



Soul Matters

Renewing Faith

Small Group

March 2022

Welcome to Renewing Faith

"Faith is homesickness. Faith is a lump in the throat."

Frederick Buechner

"Once a reporter asked A.J. Muste, "Do you really think you are going to change the policies of this country by standing out here alone at night in front of the White House with a candle?" Muste replied softly: "Oh I don't do this to change the country. I do this so the country won't change me."

Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat

How do we renew our faith
when so much is falling apart?
In these fragile days,
we, who assess life through "the fire of reason,"
find so little reason to trust
that everything's going to be ok.
The climate is collapsing.
Racism so often morphs more than it is removed.
Politics divide more than they unite.
Don't tell us it's slowly getting better.
Don't ask us to deny this feeling of despair that feels so real.
On so many days, we have lost our hope for a better day.

But we do long for it!
Don't we?
Despite the setbacks and slowness,
there remains something inside that continues to say,
"It can be better!"
"More is possible!"
"I need to believe that goodness is real."
It's a longing that lingers no matter what.

Maybe that's what the preacher meant
when he spoke of faith
as a hunger for home.
Maybe faith is more about remembering
our longing for what we love and who we want to be,
more than it is an act of restoring our trust
that everything will work out well.

Maybe the peacenik was right:
We must remain faithful to the fight
not because change is guaranteed
but to ensure that we are not changed.

Our Spiritual Exercises

Option A

Your Faith in Six Words

Sometimes talking about faith can wind us in circles. Ultimately, our faith is too complex, visceral and personal to be easily shared. But some have cut through the complexity by attempting to sum up their faith using only six words. It's a practice that clarifies and amplifies what matters most to us. It helps remind us of and hold on to our deepest commitments.

So this month, try it for yourself. Come to your group with your own six-word faith statement. Here are some inspiring examples to help you on your way:

<https://www.facebook.com/revjakebmorrill/posts/10203771525878015>

<https://www.facebook.com/tandi.rogers/posts/10152204974568645>

Option B

Doubt Your Doubts

All of us know what it's like to lose our faith. We've been betrayed by a relationship, let down by our church community, or convinced that life just won't get better. Our greatest faith can sometimes be the belief that life and others *don't* deserve our faith in them.

But sometimes our doubts need to be doubted. Sometimes life and the people around us need to be given a second chance. So this month pick an experience, person or group that you've lost faith in and risk giving it/them another try.

Come to your group ready to share whether or not the risk paid off, and more importantly, what it taught you about yourself.

Option C

Picture Your Faith

Forget trying to explain it. Sometimes faith is best expressed through images. So this month, think about what faith *looks like* for you. Here's your assignment in a nutshell:

Find or take a picture of yourself or others "living faithfully."

So many images to choose from: A person lost in prayer. Two people holding hands. Picketers. Someone planting a seed. A sunrise. Whatever it is, come to your group with at least a few photos, as well as a few words on what the images taught you about your own intuitive understanding of faith.

Option D

Tell Them!

More often than not, we can't renew our faith on our own. It takes others. Their commitment to justice renews our faith that a better world is possible. Their compassion and kindness (even when they have struggles of their own), renews our faith in humanity. Their bravery reignites our faith in ourselves.

So who is that "other" for you? Whose faithfulness renews your own? And most importantly, have you told them?!

That's exactly what this exercise is all about: telling them!

Why is that so important? Well, simply put, telling them they sustain your faithfulness helps them sustain theirs. It keeps *them* going. It's a gift to them. A gift that honors the gift they gave you.

So get busy. Do it in a letter. Or maybe over coffee. Or maybe even in some clever or playful way. Tell them their faith and faithfulness has sustained your own.

Option E

Which Resource is Yours?

In the Companion Pieces section below, there are many quotes and resources on the practice of Renewing Faith. Engaging these resources and finding the one that especially speaks to you is a spiritual practice in and of itself.

So, as your spiritual exercise for this month, reflect on those resources until you find the one that most deepens your understanding of Renewing Faith. After you've found it, engage it in a creative way. For instance, if it's an article or video, share it with someone close to you and discuss it with them. Create an art piece or write a poem in reaction to it. Come to your group ready to share where the journey led you.

Your Question

Don't treat these questions like "homework" or try to answer every one. Instead, make time to meditate on the list and then pick the one question that speaks to you most. The goal is to figure out which question is "yours." Which question captures the call of your inner voice? Which one contains "your work"? And what is that question trying to get you to notice or acknowledge?

Often it helps to read the list to a friend or loved one and ask them which question they think is the question you need to wrestle with!

1. What have you trusted since childhood? What have you never lost faith in?
2. Has your faith in humanity increased or decreased as you've grown older?
3. How is your faith in democracy doing?
4. Has age allowed you to be more or less faithful to your true self?
5. Do you think faith in the American dream is dying?
6. Do you regret the time you were too scared to take that leap of faith?
7. Have you ever been made trustworthy by someone who risked putting their trust in you?
8. Has too much doubt ever gotten you into trouble?
9. Is it possible your doubting is partially a way to avoid risking a leap of faith that scares you?
10. Despite its losses and challenges, Covid has clarified priorities for many of us. So, because of covid, what are you now more faithful to?
11. Is it time to take that leap of faith? You do know, don't you, that we weren't meant to make our homes on the safe edge of the cliff.
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 find the question that's looking for you.

Companion Pieces

Recommended Resources for Personal Exploration & Reflection

The following resources are not required reading. We will not analyze these pieces in our group. Instead they are here to companion you on your journey this month, get you thinking and open you up to new ways of imagining the spiritual practice of Renewing Faith.

Word Roots & Definitions

The Hebrew word for faith in the Old Testament is *emoonah*. What makes that word interesting is that it's the sound that a baby donkey makes when it is calling for its mother. So if you want to hear the meaning of *emoonah*, you need to say it like braying... The point being that faith in the Hebrew Bible is like a baby donkey calling out or crying for its mother. There's something kind of wonderful about that. There is an element...I don't know if you want to say of desperation in it or not, but there certainly is an element of confidence that the cry will be heard.

[Marcus Borg](#)

Faith didn't enter the English language until the 1200s after the Norman invasion, via the Old French 'feid' — in turn from the Latin 'semper fidelis' (always loyal). Its meaning then had nothing to do with belief in the absence of evidence, but rather with keeping promises and being worthy of trust. One who was faithful to God, then, kept God's commandments; it was not a statement about belief, but about behavior.

- [Source](#)

Wise Words

Faith is homesickness. Faith is a lump in the throat. Faith is less a position on than a movement toward.
Frederick Buechner

To have faith is to trust yourself to the water. When you swim you don't grab hold of the water, because if you do you will sink and drown. Instead you relax, and float.

Alan Watts

I believe in the sun even when it's not shining;
I believe in love even when I don't feel it;
I believe in God even when he is silent.

anonymous Jewish poem, [set to music](#) by Mark A. Miller

Faith is a willingness to take the next step, to see the unknown as an adventure, to launch a journey.

[Sharon Salzberg](#)

Everything worth doing in the world is a desperate gamble, a game of chance, where nothing is certain. What is love? Is it not a wild and sublime speculation that can end in ecstasy or despair? What is courage? Is it not a hazardous risk of fortune that can end in victory or defeat? What is adventure? Is it not a blind leap in the dark that can end in joy or disaster?

[Rev. David O Rankin](#)

Faith is taking the first step even when you can't see the whole staircase.

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

As you start to walk out on the way, the way appears.

Rumi

There is always light.
Only if we are brave enough to be it.

Amanda Gorman

I love the recklessness of faith. First you leap, then you grow wings.

William Sloane Coffin

Sometimes you sense how faithfully your life is delivered, even though you can't read the address.

[Thomas R. Smith](#)

First Lesson, Philip Booth

Full poem at

<https://thedewdrop.org/2021/12/17/philip-booth-first-lesson/>

Lie back daughter...

Spread your arms wide...

and let go...

lie gently and wide to the light-year stars, lie back, and the sea will hold you.

The opposite of faith is not doubt. It's despair.

[Sharon Salzberg](#)

We believed in fresh starts. We believed in good luck. We believed in the miner who scratched together one last stake and struck the Comstock Lode. We believed in the wildcatter who leased arid land at two and a half cents an acre and brought in Kettleman Hills, fourteen million barrels of crude in its first three years. We believed in all the ways that apparently played-out possibilities could - while we slept - turn green and golden.

[Joan Didion](#)

"The Great Resignation" is not about people not wanting to work. It is about a dawning recognition that, for a larger and larger portion of this country, the American dream is dead.

[Kurt Eichenwald](#)

I cannot be an optimist but I am a prisoner of hope.

[Cornel West](#)

The need for the new love is faithfulness to the old.

[Galway Kinnell](#)

The only way you can make a (person) trustworthy is to trust [them].

[Henry Stimson](#)

The moment we break faith with one another, the sea engulfs us and the light goes out.

[James A. Baldwin](#)

The point is that in almost every instance of our lives we are, if we pay attention, in the midst of an almost constant, if subtle, caretaking. Holding open doors. Offering elbows at crosswalks. Letting someone else go first. Helping with the heavy bags... Pulling someone back to their feet. Stopping at the car wreck, at the struck dog... This caretaking is our default mode and it's always a lie that convinces us to act or believe otherwise. Always.

[Ross Gay](#)

Do not believe anything just because I said it. Put it into practice. See for yourself if it's true.

[Buddha, in the Kalama Sutta](#)

Faith without works is dead. It's just not nice to sit around — you can sit around in your prayer breakfast with all this faithy-faith and all this talking and thinking and 'hallelujahing' and it's nothing. It's nothing to God. I mean, I think it pisses God off.

[Anne Lamott](#)

Beware the faith that does not trouble the world.

[Steve Garnaas-Holmes](#)

Music

Two different playlists for each of our monthly themes: one in Spotify and another in YouTube. They are organized as a journey of sorts, so consider listening from beginning to end and using the playlists as musical meditations.

Click [here](#) for the Spotify playlist on [Renewing Faith](#).

Click [here](#) for all [Spotify playlists](#).

Click [here](#) for the YouTube playlist on [Renewing Faith](#).

Click [here](#) for all the [YouTube playlists](#).

Videos & Podcasts

The Parable of the Trapeze, Danaan Parry

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HWvV5N4hOGc>

Welcome to the 'Take This Job and Shove It' Economy, The Ezra Klein Show

<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/welcome-to-the-take-this-job-and-shove-it-economy/id1548604447?i=1000525988260>

On The Great Resignation and losing faith in the American Dream

Rocked by Doubt, Radiolab

<https://www.wnycstudios.org/podcasts/radiolab/segments/278114-faith-rocks>

On traveling the tightrope between doubt and certainty, and wondering if there's a way to make yourself at home on that razor's edge between definitely...and not so sure.

The Low Road, Marge Piercy

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zveWE6I3M2g>

On renewing faith in the work of joining forces for the common good.

The Meaning of Faith, On Being

<https://onbeing.org/programs/sharon-salzberg-lawrence-kushner-anne-lamott-and-omid-safi-the-meaning-of-faith/>

"In this show, we'll explore the connotations of the word "faith" in four traditions and lives: Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. We'll speak with Sharon Salzberg, Rabbi Lawrence Kushner, Anne Lamott, and Omid Safi..."

The Anatomy of Trust

Brené Brown

<https://brenebrown.com/videos/anatomy-trust-video/>

Trust is built in the small moments not the grand gestures!

Articles

The next US civil war is already here – we just refuse to see it

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/04/next-us-civil-war-already-here-we-refuse-to-see-it>

On the Crumbling of Our American Faith in Democracy

Is a Civil War Ahead?

<https://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/is-a-civil-war-ahead>

On the Crumbling of Our American Faith in Democracy

Books

Utopia for Realists: How We Can Build the Ideal World

Rutger Bregman

On renewing our faith in radical social change: "Utopia for Realists is one of those rare books that takes you by surprise and challenges what you think can happen... Universal basic income. A 15-hour workweek. Open borders. Does it sound too good to be true? One of Europe's leading young thinkers shows how we can build an ideal world today."

Related TED Talk [HERE](#)

Grace (Eventually): Thoughts on Faith

Anne Lamott

"Here Lamott delivers a poignant, funny, and bittersweet primer of faith, as we come to discover what it means to be fully alive."

The Science of Trust: Emotional Attunement for Couples

John M. Gottman

Article about the book:

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-older-dad/201303/do-i-trust-you-anymore>

Movies

[You Will Die at Twenty](#)

[First Reformed](#)

[Silence](#)

More Monthly Inspiration from Soul Matters!

Our Facebook Inspiration Page:

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

Our Instagram Page:

Find us as “soul_matters_circle”

Music Playlists:

Click [here](#) for links to the [Spotify playlists](#) for each month.

Click [here](#) to check out the [YouTube playlists](#).

Find support for bringing the
monthly themes home and into your family life with

Soulful Home: A Guide for Families:

<https://www.soulmatterssharingcircle.com/soulful-home.html>



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