

# The Path

## Introduction from Soul Matters

*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 contradict it . . .*

- Jürgen Moltmann, Theologian in the  
German Reform tradition

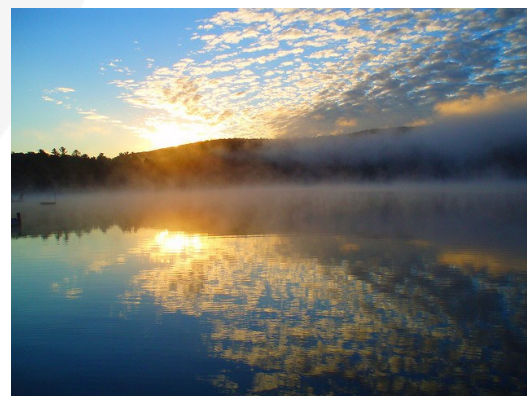
Many of our culture's messages about hope at this time of year seek to soothe and comfort: "The light will return." "A new day is on its way." "Justice and joy will soon be born." Hope, from this point of view, is a voice that reassures. It's a welcomed whisper that says, "Yes, the sky may be dark now. 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 can sometimes feel like 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.

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## What Does It Mean to Be a People of Hope?



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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'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. 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?"

## 2017/2018 Themes

September – Welcome  
October – Courage  
November – Abundance  
December – Hope  
January – Intention  
February – Perseverance  
March – Balance  
April – Emergence  
May – Creativity  
June – Blessing

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## Self-Care for the Spiritual Journey

When we go deeper into spiritual exploration together and individually, there's always a chance we will encounter some tender spots in our own spirits and stories. Therefore, it is important, when doing deep spiritual work, to have trusted companions and adequate support on the journey, and to know you are welcome to care for yourself and your spirit along the way, engaging in the theme to the level that's comfortable for you.



Likewise, please know that we are here to offer support if you find yourself struggling with something surfaced by the monthly theme. Rev. Mara is our first point of contact for pastoral care. She may be able to set up a time to meet you, or refer you to Andre Mol, our ministerial intern, caring lay leaders through our Care Network, or outside resources. She can be reached at [revmara@uusociety.org](mailto:revmara@uusociety.org) or (802) 862-5630 ext. 24.

## Our Spiritual Exercise: Spreading Our Stories of Hope

This month, we are all invited to do a single exercise together:

**Spend some time thinking about (a) what gives you hope and/or (b) a time in your life when you've been saved by hope. And then share that reflection with someone else (and/or your Theme Circle Group!).**

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 often, that gift comes in the form of a story. Hearing tales of how others find hope or have drawn on hope in their lives can help us as we make our own way. Listening to others talk about their sources of hope helps us notice the many resources available to us.

If you are in a Theme Circle, in addition to bringing a personal story of hope to your group, you might consider also bringing in a symbol/token that represents the essence of your sharing. 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.

## “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 or journaling. Focus on a different one each day. Consider the practice of reading through the poem two to three 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:

### SUNDAY

**“Hope” is the thing with feathers, by Emily Dickinson**

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/42889/hope-is-the-thing-with-feathers-314>

### MONDAY

**Hope, by Lisel Mueller**

<https://wordsforyear.com/2017/10/04/hope-by-lisel-mueller/>

### TUESDAY

**Sweet Darkness, by David Whyte**

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

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## Spiritual Exercise

### 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>



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 is your relationship like with "hope" these days? Where do you feel hope and where do you feel its absence?
2. Is there a person who embodies "hope" for you? What in their example is hopeful?
3. What might it mean for you to "be hope"? Are you bringing more hope into the world than you realize?
4. Rev. Jesse Jackson always encouraged people to "keep hope alive." How do you keep hope alive? How do you think we keep hope alive as a community?
5. What about "hope" challenges you?
6. Is there a question about "hope" that you are wrestling with these days?



## **Word Roots**

From Old English/Frisian *hōpa* 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.

“Hope” by Lisel Mueller

“...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

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“There is something compelling about the fact that Christmas comes, no matter what. The celebration of the birth of Jesus comes, no matter the season of your heart. The Prince of Peace, the baby that would bring a message of universal equality, compassion, forgiveness, and love is reborn again and again and again, no matter our state-of-mind or being...indeed, in spite of it. Perhaps that is the real miracle of the season, that hope and possibility cannot be denied.”

- Cynthia Frado

“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](#)

- “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

“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](#)

“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 goad of the promised future stabs inexorably into the flesh of every unfulfilled present.”

- 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 Tippet

“What is Hope?” by 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

“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](#)

“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](#)

“Hope opens us to the future but releases us into the present. Advent draws our eyes toward the horizon as we watch and wait for the Christ who comes to us... Instead of luring us away from the present, however, Advent invites us more deeply into it, where the kingdom of God is at work even now. This is the nature of the hope that Advent cultivates in us. Rich with memory and infused with expectation, hope calls and enables us to work here and now, in company with the [Sacred that] is already about the work of heaven in our midst.”

- Jan L. Richardson, from *Circle of Grace*

“The season of Advent means there is something on the horizon the likes of which we have never seen before... What is possible is to not see it, to miss it, to turn just as it brushes past you. And you begin to grasp what it was you missed, like Moses in the cleft of the rock, watching God’s [back] fade in the distance. So stay. Sit. Linger. Tarry. Ponder. Wait. Behold. Wonder. There will be time enough for running. For rushing. For worrying. For pushing. For now, stay. Wait. Something is on the horizon.”

- Jan L. Richardson, *Night Visions: Searching the Shadows of Advent and Christmas*

“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, [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=WRmBChQjZPs>

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

### **Bird of Sorrow**

Glen Hansard

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=229&v=QzgiTVPLZ00](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=229&v=QzgiTVPLZ00)

“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=ZMdQbLoKehE>

<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=bgiQD56eWDk>

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XANF\\_jUS3OI](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=it2IJS6gSS8&feature=youtu.be>

## Dog Days Are Over

Florence + The Machine

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UwrfZ5hnhhc>

<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...”

## Seasonal Songs

### Within Our Darkest Night You Kindle A Fire that Never Dies Away

Charles Pope - Taize

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EqQsZK57OX8>

### The Christians and the Pagans

Dar Williams

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t\\_KiHRHwaAs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t_KiHRHwaAs)

Interview about the song: [http://www.slate.com/blogs/outward/2015/12/24/](http://www.slate.com/blogs/outward/2015/12/24/dar_williams_explains_how_the_christians_and_the_pagans_became_a_holiday.html)

[dar\\_williams\\_explains\\_how\\_the\\_christians\\_and\\_the\\_pagans\\_became\\_a\\_holiday.html](http://www.slate.com/blogs/outward/2015/12/24/dar_williams_explains_how_the_christians_and_the_pagans_became_a_holiday.html)

### Solstice Carole

Wyrld Sisters

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3T0i4akX5a8&list=RDt\\_KiHRHwaAs&index=3](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3T0i4akX5a8&list=RDt_KiHRHwaAs&index=3)

### Solstice Night

S J Tucker

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tNk-ZeDMQDU&list=RDt\\_KiHRHwaAs&index=31](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tNk-ZeDMQDU&list=RDt_KiHRHwaAs&index=31)

## 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 reasons as to why you’re going to fail.”

### **The Hopeful Darkness of the Womb**

Valarie Kaur at [Watch Night](#) Service 2016

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=59&v=LCenwgheIBs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=59&v=LCenwgheIBs)

“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?...”

### **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.

### **What Is Advent Again?**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QSsMq6UXXwo&list=RDfwssGB1RZvo&index=28>

### **The Hope for a More Simple and Meaningful Christmas**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jtyA5bKvCIU&index=27&list=RDfwssGB1RZvo>

## Podcasts

### **A Time of Hope: Finding hope and beauty in Afghanistan**

The Moth

[http://player.themoth.org/#/?actionType=ADD\\_AND\\_PLAY&storyId=1602](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

### **The Place Beyond Fear and Hope**

Margaret Wheatley

<http://berkana.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/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

<http://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>

## *Movies and Television*

### *The Shawshank Redemption*

[https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/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.”

### *Time to Choose*

[https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/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](https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/children_of_men)

### *Places in the Heart*

[https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/places\\_in\\_the\\_heart](https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/places_in_the_heart)

### *Love Actually*

[https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/love\\_actually](https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/love_actually)

### *Hope Springs*

[https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/hope\\_springs\\_2012](https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/hope_springs_2012)

