

USG SGM ~ Choosing Hope ~ 2025

drawn from Soul Matters materials, see the full packet for more of all of these elements

www.soulmatterssharingcircle.com



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

Chalice Lighting: Even when the truth isn't hopeful, the telling of it is... To honestly name the harm being done is the first step in creating a more just and compassionate world. [Andrea Gibson](#)

Check-in *Share your highs and lows since we last met focusing on what drains you and what lifts you up. We give each other the gift of listening without asking questions or offering advice to allow people the safety to share what's in their hearts.*

Introduction

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. [It] means conflict with the world, for the goad of the promised future stabs inexorably into the flesh of every unfulfilled present."

- Jürgen Moltmann, Theologian

It's not always easy to hear well this time of year, especially when it comes to hope. The dominant messages are about hope offering us calm: "The light will return." "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. The cold seems to have set in deep. We feel small, and alone. So, 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!"

Spiritual Exercise: *Spread Some Positive Gossip*

Dr. Jamil Zaki researches hope and cynicism. He has identified [numerous strategies](#) to help us move from hopelessness and pessimistic views to hope and optimistic views of life and others. One of the most effective of those strategies is what he calls “positive gossip.” It’s all about publicly pointing out good deeds, spreading positive tales about strangers you’ve encountered and lifting up underrecognized admirable qualities of those close to you. Zaki says this simple habit radically alters not only our attention but others’ as well, decreasing our [innate negativity bias](#) and expanding the ability of all of us to be open to the goodness that surrounds us. By altering our attentional patterns, this “good gossip” literally causes us to live in a more hopeful world.

So, here’s your challenge: For one week, keep an eye out over the course of your day for one example of being touched by the kindness, generosity, or goodness of another person. And then find a different person to “gossip” about it to. Along the way, notice how others react to your positive gossip. Do they welcome it or does it throw them off? Also notice your own reactions. Does sharing positive gossip feel natural or awkward? And, at the end of the week, see if you notice any trends or shifts, in you or the circles in which you share your anti-cynical scuttlebutt. Come to your group ready to share what you learned and how this exercise offered you a challenge or comforting insight.

(To hear Dr. Zaki say a bit more about positive gossip, go to minute 25:25 of [this video](#).)

Quotes for Inspiration/Readings

As usual Hope is a woman
herding her children
around her,
all she retains of who
she was...
Hope rises, and she puts on her same
unfashionable threadbare cloak
and, penniless, she flings herself
against the cold, polished, protective chain mail
of the very powerful...

[Alice Walker](#)

Hope has holes in its pockets. It leaves little crumb trails so that we, when anxious, can follow it. Hope’s secret: it doesn’t know the destination— it knows only that all roads begin with one foot in front of the other. [Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer](#)

Hope is a practice, an act you can do even as you mourn, or regret, or dread. Hope is an act of trust, regardless of what the future may hold, trust in the gravity of grace, the life that sings in all things... Hope is not wishing but acting. Birthing. Planting. Getting up.

[Steve Garnaas-Holmes](#)

Questions

*Pick the one question that speaks to you most and let it lead you where you need to go. The goal is to figure out what being a part of a people of **HOPE** means for you and your daily living.*

1. If hope could speak, what do you think it would most want to say to you right now?
2. If you could magically infect someone with hope, who would it be and why?
3. Might life be inviting you to bring an old hope back to life?
4. What is your cynicism [protecting](#) you from?
5. We all carry within ourselves the hopes and fears of those we've loved. Is it time to put one of those down so you can make your path your own?
6. **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 find it.

Sitting in Silence *Take a few moments to sit quietly and reflect upon your thoughts.*

Sharing/Deep Listening *Respond with your thoughts and experiences with the topic. We create a safe space by listening deeply and not responding. When sharing, connect with what is true for you. When listening, give the speaker your full attention rather than thinking about what you will share.*

Reflection and Gratitude *This is a time to respond briefly to something another person said or to relate additional thoughts that may have occurred as others shared. Consider lifting up one comment or experience for which you are particularly grateful.*

Inspiration:

The Tiny Spark of Small Hope

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K3WVstXLsR0>

9 Photographers Most Inspiring Pictures Of Hope

<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2019/dec/16/hopeful-nine-photographers-most-inspiring-pictures>

Extinguishing the Chalice: Hope is the salve that keeps our broken hearts soft. -Ann Voskamp