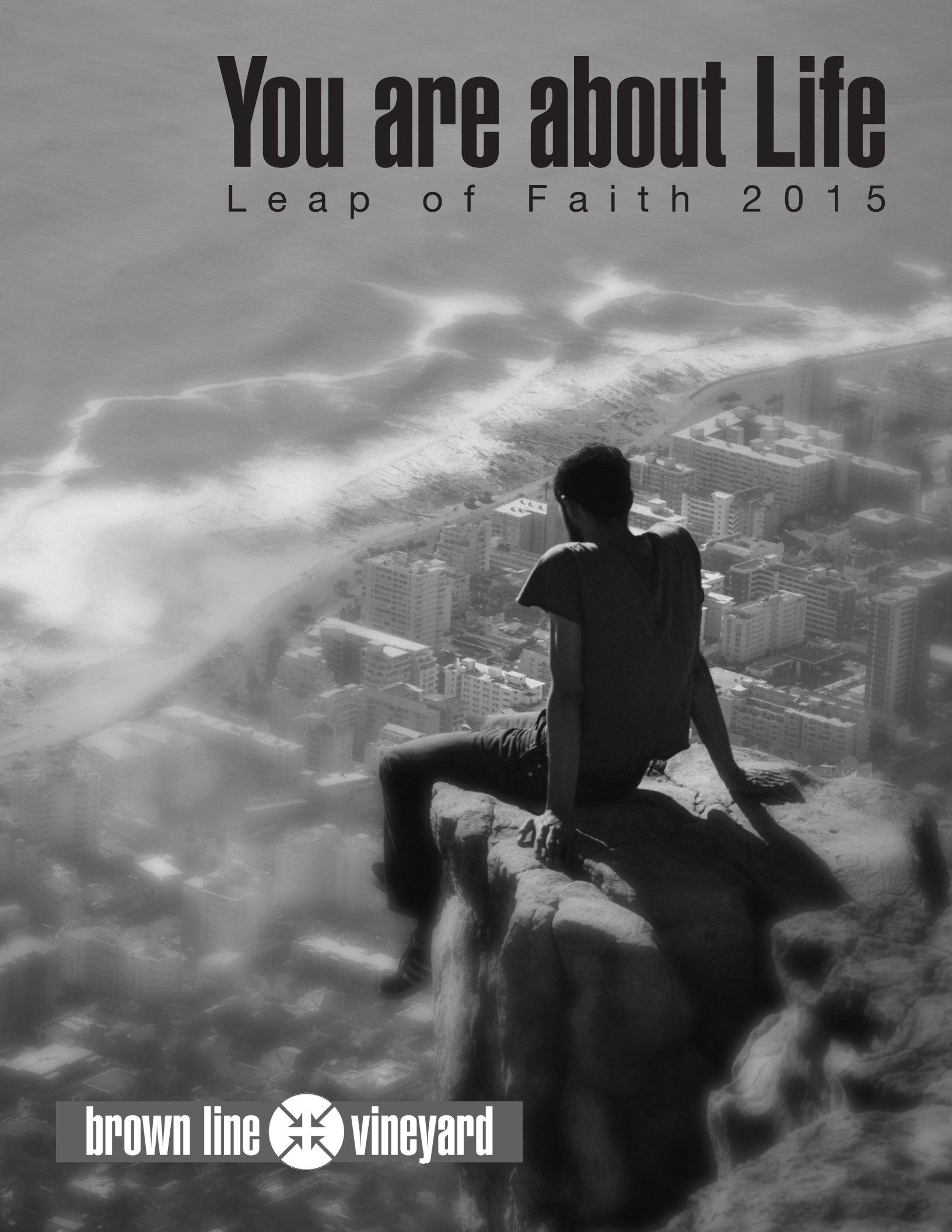


# You are about Life

Leap of Faith 2015



brown line  vineyard



As the historic church season of Lent (the 40 days leading up to Easter) begins, we feel a lot of anticipation at Brown Line Vineyard. This is because we (and many other communities around the country with whom we're connected) mark Lent with an all-church 6-week experience called Leap Of Faith.

Leap Of Faith is an **experiment** every year - we try our best to collectively take a leap of faith (see what we did there?) to believe that if we commit to a high level of intentionality and prayer for 40 days, then we just might experience a corresponding high level of God's closeness and power and love in our lives and world.

Last year some pretty awesome stories came out of the experience.

As a part of the experiment, two separate people (one unemployed, the other underemployed) spent the 40 days praying for jobs, and a few months later both had great jobs! Another person spent the 40 days praying for help in ending a bad habit she had long struggled with, and experienced significant freedom. Another person prayed for help in finding people to invest in an entrepreneurial endeavor, and within the first week of Lent, he had the amount he needed in pledges.

Or one of the stories that kicked-off our experience last year was from a couple from out of town, who had been guests at one of BLV's Sunday services while they were in Chicago. They had reached a point of real discouragement as they'd been trying to get pregnant for a long while to no avail. They were prayed for during our service, and it was an emotional yet really encouraging experience in the moment; but more than that, a couple months later, we heard from them that they were expecting!

I (Vince) was praying last year that during the six weeks of Lent I would get "a taste" of what it will look like when I no longer have to work two jobs, as I was feeling a bit wearied of the day-job I was working at the time on top of pastoring. And, long story short, one terribly painful day (in which I ended up in the ER with appendicitis) was turned for good when my post-op instructions allowed me to use two weeks of paid sick time just before a policy change at my organization was going to make that sick time disappear. Just like that, I got exactly what I prayed for: a two-week "taste" of not having to work two jobs.

Our whole church also had something we were all spending the 40 days of Lent last year asking God for: that our community would grow in attendance and in donations - to the point that we as a church could support part-time salaries for our pastors. And that prayer has been emphatically answered! Last September, BLV began supporting its pastors financially, and today (as we write this) our average Sunday attendance is near-double the size it was last year this time!

All this said, many people didn't have their particular Leap Of Faith prayers answered last year. So... just to recap... our community seemed to have some prayers answered, and other prayers not answered.

Hmmm... Couldn't those "answered prayers" just be coincidences or strokes of luck? Sure; there's of course no way to prove for certain they're in any way miraculous. (That's just the point of miracles, isn't it? They're, by definition, not traceable, repeatable things.) But, even if we do happen to be wrong sometimes chalking up certain changes in circumstance to God's miraculous intervention, suppose with us for a moment that there is a powerful Living God behind *some* things in our lives. How much could your own tangible experiences of God's power increase your sense of being loved and cared for and considered by a Being bigger and more resourced than you are?

How much could they dial back the anxieties and fears in your life? How much could they increase your faith? When we really feel the backing of a God who actually has some *power*, we start to experience life differently!

This is why we call Leap Of Faith an *experiment*: Let's throw some energy and effort behind this and see what happens! If that sounds as intriguing to you as it does to us, here's **two commitments** for the next six weeks that we'd like to invite you into.

## 1) Pray Daily . . .

### ... For your Big Ask

Your Big Ask (that's Ask with a "K"... sheesh, people, get a grip...) is something tangible and measurable that you're praying for God to answer. Like the stories above. Pray for a job, or pray to end a bad habit. What do you find yourself longing for? Is it to find a mate? For success in a project? To get pregnant? Perhaps for relief from some malady or affliction that has plagued you? - something specific that, if God would do it for you, you'd be jazzed. It could be something that you hope to have answered by the end of the six weeks of Lent, or it could be something with a longer time frame, but hopefully you'd see some encouraging signs during Lent.

We pray for something tangible and measurable not to give God a ransom note (like: you better make this happen, or else!) but because God himself seems to encourage this! Take, for example, the Psalms - the prayer book of the Bible - where consistently the various writers seem to understand their relationships with God as bolstered in a big way by asking him for things. 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."*

The Psalmist loves God why? Because God *hears* and *answers* his prayers. And the Psalmist thanks God how? By *calling on God again* in his next experience of need.

Why would God want us to just continually be coming to him asking for things? Well, think about it: we're human... we're going to want what we want anyway... whether we're praying about it or not! If we're being honest, the realistic alternative to "wanting something" usually isn't "deciding to not want something"; it's "pretending to not want something because that seems more noble." Essentially, God seems to prefer people honestly engaging with him over people trying to put their best faces forward for him.

So why not come to God with your wantings and longings? To a God who is loving and has more resources than you. He just might be pleased to give you what you're asking for! Jesus spoke of the God he knew this way:

*"For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion?" (Luke 11)*

Our experience has been that God is far more creative in giving us good things than we are in asking for good things. What we hear from those people whose Big Asks for Leap Of Faith last year were not answered is that, even so, the process of having brought their longing and wanting to God transparently for forty days led to other fantastic things: like they received something different than they had prayed for (something better!), or they received clarity on what they *really* want in life. Or, most of all, they just so enjoyed having felt in regular conversation and close connection with God for forty days - the Big Ask was just a vehicle to take them to God. And that connection is the biggest thing that sticks with people who throw themselves into this idea of taking a Big Ask to God. So we encourage you to throw yourself into this!

*What is something specific and measurable, which you feel would make your life better, that you're going to commit to asking God for each of the forty days of Lent? Write that here:*

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### **... For Your 6**

A really fun element of the Leap Of Faith experience for many people has been committing also to pray for God to do great things for other people around us, not just us. So a term that gets thrown around from time to time at BLV is "praying for Your 6".

The thought is that each person in our church will regularly interact with at least 6 local people who, best we can tell, aren't experiencing much from God. We mostly have in mind here people who are not in our inner circles -- but people we're sort of on the fringe of relationship with -- people we would choose to pray for and love as best we can: A neighbor. Your mechanic. Someone at your work or school or gym. The person who cuts your hair. Someone you always talk to at the store or coffee shop. You get the idea. (That said, if your best friend fits this profile, go for it! Put them on your list of 6.)

The goal: pray for these folks simply that they would experience good things from God. Our theory is: if your impression is that they "aren't experiencing much from God", most likely they have no one, or very few people, praying for them. Perhaps you can offer them that great gift! If you're feeling bold, some people we know who really swear by this "pray for Your 6" thing will flat-out ask their 6: "I'm doing this prayer experiment thing, so how can I pray for you?" That, we're told, can lead to surprisingly substantive conversation.

Last year we got all sorts of stories as a result of praying for our 6 ranging from fun to intensely impactful. I (Kyle) ended up having unexpected and super positive interactions with the conductor of the Metra train I ride every week. Or, on the other side of the spectrum, another person in our community ended up, out of the blue, becoming the much-needed shoulder to cry on when a neighbor suddenly lost her spouse.

We find it's best to not have any expectations as to what praying for Your 6 will lead to, and to just enjoy praying and keep your eyes open for what God may be doing.

So, who are Your 6? Write their names down here:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_

**... For BLV**

Our whole church has a Big Ask as well that we'd love for you to pray for each day of Lent: *that we would double in Sunday attendance! (Again!)*

At the risk of sounding self-important for a moment, we do really think Brown Line Vineyard has something unique to offer the people in our neighborhoods - a sense of connection with God and connection with other people that many folks on Chicago's North Side, we believe, would love, but for various reasons just don't believe is in the cards for them - perhaps they didn't grow up with much faith, or they feel alienated by most religious conversations, or they've just never felt at home in any church. We wonder if Brown Line Vineyard might feel like "just what the doctor ordered" for folks like that, and we want to welcome such people with open arms!

This is the perfect thing to pray for as a church, because a doubled Sunday attendance just feels impossible to pull off by our own efforts. If this were to happen, we would just have to stop and say: "Wow! Isn't God amazing?!"

**... For peace in West Africa**

Lastly, we want to, as a community, direct a heck of a lot of prayer toward a region in our world that could especially use some beyond-human power right now. You may have heard about Boko Haram, an extremist group based in Nigeria, that is leaving a horrific trail of violence and cruelty in its quest for power and control in West Africa. With every new report of Boko Haram's brutality, the challenge of seeking justice in the model of Jesus of Nazareth -- by standing for forgiveness and peace, rather than revenge -- is made more challenging. And such reports hit many of us at BLV particularly hard, as my (Vince's) own parents-in-law work in a hospital in West Africa (thankfully, quite far from Boko Haram's reach at present).

Jesus' take on prayer of this sort -- that is, praying for really massive things (like peace in a region) -- was a provocative one. He told his followers that he has given every single one of them *spiritual authority*, as if to suggest: there is a spiritual element behind every evil out there (small or big), and any one of us can -- if we choose to exercise our personal spiritual authority through prayer -- *actually affect* movement toward the defeat of the spiritual side of those evils.

Perhaps your prayer is just a drop in a bucket, perhaps the prayers of *our whole church* are just a drop in a bucket... Nonetheless, Jesus' suggestion that our prayers can perhaps contribute (even if

un-discernably) to the filling of that bucket we might call “peace in West Africa” motivates us! So, pray with us, and notice your own life expand in the process as you incline your heart and mind toward a wider world. (We suggest the New York Times Online as a resource to learn more about Boko Haram and the West African peoples and cultures they are harming and threatening.)

## 2) Take daily advantage of our Bible Guide

Since the whole Leap Of Faith experiment thing gets us in a “committing to things together” mood, we’ve also found it’s a great opportunity to challenge the whole church to read through a book of the Bible together.

Many people found this super rewarding last year -- especially due to the Bible Guide we released, which offered succinct and engaging background and commentary and questions to help the passages we read come alive. This year, we will have a Bible Guide to take us through the New Testament book Acts, which begins with Jesus’ resurrection and then chronicles the very first events in the spread of the Jesus-movement. It’s a fast moving history, with lots of examples of people experiencing God profoundly in prayer and also facilitating profound experience of God for others. We think you’ll enjoy!

You can access the Bible guide, which will be updated for you each morning of Lent, by:

- Subscribing to receive the day’s reading in your email inbox each morning. (If you’re on our e-newsletter list, you will receive an email asking if you’d like to subscribe)
- Clicking on “Bible Guide” from our website, [brownlinevineyard.org](http://brownlinevineyard.org)
- Asking for a printed version (just send an email to: [brownlinevineyard@gmail.com](mailto:brownlinevineyard@gmail.com))

## Now what?

Can we encourage you the following ways to help you take full advantage of this Leap of Faith prayer experiment?

First, *pray every day during Lent* -- when you shower in the morning, or over coffee, or during your lunch break, or before you go to bed, whatever. As you pray, you might feel like God is speaking to you about what you’re asking for. Obviously, pay attention to that! But, mainly, just keep on praying.

Second, *tell someone else* about your Big Ask and ask them to pray for it too (best case scenario: your spouse, if you have one, and/or someone in your small group, if you have one). And it would be neighborly of you if you prayed for theirs! Jesus said that God is uniquely present and at work when two or more people come before him with things. Maybe your chances of seeing something happen go up when someone else is praying too. (And they might even have more faith than you do, so you can leech off of them!)

Third, *when you experience God or see God answer prayers, tell us!*

- Send an email with your story to [brownlinevineyard@gmail.com](mailto:brownlinevineyard@gmail.com)
- Or go to our website, [brownlinevineyard.org](http://brownlinevineyard.org), and click on “Tell us your Leap of Faith story!”
- Or just tell Kyle or Vince in person

This is a super-powerful and often-overlooked spiritual principle: when you experience God or see God answer a prayer, tell others! Psalm 40 comes to mind.

*“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.” (Psalm 40:10)*

The suggestion here (and in many other Psalms) seems to be that if we “keep hidden” the actual things God does for us and don’t speak them out, then those things will fade in our memory. We’ll be left cynical and distrusting.

Fourth, *don’t waste time beating yourself up if you get behind in the Bible Guide*. It’s not meant to be a test or an indicator of you in any way. It’s just meant to be a helpful resource. So, if/when you find yourself behind, instead of heaping false guilt on yourself, just say “Oh well,” and then read from where you are (the entire guide will still be available online after the forty days of Lent are over).

## What’s with the “You are about Life” theme for Leap Of Faith?

Our theme for Leap of Faith this year is a phrase we’ve borrowed from a Franciscan priest and writer on spiritual direction named Richard Rohr: **“Life is not about you. You are about Life.”**

It might seem confusing that our theme has “Life is not about you” in it, and we’re telling you to unabashedly pray for something for yourself. It might even make you feel uncomfortable. For a lot of us, our image of church is that it’s the place I’m supposed to keep my wants and longings to myself. (It would be selfish to bring those up!)

But, if you will, allow us to take a slightly different (and maybe provocative) angle on this.

What if keeping my wants and longings to myself, or even striving my very best to be as unselfish as possible, are *actually* the behaviors in me that *most* make my life all about me? Because they make my life all come down to what *I* can pull off, how motivated and good *I* can be?

Does that feel like a bit of a shocking suggestion? Trying to be unselfish isn’t self-centered, right? Of course, in the simplest sense, no. And all of us I’m sure would be really served by trying our best to be less selfish.

BUT it is the subtle way that even the most noble pursuits or even the very best self-help advice all boil down to... well, self-help... helping *our selves*. And in that sense, they make life all about me! Sure, the ugliest version of this is a self-centered monster who couldn’t care less about their self-centeredness, but maybe all of us have a bit of a self-centered monster in us. The monster is just quietly wreaking havoc internally, rather than externally -- gradually exhausting us in the effort to be good enough, self-sufficient enough, in-control enough.

If we instead honestly bring our wants and longings to God (as selfish as they may seem), those wants and longings then can become an opportunity to submit ourselves to something bigger than us. By simply assuming (even if only for a moment) that there may be a God out there who can pull



off something we can't, we have recognized our own smallness and limitations and placed our trust (again, if only for a moment) in something outside of us.

We've asked: what if, instead of life being about me, *I am about life*? What if my story doesn't start and end with me, but rather I'm part of a much bigger, ongoing story of life? And what if that bigger story centers around a loving God who says that his great mission is to give fullness of life to anyone wrapped up in his story?

If that's the case, then the pressure is off me to pretend or strive or perform or anything like that. Rather, my great task is to as honestly as possible bring all of myself (including my wants and longings) into that bigger story. Jesus put it this way:

*"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."* (Matthew 11)

Wow! That sounds great! But it seems it is the human condition to resist this. It's remarkably hard to place my trust outside of myself, to NOT put all the pressure of my life working on me and my shoulders. (Maybe that's why it feels so freeing when we actually feel like we're no longer doing that!)

So while the promise Jesus makes us is that we will feel peace and rest and release of anxiety, apparently it takes a great deal of something other than striving/performing/pretending to find ourselves in position to receive Jesus' promise.

That something, if we have to boil it down to one word, is **humility**.

It is a major ego-hit to submit to the idea that "life is not about me". My ego - that part of me that wants to be rewarded, propped up, in-control, important, special, perfect - has to die. But then we can experience the incredible freedom in saying: "I am about life".

**This is just the thing that the historic church season of Lent bids us to do.** The annual rhythm of preparing for forty days to mark the death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth (his death on Good Friday, his resurrection on Easter Sunday) is an invitation to each of us to: die to the ways that "life is about us", so that we can be resurrected as "people who are about life" - people who feel connected to and supported by a big and wonderful and loving God; people who are freed from the pressure of the havoc wrought by the self-centered little monsters in us; people who feel comfortable in our own skin and are not driven by compulsions to perform or be someone or something else.

Now that sounds like a full life! Our Sunday teachings throughout Lent will be unpacking this theme more.

## **So... how long might it take to do this stuff each day?**

We, of course, couldn't really say, not being you. Our guess is that we're talking twenty minutes to a half-hour each day (though it may certainly exceed that if you're experiencing a lot of life from it!).

So that's some real time! As we said, think of it like an experiment. There's not much to lose in trying this for forty days (maybe some time you could spend watching Netflix or surfing Facebook), but if our stories from last year are any indication there's some pretty powerful potential gains!

**Could you possibly summarize all this so that I can, like, post it on my refrigerator and be sure to do it everyday?**

Consider it done! We have the two commitments written out for you on a single half-sheet.

And there you have it: BLV's Leap of Faith experience for Lent 2015. Here's to you experiencing fullness of life these 40 days!

Your pastors,  
Kyle Hanawalt and Vince Brackett



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