



## January 2020 Membership Resource

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In partnership with:



### About this Resource



*“Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.  
For darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples;  
but the LORD will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you.”*  
- Isaiah 60:1-2

In the wake of school shootings, the widening wage gap, families separated at the border, and countless other enormous social problems, our JustFaith community has been hard at work, advocating for just laws and sharing compassion with those in dark situations. Our programs seek to provide the tools and education necessary to equip our community to address the world’s brokenness. But to start out this new decade, we wanted to give you additional tools for acknowledging the brokenness that all of us experience at various points in life, that you might also work toward your own spiritual healing. After all, it is usually when we ourselves are spiritually, emotionally, and physically healthy that we have the most to give to others.

This resource is all about healing. Regardless of whether 2019 brought you enormous setbacks and loss, or if the ordinary day to day challenges leave you longing for spiritual renewal, we hope this resource will guide you in beginning 2020 with renewed wholeness. You can use it as a personal devotional guide, or you can bring it to your small group or even Sunday school class. There are five sessions. The timing for each session is flexible, so that you can feel free to skip around and take as much time as you need on each of the exercises.

If you enjoy this resource, you may be interested in our Engaging Spirituality module, a 21-week program that introduces participants to practices of contemplative prayer and meditation.

The JustFaith staff wishes you peace, healing, and wholeness in this new year. Blessings on your journey!

#### Links:

- “Abide with Me”: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=84YASWe3\\_2Q](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=84YASWe3_2Q)
- Psalm 22: <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+22&version=NRSV>
- “As the Deer”: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rXFZsRhdt78>
- “Be Thou My Vision”: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ihJAJA4ibEs>
- “The Power of Vulnerability”:  
[http://www.ted.com/talks/brene\\_brown\\_on\\_vulnerability.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_on_vulnerability.html)
- “Kevin Kling: The Losses and Laughter We Grown Into”  
<https://onbeing.org/programs/kevin-kling-the-losses-and-laughter-we-grow-into/>



- “11 Minutes Awareness of Breath” <https://www.mindful.org/an-11-minute-awareness-of-breath-practice/>
- “Mindful Eating Exercise” (requires a raisin for each participant): <https://www.dukeintegrativemedicine.org/dukeimprogrmsblog/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2017/08/Mindful-Eating-Transcript.pdf>
- A Guided Walking Meditation: <https://www.mindful.org/walking-meditation/>
- Levels of Validation: <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/pieces-mind/201204/understanding-validation-way-communicate-acceptance>
- “Come Thou Fount”: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zNzO6LCyilY>



## Session 1: It's okay to feel your feelings.

We must not portray you in king's robes,  
you drifting mist that brought forth the morning.  
Once again from the old paintboxes  
we take the same gold for scepter and crown  
that has disguised you through the ages.  
Piously we produce our images of you  
till they stand around you like a thousand walls.  
And when our hearts would simply open,  
our fervent hands hide you.  
Rainer Maria Rilke, *Book of Hours*, I 4<sup>1</sup>

"I think that if I ever have kids, and they are upset, I won't tell them that people are starving in China or anything like that because it wouldn't change the fact that they were upset. And even if somebody else has it much worse, that doesn't really change the fact that you have what you have." – Charlie, *Perks of Being a Wallflower*<sup>2</sup>

Especially for us "social justies," feeling guilty for our sadness traps us in our sadness (note: throughout this session, feel free to substitute "sadness" for "anger," or any negative emotion, for that matter). It is true that there are plenty of people who have it worse. All over the world, people are starving, in the midst of warfare, victims of natural disasters, stuck in oppressive political regimes – the list goes on and on. Considering the weight of the world in comparison with our own problems, it seems irrational to feel the way we do, so the natural solution is to reason ourselves out of it. But a lot of times, there's no rational easy fix, and so the reason that was supposed to bring order and control to our lives ends up digging us into a deeper hole. Now we still have our original problem, along with added anxiety about the presumed inescapability of that problem, as well as guilt that we feel the way we do.

All of that to say – the kind of reason that solves math problems or comes up with something insightful to say at a meeting isn't always our friend when our lives feel hopeless and empty. Sadness is part of being human. But sadness is not necessarily the problem – it is our reactions to that sadness that is the problem. Trying to reason our way out of sadness is like

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<sup>1</sup> Barrows, Anita. [Rilke's Book of Hours](#). Penguin Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

<sup>2</sup> Chbosky, Stephen. *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (p. 211). MTV Books. Kindle Edition.



trying to stand up in the midst of a giant ocean wave: it knocks us off our feet, and sometimes we're left physically exhausted, unable to focus, and unsure whether it's worth it to keep going with life. Since it's nearly impossible to suppress undesirable thoughts and feelings by sheer will and the power of reason, perhaps the best option is to find some better ways to deal with the sadness or anger that's inevitably going to happen.

***A Story from *The Mindful Way through Depression*:***

The Novice In a time-honored story set in an ancient Himalayan kingdom, a novice monk was excited at the prospect of meeting his teacher for the first time. He was on fire with questions but sensed that this was not the time to ask them. Instead, he listened carefully to the teacher's instructions. They were brief and to the point. "Get up early tomorrow and climb to a cave you'll find at the top of this mountain. Sit from dawn to dusk and have no thoughts. Use any method you wish to banish thought. When the day is over, come and tell me how it went." At dawn the next day the novice found the cave, made himself comfortable, and waited for his mind to settle. He thought that if he sat long enough it would become blank. Instead, his mind was crowded with thoughts. Soon he started to worry about failing the task he had been set. He tried to force the thoughts out of his mind, but that just produced more thoughts. He shouted at them to "Go away," but the words echoed noisily in the cave. He jumped up and down, held his breath, shook his head. Nothing seemed to work. He'd never known such a bombardment of thoughts in his life. At the end of the day he climbed back down, completely dispirited, wondering what his teacher's response would be. Perhaps he'd be dismissed as a failure, unsuitable for further training. But the teacher just burst out laughing at the tale of his mental and physical gymnastics. "Very good! You have tried really hard and done well. Tomorrow you should go back to the cave. Sit from dawn to dusk having nothing but thoughts. Think of anything you like all day long, but allow no gaps to occur between your thoughts." The novice was really pleased. This would be easy. He was bound to succeed. After all, "having thoughts" is what had been happening to him all day. The next day saw him climbing with confidence up to his cave and taking his seat. After a little while he realized that all was not well. His thoughts started to slow down. Occasionally, a pleasant thought would come to mind and he would decide to follow it for a while. But soon it dried up. He tried to think grand thoughts, philosophical speculations, to worry about the state of the universe. Anything. He started to run low on things to think about and even got a little bored. Where had all his thinking gone? Soon the "best" thoughts he could get seemed a little worn, like an old coat that had become threadbare. Then he noticed gaps in his thinking. Oh dear, this was what he had been told to avoid. Another failure. At the end of the day he felt pretty wretched. He'd failed again. He climbed down the mountain and went to find his teacher, who burst out laughing again. "Congratulations! Wonderful!



Now you know how to practice perfectly.” He didn’t understand why the teacher was so pleased. What on earth had he learned? The teacher was pleased because the novice was now ready to recognize something of real significance: You cannot force the mind. And if you try to, you won’t like what comes of it.<sup>3</sup>

Today, let us surrender the burden of the guilt that comes with feeling sad, and to stop looking for a “quick fix.” Instead of standing up in the middle of the wave and allowing ourselves to get knocked over, let’s stop frantically trying to reason ourselves out of the problem. If you don’t want to get swept away, sometimes it’s best to sit in the sand and watch the waves pass by overhead. To do this, we have to acknowledge that we’re sad, that it’s not fun, and then wait for the sadness to roll on by.

Waiting for the wave to pass is easier said than done. It’s important to remember, too, that sadness is not at all separate from the Christian tradition, despite that we don’t acknowledge it nearly as much as we should. Throughout the Bible, people are crying out to a God who hides God’s face and sometimes feels so very far away. Even Jesus on the cross asks why he has been forsaken. He has taken on the full extent of our human suffering, including the horrific experience of feeling that God is not present with us.

Worship is an excellent place to acknowledge sadness and to incorporate it into our Christian lives. Through incorporating lament into our worship and prayer life, we bring before God our whole selves as the broken creatures we are.

## A Mediation of Lament

**Song: “Abide with Me”**— Play the video, and feel free to sing along (you can choose another version of this hymn if you like – I (Kristin) preferred this one because it had on-screen lyrics) [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=84YASWe3\\_2Q](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=84YASWe3_2Q)

**Reading: Psalm 22:1-18, 25-31** (if you are with a group , take turns reading verse by verse around the circle) <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+22&version=NRSV>

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<sup>3</sup> Williams, Mark. [The Mindful Way through Depression: Freeing Yourself from Chronic Unhappiness](#) (p. 74). Guilford Publications. Kindle Edition.



**Reader 1:** **Prayer for Healing<sup>4</sup>** (from *Common Prayer: a Liturgy for Ordinary Radicals*)

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,  
we enjoin your divine mercies.

Lord, why do we suffer?

Why do we hurt?

Shall our only answer

be the eternal abyss of the cosmos?

Shall our only answer be the whirlwind of unknowing  
which engulfed Job?

Why do the wicked flourish,

while the righteous waste away?

I am left speechless, left with the words,

“I will trust in you, my God.”

God, We ask for the sending of your healing Spirit,

who came to us through Jesus, as he breathed upon his disciples.

This Spirit gathered your people,

to be warmed by the fire of divine presence.

By this warmth, may we

be healed and taken into your care.

**Reader 2:** In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it (John 1:1-5)

**Invitation for candle lighting** - *Participants may light a candle on the table in acknowledgement of pain, hurt, and suffering. Lighting the candle is to be an act of bringing our hurt before God into the worship space.*

**During the candle lighting, play the song “As the Deer”:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rXFZsRhdT78> (Again, feel free to use whichever version you want).

**Song:** Then play “Be Thou My Vision”: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ihJAJA4ibEs> (feel free to sing along)

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<sup>4</sup> Wilson-Hartgrove, Jonathan, and Enuma Okoro. *Common Prayer: a Liturgy for Ordinary Radicals*. Zondervan on Brilliance Audio, 2015.



### **Prayer for Those Who Mourn (read together)<sup>5</sup>**

Gracious God,  
as your Son wept with Mary and Martha at the tomb of Lazarus,  
look with compassion on those who grieve.  
Grant them the assurance of your presence now  
and faith in your eternal goodness,  
that in them may be fulfilled the promise  
that those who mourn shall be comforted;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

### **Letters to a friend**

This activity will continue throughout the sessions. Its intention is to introduce writing as a spiritual practice, and perhaps to help participants to feel connected to other human beings (and, by extension, God). Letters can be written as part of your time together as a group, or you can have participants write them on their own between sessions. You can engage in this exercise in a number of ways:

- **Option 1:** You can journal solo.
- **Option 2:** Participants can have “pen pals” – other members of the group – who will exchange letters.
- **Option 3:** You can mail your letter to a trusted friend or family member.

#### **Prompt 1:**

Where does your name come from? Does it have a specific meaning? Do you like your name? Do you have nicknames? How did you feel about your name as you were growing up?

#### **Prompt 2:**

What was it like growing up in your family? Who was present at your home? What was your relationship like with each of your primary caregivers?

## **Session 2: Vulnerability**

### **Begin by reading** Ezekiel 37:1-14 (NRSV):

The hand of the LORD came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. 2 He led me all around them;

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<sup>5</sup> *The United Methodist Hymnal*. United Methodist Pub. House, 1989.



there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. 3 He said to me, “Mortal, can these bones live?” I answered, “O Lord GOD, you know.” 4 Then he said to me, “Prophecy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. 5 Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: I will cause breath [131] to enter you, and you shall live. 6 I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath [131] in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the LORD.” 7 So I prophesied as I had been commanded; and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. 8 I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them. 9 Then he said to me, “Prophecy to the breath, prophecy, mortal, and say to the breath: [132] Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, [132] and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.” 10 I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude. 11 Then he said to me, “Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, ‘Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.’ 12 Therefore prophecy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. 13 And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. 14 I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken and will act, says the LORD.”

**Watch Brene Brown’s TED Talk, “The Power of Vulnerability”:**

[http://www.ted.com/talks/brene\\_brown\\_on\\_vulnerability.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_on_vulnerability.html)

**Activity with a partner:** Take some time to discuss the following questions.

- Tell about a time when you took a big risk by putting yourself in a vulnerable position. How did the people around you respond? Do you regret your actions? Did this situation shaped how much you share of yourself in future situations?
- To what degree would you say that, as you were growing up, you had the experience of being known by your parents? Explain.

**Reflect as a group:** Was it difficult to be vulnerable and to share openly? Notice what you begin to feel and think that is perhaps different from how you were feeling before you shared with your group. How would you describe the differences?



**On the importance of telling stories:** Either individually or as a group, consider listening to Krista Tippett’s interview with Kevin Kling, a comedian, poet, and playwright who discusses why stories are so important. <https://onbeing.org/programs/kevin-kling-the-losses-and-laughter-we-grow-into/>

An excerpt:

“By telling a story, things don’t control me anymore. It’s in my vernacular; it’s the way I see the world. And I think that’s why our stories ask our questions, our big questions like: “Where do we come from – before life, after life?” “What’s funny in this world or sacred?” And even more importantly, by asking in front of people and with people, even if we don’t find the answer by the asking, we know we’re not alone. And I have found that often that’s even more important than the answer.”

## Conversation on Boundaries

While the sharing of stories is helpful for ourselves and others, we must keep in mind that we must be intentional about sharing too much when we’re feeling vulnerable. Boundaries are also really important – if we are seeking to find someone to fix us or take on our burden for us, we will only end up disappointed. Henri Nouwen writes in *The Inner Voice of Love*,

“Do not tell everyone your story. You will only end up feeling more rejected. People cannot give you what you long for in your heart. The more you expect from people’s response to your experience of abandonment, the more you will feel exposed to ridicule.

You have to close yourself to the outside world so you can enter your own heart and the heart of God through your pain. God will send to you the people with whom you can share your anguish, who can lead you closer to the true source of love.

God is faithful to God’s promises. Before you die, you will find the acceptance and love you crave. It will not come in the way you expect. It will not follow your needs and wishes. But it will fill your heart and satisfy your deepest desire. There is nothing to hold on to but this promise. Everything else has been taken away from you. Cling to that naked promise in faith. Your faith will heal you.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Nouwen, Henri J. M. *The Inner Voice of Love: a Journey through Anguish to Freedom*. Darton Longman & Todd, 2014.



### **Letter prompt:**

Who is the person outside of your immediate family who knows you best? What does communication with this person look like? Do you feel that you know this person as well as this person knows you?

## **Session 3: Mindfulness**

Open with Rumi's poem "The Guest House":

### **The Guest House**

This being human is a guest house.  
Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness,  
some momentary awareness comes  
as an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all!  
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,  
who violently sweep your house  
empty of its furniture,  
still, treat each guest honorably.  
He may be clearing you out  
for some new delight.

The dark thought, the shame, the malice,  
meet them at the door laughing,  
and invite them in.

Be grateful for whoever comes,  
because each has been sent  
as a guide from beyond.

- Rumi



## Discussion on Mindfulness

We are shaped by what we pay attention to. An overwhelming amount of stimuli floods our mind at every second, but we're only consciously aware of a very small fraction of these events. For example, when you're washing the dishes, you can hear the sound of the water hitting the pan, see the bubbles the soap makes, feel the warm water against your skin, etc., but you're not really aware of all of these things because you're thinking about the paper you need to write after the dishes are done, or you're replaying over in your mind a conversation from earlier in the day. We miss out on a lot of life when we don't pay attention to the present moment. And when we do pay attention to the present moment, we're often attempting to change it, trying to feel less sad or less angry or more happy.

The book *The Mindful Way Through Depression* teaches its readers to turn their attention to the present.

“Mindfulness is the awareness that arises from paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgmentally, to things as they are. It’s a way of shifting from doing to being so that we take in all the information that an experience offers us before we act. Being mindful means that we suspend judgment for a time, set aside our immediate goals for the future, and take in the present moment as it is rather than as we would like it to be. It means we approach situations with openness, even if we notice that they bring up feelings such as fear. Being mindful means intentionally turning off the autopilot mode in which we operate so much of the time- brooding about the past, for instance, or worrying about the future—and instead tuning in to things as they are in the present with full awareness. It means knowing that our thoughts are passing mental events, not reality itself, and that we are more in touch with life as it is when we allow ourselves to experience things through the body and our senses rather than mostly through our unexamined and habitual thoughts. Mindfulness is not paying more attention but paying attention differently and more wisely—with the whole mind and heart, using the full resources of the body and its senses.”<sup>7</sup>

## The Theology of Mindfulness

In taking the form of a human, Jesus took on the suffering we as humans experience. During Holy Week, we are reminded of the physical pain he endured, but we often forget about his emotional pain in feeling disconnected from other people, and from God.

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<sup>7</sup> Williams, Mark. [The Mindful Way through Depression: Freeing Yourself from Chronic Unhappiness](#). Guilford Publications. Kindle Edition.



In the Garden of Gethsemane, the disciples abandoned Jesus, falling asleep during what must have been a lonely, miserable experience for him (Matthew 26:36-46, NRSV):

**36** Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, “Sit here while I go over there and pray.” **37** He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and agitated. **38** Then he said to them, “I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and stay awake with me.” **39** And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want.” **40** Then he came to the disciples and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, “So, could you not stay awake with me one hour? **41** Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial;[e] the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” **42** Again he went away for the second time and prayed, “My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.” **43** Again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. **44** So leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words. **45** Then he came to the disciples and said to them, “Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. **46** Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand.”

On the cross, Jesus does not allude to a Psalm about God being his strength and shield or a mighty fortress; rather, he cries out Psalm 22, “my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” It seems that Jesus, too, experienced the terrifying human sensation of feeling that God has hidden God’s face.

At the same time, though, the image of Jesus on the cross demonstrates that God and suffering are not two separate things. The ability to see God’s presence in this broken world is perhaps what it means to experience the Kingdom of God in its present sense. Mindfulness and gratitude are ways we go about recognizing that God’s kingdom is already at hand — we can direct our attention to the things that are of God but don’t necessarily make it into our conscious awareness. Things like the way the sunlight feels on your skin during a warm day, or a connection you felt with a friend during a meaningful conversation. Paying attention to these things doesn’t make the world any less broken, but it’s important to know that the Kingdom of God is here on earth if we are willing to look for it.

## Training your Brain: On Habit and Memory



Remembering operates largely in terms of patterns. Memories begin as impulses traveling through brain circuits, which leave permanent traces, and these connections between brain cells become more and more efficient with repetition of our experiences, which forms patterns in our thinking. It's kind of like when you're walking through the woods, it's difficult to navigate through the tall grass and thorns the first time, but as you travel along the path time and time again, a trail forms making it easier to walk. When you learn how to ride a bike, there are about fifty things you have to think about at once: maintaining balance, pedaling, braking, etc. But after some practice, you don't have to put so much thought into all these things – the networks in our brains are so efficient that it's not a conscious effort anymore to remember how to pedal. This process relates to our time together in that our experiences early on in life have created cognitive patterns of which we may not be aware, as much of what we do is the repetition of what we have done in the past. Dr. Curt Thompson, in his book *Anatomy of the Soul*, provides the following example of how these patterns play into modern attachment theory:

“For instance, perhaps when you were a child, your parent’s furrowed brow was consistently followed by an angry outburst. If, when you are a young adult, your girlfriend also furrows her brow, you’re likely to feel threatened every time you see your frown. The problem, of course, is that she may not be angry, merely puzzled.”<sup>8</sup>

When we react emotionally to a situation, it may be helpful to ask *why* we reacted the way we did. If we pay attention to the reactions that we had formerly displayed mindlessly and automatically, we may be able to attribute them to their proper source. In other words, many of our responses are not so much a direct reaction to a current event as a trigger to a pattern of thinking that began a long time ago. Even if it's not possible to locate the specific way in which this pattern of thinking began, it might at least be helpful to recognize that those patterns are present. It is of course possible to “re-route” these neural connections, so to speak, by creating new patterns of thinking through changing the way we react.

Patterns of thinking also relate to the way that we experience God. Faith is not just something to be grasped cognitively – it is something to be embodied and lived out. The more that we practice the good habits we want to develop (such as being patient, loving, and eating and drinking in moderation), the more naturally these things will come to us. The best way to go about it is to live out who we desire to be in a concrete way. If we want to better love someone who's difficult to love, *do* things to show love, and our emotions will likely eventually match our actions. Sometimes – not always, and only to an extent – acting as

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<sup>8</sup> Curt Thompson, [\*Anatomy of the Soul: Surprising Connections between Neuroscience and Spiritual Practices That Can Transform Your Life and Relationships\*](#). (Tyndale Momentum: 2010).



though we're happy, compassionate, and loving can actually make us feel happy, compassionate, and loving.

An interview with psychologist David Myers: "One study had people bite on a pencil, which tends to activate the smiling muscles, or to just hold it between their lips, which tends to activate the frowning muscles. That manipulated their emotions. Going through the motions can trigger the emotions inside. So if you'd like to be more optimistic or outgoing, start acting as if you were. Fake it.

.... If you want to change some of your traits, the way not to change them is to sit on your duff just waiting for change to strike you from within. The way to change is to get up out of that chair and begin acting as if you were the person you'd like to be."<sup>9</sup>

It's also important to remember that sadness probably won't go away overnight, but God is with us despite whether we can feel God's presence or not. The good news: studies have shown that we tend to overestimate the duration of emotions and underestimate our capacity to adapt.

**An exercise in mindfulness:** Choose one or more of the following exercises:

- "11 Minutes Awareness of Breath" <https://www.mindful.org/an-11-minute-awareness-of-breath-practice/>
- "Mindful Eating Exercise" (requires a raisin for each participant): <https://www.dukeintegrativemedicine.org/dukeimprogramblog/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2017/08/Mindful-Eating-Transcript.pdf>
- A Guided Walking Meditation: <https://www.mindful.org/walking-meditation/>  
If it's nice weather, listen to these instructions from psychologist Jon Kabat-Zinn and then go outside to try it out.

### **Group discussion:**

How did you react to the exercise(s)? What surprised you?

### **Letter prompt (for more details, see first session):**

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<sup>9</sup> Found in *Myths, Lies, And Downright Stupidity: Get Out the Shovel -- Why Everything You Know is Wrong* by John Stossel (Hyperion, 2007)



This week, see if you can be aware of your sensory impressions as much as possible. Write about one or two of these experiences – for example, describe in detail what it was like to walk to the mailbox or get out of bed in the morning.

## Session 4: Unity and human connection

“For small creatures such as we, the vastness is bearable only through love.”

– Carl Sagan

“I think about our connectedness. I guess connectedness is a key word. Studying science, you realize the connectedness of all things. You know, we are stardust and here I am, this bag of stardust, and it took how many billions of years for the atoms that make up my body to come together and make this being that’s able to take a conscious look at the universe. I mean, I am the universe and I’m taking a look at myself through these senses that I have and that is an amazing thing.”

– Natalie Batalha, a scientist working on the Kepler Mission at NASA.

“No matter how much one may love the world as a whole, one can live fully in it only by living responsibly in some small part of it. Where we live and who we live there with define the terms of our relationship to the world and to humanity. We thus come again to the paradox that one can become whole only by the responsible acceptance of one’s partiality.”

– Wendell Berry, “The Body and the Earth”

**Begin by reading** “Between” by Harold M. Schulweis:

**Between**  
**by Harold M. Schulweis**

God is not in me  
nor in you  
but between us



God is not me or mine  
nor you or yours  
but ours.

God is known  
not alone  
but in relationship.

Not as a separate, lonely power  
but through our kinship, our  
friendship,  
through our healing and binding  
and raising up of each other.

To know God is to know others,  
to love God is to love others,  
to hear God is to hear others.

More than meditation,  
more than insight,  
more than feeling,  
between us are  
claims, obligations, commandments;  
to act, to do, to behave our beliefs.

I seek God  
not as if God were alone,  
an isolated person, He or She,  
a process, a power, a being, a thing.  
I seek God  
not as if I were alone,  
a thinker, a mediator, a discrete entity.

I seek God in connection,  
in the nexus of community.  
I pray and celebrate the betweenness  
which binds and holds us together.

And even when I am left alone,



I am sustained by my  
memory of our betweenness  
and the promise of our betweenness.

God is not in me, or in you, or in God's self,  
but in betweenness  
and it is there we find the evidence of  
God's reality and our own.

**Levels of Validation:** Have participants read the following article:

<http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/pieces-mind/201204/understanding-validation-way-communicate-acceptance>

**Discussion with partner (or journal):** Tell about what you did yesterday, but practice intentional listening and maybe “levels of validation.”

**Discussion with NEW partner (or journal):** Have you ever felt God's presence in the midst of a conversation or interaction with someone? Explain. Be sure to listen intentionally and maybe use “levels of validation.”

**Read aloud** the following passage from Henri Nouwen's *Bread for the Journey* (HarperCollins, 1997):

When we feel lonely we keep looking for a person or persons who can take our loneliness away. Our lonely hearts cry out, "Please hold me, touch me, speak to me, pay attention to me." But soon we discover that the person we expect to take our loneliness away cannot give us what we ask for. Often that person feels oppressed by our demands and runs away, leaving us in despair. As long as we approach another person from our loneliness, no mature human relationship can develop. Clinging to one another in loneliness is suffocating and eventually becomes destructive. For love to be possible we need the courage to create space between us and to trust that this space allows us to dance together.

**Discuss (or journal):**

What kinds of relationships merit boundary-setting? What are some good ways to go about doing that? Maybe share a story where you've had to set boundaries in the past, whether for your own emotional well-being or the emotional well-being of someone else.



**Letter prompt (for more details, see first session):**

Describe a time when you shared something important to you and were *not* listened to well. How did this experience feel? How did you react? Did it change the way you listen to other people?

## Session 5: The Psychology of Gratitude

### Cutting Loose

Sometimes from sorrow, for no reason,  
you sing. For no reason, you accept  
the way of being lost, cutting loose  
from all else and electing a world  
where you go where you want to.

Arbitrary, a sound comes, a reminder  
that a steady center is holding  
all else. If you listen, that sound  
will tell you where it is and you  
can slide your way past trouble.

Certain twisted monsters  
always bar the path -- but that's when  
you get going best, glad to be lost,  
learning how real it is  
here on earth, again and again.

- William Stafford

**Begin by making two lists:** A list of things you'd like to set aside during the session (things that you're worried about), and things/people you're thankful for.

A mindset of gratefulness does not invalidate pain. The fact that we are grateful for what we *do* have does not mean that we cannot feel sorrow at the same time. It's important, though, to recognize what is going well rather than just mourning what is not. For example, when



you get a review back from your boss, you're probably more likely to obsess over the one thing you need to improve on than the fifteen things you're doing great.

**Write letters** to people we're thankful for. Encourage participants to mention the specifics – include reflections from particular events in the relationship that are meaningful, rather than just saying something along the lines of “thank you for being such a compassionate person.”

**Building an Ebenezer** (do this outside if the weather's nice).

Begin by reading Joshua 4:19-23:

**19** On the tenth day of the first month the people went up from the Jordan and camped at Gilgal on the eastern border of Jericho. **20** And Joshua set up at Gilgal the twelve stones they had taken out of the Jordan. **21** He said to the Israelites, “In the future when your descendants ask their parents, ‘What do these stones mean?’ **22** tell them, ‘Israel crossed the Jordan on dry ground.’ **23** For the Lord your God dried up the Jordan before you until you had crossed over. The Lord your God did to the Jordan what he had done to the Red Sea[b] when he dried it up before us until we had crossed over.

Explain that, throughout their wandering in the desert for 40 years, Israel has not been abandoned. On their way into the promised land, God dries up the river Jordan so that they can cross into safety. Here, they make a pile of stones to mark where God has been on their journey.

- Pass out stones, three per person. Take a minute to reflect where God has been with you in the midst of suffering.
- Participants lay down their stones in a pile one by one, saying aloud or remembering silently where God has been.

**Sing:** “Come Thou Fount”: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zNzO6LCyilY>

**Letter prompt (for more details, see first session):** Write about your first memory of feeling God's presence. What was it like at the time? How do you interpret this memory in light of events that have taken place later in life?



**Close by reading** “The Slow Work of God” by Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, (1881-1955) a French Jesuit paleontologist and theologian who worked to bridge the gap between religion and science.

### **The Slow Work of God**

Above all, trust in the slow work of God.  
We are quite naturally impatient in everything  
to reach the end without delay.  
We should like to skip the intermediate stages.  
We are impatient of being on the way to something  
unknown, something new.  
And yet it is the law of all progress  
that it is made by passing through  
some stages of instability—  
and that it may take a very long time.  
And so I think it is with you;  
your ideas mature gradually—let them grow,  
let them shape themselves, without undue haste.  
Don't try to force them on,  
as though you could be today what time  
(that is to say, grace and circumstances  
acting on your own good will)  
will make of you tomorrow.  
Only God could say what this new spirit  
gradually forming within you will be.  
Give Our Lord the benefit of believing  
that his hand is leading you,  
and accept the anxiety of feeling yourself  
in suspense and incomplete.

— Pierre Teilhard de Chardin