



Soul Matters

What does it mean to be a
people of HOPE?

What Does It Mean To Be A People of Hope

Faith, wherever it develops into hope, causes not rest but unrest, not patience but impatience. It does not calm the unquiet heart, but is itself this unquiet heart in [all of us]. Those who hope...can no longer put up with reality as it is, but begin to suffer under it, to contradict it. [True hope] means conflict with the world, for the god of the promised future stabs inexorably into the flesh of every unfulfilled present."

Jürgen Moltmann, Theologian

It's not always easy to hear well during this time of upheaval and crisis, especially when it comes to hope. The dominant messages are about hope offering us calm: "The light will come." "A new day is on its way." "Justice and joy are growing in the womb and will soon be born." Hope, from this point of view, is a voice that reassures. It's a welcomed whisper that says, "Yes, the sky may be dark now. Yes, the road you're on at this moment may be hard. But trust me, just over that horizon, there's a new world waiting for us all."

This soothing message comes to us as a gift. During dark days, we all get tired. The fruits of our efforts are hard to see. We feel alone. The promise that things will change offers us relief. We are released from the burden of believing that "it is all up to me" or that it all must be solved now.

It's a beautiful and needed message. But, as Moltmann and others remind us, it's also only half of what hope is trying to say. Hope doesn't just whisper "It *will* be different," it also shouts "It *should* be different" and "It *can* be different." Yes, it speaks soothing words about trusting and waiting, but it also takes the form of a holy impatience that declares, "Enough is enough. The time is now!" As Moltmann puts it, hope is not just that which calms the unquiet heart; it also *is* the unquiet heart.

In other words, hope doesn't just promise us that change will come in the future; it also changes who we are in the present. When we believe that a new day is dawning, we don't just sit down and wait. We get up and go out to meet the light. When hope convinces us that there are unseen forces working for the good, we begin to look around more closely, and in doing so we notice that darkness and pain are not all that is there. When hope's holy impatience gets into our bones, we start acting as if we deserve that new day now. Which in turn changes others by convincing them that we all have waited long enough.

Bottom line: listening fully to hope, makes you dangerous, not just soothed! It doesn't relieve us of duty as much as it reminds us that wind is at our back and unseen reinforcements are at our side. Yes, hope reassures, but it also emboldens. It doesn't just offer us a promise; it gives us a push.

But all of this only happens if we listen fully. So maybe the most important question this month is: "Are we listening to everything hope has to say?"

Our Spiritual Exercise

Spreading Our Stories of Hope

Instead of options this month, we are all invited to do one single exercise together:

**Spend some time remembering how you've been saved by hope.
And then bring that story of hope to your group to share.**

Hope rarely descends or magically appears. Most often, it's passed on. It comes to us as a gift. We don't find it, as much as we receive it. And almost always, that gift comes in the form of a story. Hearing tales of others finding their way through the dark helps us trust that light is waiting at the end our tunnels as well. Listening to others talk about their sources of hope helps us notice the many resources available to us. Simply put, hope can't spread without our stories. Light doesn't travel through the dark on its own. It hitchhikes on the tales we tell each other.

So this month, let's give each other the gift of hope by sharing the gift of our stories. We all have them. Some of us will talk about that person whose belief in us enabled us to believe in ourselves. Others will talk about how we held on through depression for the sake of kids. More than one of us will name that moment when we realized that the darkness was not our enemy but actually contained a gift. At least one of us will likely talk about the magic of "faking it until we made it." Still others may share their experience of stumbling upon one of those beautiful "[It Gets Better](http://itgetsbetter.org)" (itgetsbetter.org) videos. In the end, the details of the stories are less important than the act of bringing them all into the room. Surrounded by each other's stories, the circle can't help but become lit up.

Besides bringing a personal story of hope to your group, consider also bringing in a symbol/token that represents the essence of your story. You might also want to keep that symbol/token close to you during the weeks before your meeting, as a way of both helping you remember the details and offering gratitude.

During your group session, after everyone has shared their story, be sure to leave time for everyone to talk about what happened as the many stories of others washed over them.

“Extra Credit” Exercise: A Week’s Worth of Hopeful Words

If you have the time for and interest in an *additional* spiritual practice this month, consider weaving the following poems into your daily meditation, journaling or walking practice. Focus on a different one each day. Consider the practice of reading through the poem 2-3 times, choosing a different focus question for each reading. For instance, when reading through it the first time, simply ask yourself, “What line or phrase pops out for me?” On your second reading, ask yourself, “Who or what am I in the poem?” Other focus questions might be: “What is the poem asking me to do today?” or “Who is the poem asking me to engage in a new way?”

Here’s the list of poems we recommend, but of course alter as needed:

MONDAY

Hope, by Lisel Mueller

<https://writersalmanac.org/episodes/20170404/>

TUESDAY

Sweet Darkness, by David Whyte

<https://wordsfortheyear.com/2014/04/17/sweet-darkness-by-david-whyte/>

WEDNESDAY

The Winter of Listening, by David Whyte

<https://www.facebook.com/PoetDavidWhyte/photos/a.213444315348246.68208.213407562018588/844107495615255/?type=3&theater>

THURSDAY

Hope, An Owner’s Manual, by Barbara Kingsolver

Found [here](#) and

<https://lifeacousticandamplified.wordpress.com/2014/03/19/hope-an-owners-manual-by-barbara-kingsolver/>

FRIDAY

Still the Moon Increases, by Nancy Shaffer

<https://simplyblessed.heartsdesire.com/2013/11/15/still-the-moon-increases/>

SATURDAY

What is Hope?, by Rubem A. Alves, Brazilian liberation theologian

<http://mpleroy-eng.blogspot.com/2004/10/rubem-alves-full-poem.html>

Your Question

As always, don't treat these questions like "homework" or a list that needs to be covered in its entirety. Instead, simply pick the one question that speaks to you most and let it lead you where you need to go. The goal of these questions is not to help you analyze what hope means in the abstract, but to figure out what being "a person of hope" means for you and your daily living. So, which question is calling to you? Which one contains "your work," and Life's invitation?

1. What if your darkness is not the darkness of the tomb, but instead the darkness of the womb? What if this pain of yours is not about death and loss, but new life trying to be born? Could it be that Life - like any good midwife - is calling you to "breathe and push"?
2. Who is hope for you? Whose way of being in the world helps you believe that tomorrow will be better? What are you doing to ensure that their inspiration remains front-and-center rather than faded and far away?
3. What might it mean for you to "be hope"? It's one thing to believe in hope; it's quite another to become it.
4. Are you bringing more hope into the world than you realize? Are you sure that your everyday commitments and work can't be seen as "bringing hope into the world"? If you don't think of your work and commitments in that way, how might life look different if you did?
5. Are you hopeless? Or have you let someone *take away* your hope? Have you allowed someone's betrayal to convince you that the world is darker than it really is?
6. Are you sure hope abandoned you? Or did your *preferred* dream just not occur? What if hope is waiting for you in a new and unexpected form?
7. Why are you keeping your hopes so small? Are you really going to let that past disappointment dictate the size of your dreams?
8. Are you calling yourself a cynic, but really a disappointed idealist underneath? Is your cynicism making you feel sane or suffocated?
9. Is hope trying to sooth your heart or disturb it? Is there a holy impatience inside you that is tired of waiting? Is hope itself telling you, "Stop hoping; Start acting, demanding, doing!"
10. Are you clear about the responsibility we have for our grandchildren's' hopes?
11. What if hope doesn't swoop in and wipe away all the pain? What if hope is you standing squarely inside the pain and saying to it, "You are not the full story"?

12. What's your question? Your question may not be listed above. As always, if the above questions don't include what life is asking from you, spend the month listening to your days to hear it.

Companion Pieces

Recommended Resources for Exploration and Reflection

The below recommended resources are not "required reading." We will not analyze these pieces at our small group meeting. Instead they are here to companion you on your personal journey this month, get your thinking started, and open you to new ways of thinking about what it means to be part of a people of HOPE.

Word Roots

From Old English/Frisian *hopa* meaning to wish for, to desire, to have confidence in the future. The word despair comes from the Latin root *de* - without, and *sper* - hope.

Wise Words

Hope

Lisel Mueller

Full poem found [here](#)

"...It is the singular gift
we cannot destroy in ourselves,
the argument that refutes death,
the genius that invents the future,
all we know of God.

It is the serum which makes us swear
not to betray one another;
it is in this poem, trying to speak."

Hope begins in the dark, it's a stubborn hope that if
you just show up and try to do the right thing, the
dawn will come. You wait and watch *and work!*

Anne Lamott

Hope has to be seen to be believed. It has to be
made visible. It has to be something we can feel and
touch. We are called to be persons who embody
hope for one another. We have to be each other's
partners in hope.

Paul Wadell, theologian

Critical thinking without hope is cynicism. Hope
without critical thinking is naïveté.

[Maria Popava](#)

Hope is the salve that keeps our broken hearts soft.
Ann Voskamp

Despair is anger with no place to go. Hope is the
feeling we have that the feeling we have is not
permanent.

Mignon McLaughlin

The Sun will rise and set regardless. What we
choose to do with the light while it's here is up to
us. Journey wisely.

Alexandra Elle

Hope also has something to do with presence -- not
a future good outcome, but the immediate
experience of being met, held in communion, by
something intimately at hand.

Cynthia Bourgeault

You can cut all the flowers but you cannot keep
Spring from coming.

Pablo Neruda

"The future is dark. But my faith dares me to ask:
What if this darkness is not the darkness of the
tomb, but the darkness of the womb? What if our
America is not dead but a country still waiting to be
born? What if the story of America is one long
labor? What if all the mothers who came before us,
who survived genocide and occupation, slavery and
Jim Crow, racism and xenophobia and
Islamophobia, political oppression and sexual
assault, are standing behind us now, whispering in
our ear: You are brave? What if this is our Great
Contraction before we birth a new future?"

Remember the wisdom of the midwife: “Breathe,” she says. Then: “Push....”

[Valarie Kaur, *A Sikh Prayer for America*](#)

Sweet Darkness

David Whyte

Full poem found [here](#)

“When your eyes are tired
the world is tired also.
When your vision has gone
no part of the world can find you.
Time to go into the dark
where the night has eyes
to recognize its own.
There you can be sure
you are not beyond love...”

The Winter of Listening

David Whyte

Full poem found [here](#)

“...What disturbs
and then nourishes
has everything
we need...”

The day widened, pulled from both ends by the shrinking dark, as if darkness itself were a pair of hands and daylight a skein between them, a flexible membrane, and the hands that had pressed together all winter — praying, paralyzed with foreboding — now flung wide open.

Annie Dillard

Hope is a touch of graceful humor, no matter what’s occurring. The ability to laugh, the ability to see the ridiculous, the ability not to tense up too much, when things become impossible, just to face them anyhow. A touch of humor. Let’s say laughter through the flame... That’s hope: Humor, guts, and courage, no matter the odds.

Charles Bukowski

Everyone has been hurt. Many people have been hurt so deeply that their scars are vivid reminders of visceral pain. Yet, not everyone walks around with a vocal and audacious negativity that can be harmful to others. What you’re blaring to the world through a megaphone when you are openly and ceaselessly

cynical is that you are fundamentally wounded; that you are so hurt, you still aren’t capable of doing the work required to heal yourself. People don’t naturally gravitate towards cynicism without some negative experience (or many) precipitating their response. So when you’ve been disappointed or hurt or let down, you use cynicism as a defense mechanism to protect yourself from being hurt again. The funny thing is, to anyone really listening, you’re doing just that.

*Serene Hitchcock, *Cynicism Hides Hurt**

Scratch a cynic and you will find a disappointed idealist. *George Carlin*

For comfortably situated people, hopelessness means cynicism and letting oneself off the hook. If everything is doomed, then nothing is required.

Rebecca Solnit, [The Case for Hope](#)

The danger of hopelessness is that we can lose each other. In times of hopelessness, it’s easy to get scared of everything and everyone. It’s easy to start believing that your neighbor is the problem and that hoarding is a better strategy than generosity. The problem is that when community starts to break down, we lose the most important source of hope we have: each other.

Rev. Sean Parker Dennison

Everything changes: there lies most of our hope and some of our fear.... If you take the long view, you’ll see how startlingly, how unexpectedly but regularly things change. Not by magic, but by the incremental effect of countless acts of courage, love, and commitment, the small drops that wear away stones and carve new landscapes, and sometimes by torrents of popular will that change the world suddenly. To say that is not to say that it will all come out fine in the end regardless. I’m just telling you that everything is in motion, and sometimes we are ourselves that movement.

Rebecca Solnit, [The Case for Hope](#)

Despair is often premature: it’s a form of impatience as well as certainty. My favorite comment about political change comes from Zhou En-Lai, the premier of the People’s Republic of China under Chairman Mao. Asked in the early

1970s about his opinion of the French Revolution, he reportedly answered, "Too soon to tell."

Rebecca Solnit, [The Case for Hope](#)

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Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*

The message of the Incarnation is not to behold an innocent baby resplendent in inertia, but rather to take sides with a God who agitates for reform and shatters the status quo.

Doris Donnelly

Change and hope come from the margins.

Krista Tippett

What is Hope?

Rubem A. Alves, *Brazilian liberation theologian*

Full poem found here: <http://mpleroy-eng.blogspot.com/2004/10/rubem-alves-full-poem.html>

"It is a presentiment that imagination is more real and reality less real than it looks.

It is a hunch

that the overwhelming brutality of facts that oppress and repress is not the last word.

It is a suspicion

that reality is more complex

than realism wants us to believe

and that the frontiers of the possible

are not determined by the limits of the actual..."

Living hopefully is not devoid of pain. Living hopefully means residing squarely inside of pain, naming it as real and still saying to it "You're not the only story to tell."

Moral courage [video](#)

To be hopeful in bad times is not just foolishly romantic. It is based on the fact that human history is a history not only of cruelty, but also of

compassion, sacrifice, courage, kindness. What we choose to emphasize in this complex history will determine our lives. If we see only the worst, it destroys our capacity to do something. If we remember those times and places – and there are so many – where people have behaved magnificently, this gives us the energy to act and at least the possibility of sending this spinning top of a world in a different direction. And if we do act, in however small a way, we don't have to wait for some grand utopian future. The future is an infinite succession of presents, and to live now as we think human beings should live, in defiance of all that is bad around us, is itself a marvelous victory.

Howard Zinn

Look at the facts of the world. You see a continual and progressive triumph of the good. I do not pretend to understand the moral universe; the arc is a long one, my eye reaches but little ways; I cannot calculate the curve and complete the figure by the experience of sight; I can divine it by conscience. And from what I see I am sure it bends towards justice.

Theodore Parker

Hope comes from looking back and knowing we are on that arc... *Hope comes from looking forward and knowing can we harness the collective power of [the community around us]...* Hope comes from looking [deeply] and knowing we can change, and grow.

Rev. Jay Wolin

"We are not saints, we are not heroes. Our lives are lived in the quiet corners of the ordinary. We build tiny hearth fires, sometimes barely strong enough to give off warmth. But to the person lost in the darkness, our tiny flame may be the road to safety, the path to salvation. It is not given us to know who is lost in the darkness that surrounds us or even if our light is seen. We can only know that against even the smallest of lights, darkness cannot stand. A sailor lost at sea can be guided home by a single candle. A person lost in a wood can be led to safety by a flickering flame. It is not an issue of quality or intensity or purity. It is simply an issue of the presence of light."

[Kent Nerburn](#)

“Agent Smith: “Why, Mr. Anderson? Why do you do it? Why get up? Why keep fighting? Do you believe you’re fighting for something? For more than your survival? Can you tell me what it is? Do you even know? Is it freedom? Or truth? Perhaps peace? Could it be for love? Illusions, Mr. Anderson. Vagaries of perception. The temporary constructs of a feeble human intellect trying desperately to justify an existence that is without meaning or purpose. And all of them as artificial as the Matrix itself. Although, only a human mind could invent something as insipid as love. You must be able to see it, Mr. Anderson. You must know it by now. You can't win. It's pointless to keep fighting. Why, Mr. Anderson, Why? Why do you persist? “ Neo (“Mr. Anderson”): “Because I choose to.”
From the movie, Matrix Revolutions

Don't think that your hopes are too audacious. God's hopes for the world are even more audacious than you can imagine. Mary thought it audacious that God should choose her to carry God's hope for the world, but it was true. The same is true of us.
Steve Garnaas-Holmes, [unfolding light](#)

I still value hope, but I see it as only part of what's required, a starting point. Think of it as the match but not the tinder or the blaze. To matter, to change the world, you also need devotion and will and you need to act. Hope is only where it begins.
Rebecca Solnit, from [The Case for Hope](#)

Songs and Music

A Change Is Gonna Come

Sam Cooke

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wEBlaMOMKV4&index=2&list=RDRGSMxW4Ngtw>

We Shall Overcome

Mahalia Jackson

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vTyKJjj2oC0>

Tyrants Always Fall

The Nields

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y3MSLms3TAo>

One Day

Matisyahu

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cXACMQtuuZI>
(acoustic)

Bird of Sorrow

Glen Hansard

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=229&v=QzqiTVPLZ00

“Even if a day feels too long,
and you feel like you can't wait another one
and you're slowly giving up on everything,
love is gonna find you again
Love is gonna find you, you'd better be ready
then...”

Hey World (Don't Give Up)

Michael Franti

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O-oETzPKRX8>
(acoustic)

“Hey world, what you say
Should I stick around for another day or two?
Don't give up on me, I won't give up on you
Just believe in me like I believe in you...”

I Hope

Dixie Chicks

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lm2TtsLHUYs>

Here Comes the Sun

The Beatles

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KQetemT1sWc>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XANF_jUS3OI

(Nina Simone Cover)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=357gZV2Nfsk>

(Richie Havens cover)

Sunshine

Ryan Bingham

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=it2LJS6qSS8&feature=youtu.be>

Dog Days Are Over

Florence + The Machine

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iWOyflBYtuU>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0HuYEOO2r1g>

(offering the song as a gift)

“Happiness, hit her like a train on a track...”

The dog days are over

The dog days are done...”

Videos

Whether You Believe You Can or Believe You Can't, You're Right!

Kyle Maynard - Big Think

<http://bigthink.com/videos/kyle-maynard-how-to-loosen-the-grip-of-fear-and-doubt>

“When you have hope, you start looking for all the evidence as to why you are going to succeed; when you lack hope, then you start looking for all the reason as to why you’re going to fail.”

Beyond Hope

Derrick Jenson

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=58tWEaqZ-GM>

Reaching beyond hope to commitment

I Believe in Hope! (some explicit language)

Joanna Hoffman

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qis1WwQ9miw>

“The truth is I pretend to be a cynic but I am really a dreamer who is terrified of wanting something she may never get...” Maybe hope is stupid

Podcasts

A Time of Hope: Finding hope and beauty in Afghanistan

The Moth

http://player.themoth.org/#/?actionType=ADD_AND_PLAY&storyId=1602

“No matter what they say, there is music!” A story about when the music began again.

Articles

Margaret Wheatley

The Place Beyond Fear and Hope

<https://margaretwheatley.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/BeyondHopeandFear.pdf>

“Rudolf Bahro, a prominent German activist and iconoclast, describes the first step: “When the forms of an old culture are dying, the new culture is created by a few people who are not afraid to be insecure.”... I don’t know what Bahro meant by “insecure”; however, I’ve noted that those who

endure, who have stamina for the long haul and become wiser in their actions over time, are those who are not attached to outcomes. They don’t seek security in plans or accomplishments. They exchange certainty for curiosity, fear for generosity. They plunge into the problem, treat their attempts as experiments, and learn as they go. This kind of insecurity is energizing...”

Reflection: We’ve Hoped Our Way Into Our Current Crisis

Miguel Clark Mallet

<https://onbeing.org/blog/miguel-clark-mallet-weve-hoped-our-way-into-our-current-crisis/>

“We’re urged to embrace hope as an antidote. Hope for a brighter day. Hope for justice. Hope for peace. Hope that compassion will win out. But speaking for myself, I’m giving up hope. Not that I don’t understand the impulse. It’s tempting to think that looking to the future will get me through hardship. But in my life’s struggles, hope hasn’t worked out that way. Too often hope has hardened into anticipation and expectation for specific outcomes...”

Books

Hope in the Dark: Untold Histories, Wild Possibilities

Rebecca Solnit

Essay from the book found [here](#)

Darkness Before Dawn: Redefining the Journey Through Depression

Tami Simon (Editor)

Excerpt found [here](#) - interview with Parker Palmer:

The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration

Isabel Wilkerson

Review:

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2016/sep/08/books-to-give-you-hope-the-warmth-of-other-suns-by-isabel-wilkerson>

The Handmaid's Tale

Margaret Atwood

Review:

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2016/a>

ug/29/books-to-give-you-hope-the-handmaids-tale-by-margaret-atwood

Movies and Television

The Shawshank Redemption

https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/shawshank_redemption

Andy says to Red, his friend and fellow prisoner, "You need it so you don't forget there are things in this world not carved out of gray stone. There is something inside that they can't get to - they can't touch - it's yours."

Red asks, "What are you talking about?"

Andy replies, "Hope."

Time to Choose

https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/time_to_choose

"A hopeful and helpful look at the positive efforts all around the world to stop the progression of climate change."

Children of Men

https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/children_of_men

Places in the Heart

https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/places_in_the_heart

Love Actually

https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/love_actually

Hope Springs

https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/hope_springs_2012



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<https://www.facebook.com/soulmatterssharingcircle/>

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