

# Soul Matters

A Kaleidoscope of thoughts, images,  
stories, poetry, and ideas  
to engage hearts and minds



## What Does It Mean To Be A People of Expectation

God give us rain when we expect sun.  
Give us music when we expect trouble.  
Give us tears when we expect breakfast.  
Give us dreams when we expect a storm.  
Give us a stray dog when we expect congratulations.  
God play with us, turn us sideways and around.

— Michael Leunig

Pray for our expectations to be turned on their heads? Give us tears when we expect to be fed? Give us wild obligations when we expect congratulations? Turn us sideways? You want us to pray for *this*? Hope for *this*? That's a bit nuts! And a bit UU.

We all know the common mantra: "You get what you expect." That, most certainly, is part of what it means to be a people of expectation from an UU perspective. We believe that human beings have tremendous power to shape and create their own experience. If you expect people to be good, you will discover and notice goodness. If you believe life is on your side, you will see opportunities unfold over and over again. This form of relating to expectation is about reminding ourselves that we have control. It's about noticing we have options. It's about taking hold of the situation and putting our stamp on it.

And yet there are also moments when letting the situation take hold of us is good for the soul. Sometimes holding too tightly to our desired expectations leaves us blind. Sometimes getting what we expect leads to expecting to always get what we want. Sometimes the most important question is not "Are you ready to take control of the reality in front of you?" but instead "Are you willing to let go of expectation and be led by the unknown?"

Another way to put all this is to ask, *do you trust?* Do you have faith that this wildly unpredictable life of ours won't lead you astray? When your expectations get turned on their head, do you see that as a threat or are you willing to lean in? When that stray dog messes up your big congratulatory day, are you willing to follow where it wants you to go or is your first instinct to put it down?

Please don't put it down.

That's the message of Michael Leunig's prayer. That what's he's praying for. That's what he wants *us* to pray for! Please, please, pray *for* those stray dogs and tears at breakfast. Pray dearly for life to send you its blessed disruptions. Please, please, pray that life will lead you into the land of crushed expectations - into that *wonderfully sacred* land inhabited by the holy angels of "perhaps," "maybe, maybe not," "what if," "I wonder what else?" and "I wonder if there is another way?" And pray for all this, NOT because disruption is "good for us" or because we all deserve a needed dose of humility, but because it signals that you're finally able to trust -- that you've finally decided that sometimes it's ok to put your preferred expectations aside, because -- as strange or scary as the unknown is -- you know it won't lead you astray.

# QUESTIONS TO WALK WITH

Below is a reflection and a list of questions to open the mind's gateway to reveal the wisdom that is right below the surface of our everyday ordinary lives. Pick one question, any, the one that grabs you and won't let go, then walk with it. Let your mind wander and wonder. Let the question percolate. Listen curiously to what surfaces. Live into the answers. Be surprised by what is discovered. Share what you learn with someone meet along the way.



1. What if “it” begins this very month?! What would happen if you knew this month was going to be the start of some yet-to-be discovered new adventure?
2. Are you expecting too much of *yourself*?
3. Are you expecting too little?
4. Have you been chasing an expectation too long? Is it time to let it go?
5. Did the lessons your parents taught you about the power and possibility of expectation prove correct?
6. Are your holiday expectations set too high?
7. Are your holiday expectations too low? Isn't this a time of expecting miracles?
8. What happens to you when you don't get what you expect? Is there work there for you?
9. Are you sure you shouldn't wait just a little bit more? Is life asking you to be patient just a little bit longer? Are you sure that expectation of yours isn't right around the bend?
10. Do you expect the best or the worst of people? Are they innocent until proven guilty or guilty until proven innocent?
11. Are you really open to “whatever comes”?
12. Has the weight of societal expectations become more than you want to bear alone?
13. 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.

## Opening Words

Draw closer to the deep meanings of hope — hope is a movement within the human person that sees the present and all its prospects, or lack thereof, in light of some other prospect, something good, or even slightly better, that is to come. *It recognizes that what is presently possible might not be all there is.* Hope holds out and holds on.

— Michael Downey

## Closing Words

The touch still burns, and because it does, there remains for all of us a chance to light up the tomorrow and brighten the future. ... this is the challenge that makes life worthwhile.

~Robert Kennedy

# *Spiritual Practice - Deepening Experiences*

## Option A: **Your Perhaps Poem**

These “[Perhaps Poems](#)” challenge us to turn our deepest assumptions and expectations on their head. Doubt even the most basic and beloved things, and do it with joy! Consider joining this playful upsetting of apple carts this month by writing your own “perhaps poem.” There are plenty of them on the website linked below to inspire you! Bring your perhaps poem to your group and share the journey of its creation,

Perhaps Poems: <http://www.beyond-the-pale.uk/perhaps.htm>

## Option B: **The Expectations of a Mother: Slapped Fists, Stifled Selfhood & Stolen Childhoods**

Expect your child to be at risk from the very first moment. Expect “sequestered selfhood.” Expect unpleasant emotions to be off-limits. Expect the need to slap little fists. These are the expectations of parenting. For some of us.

Poet and mother, Mia Wright asks us to hear this “[dark truth](#).” Our spiritual exercise asks us whether or not we want it to remain that way. Here is your invitation:

- Set aside time this month to watch this video multiple times: 'Darkest Truth' - a poem by Mia Wright, All Souls UU, Tulsa - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pQySlgRmmXI>
- Each time, note the feelings, reactions and insights it evokes.
- Consider watching it with a trusted friend and processing it together.
- After at least three times of watching it, note how your reactions deepened or changed.
- Also ask yourself, “What does this ask of me?”

The goal of this spiritual work is not to analyze the video and figure out where you agree or disagree. The invitation is for you to identify what it asks of you and how it opens your eyes.

Come to your group and share your journey.

## Option C:

### **A Ritual of Expectation**

Solstice fire rituals. Christmas advent wreaths and calendars. Hanukkah candles. This is the season of ritual -- rituals of preparation and expectation to be exact. Expecting and trusting the light to return is no easy task. It's one thing to intellectually believe that the dark always gives way to the light; it's quite another to feel it in your bones.

All religions say this task is much easier with ritual, and with rituals done together. So this month, recruit your family or circle of friends and engage one of the winter rituals of expectation. Here are a few links to help you decide which might be right for you:

- Hanukkah: <http://tinyurl.com/prkve8s>
- Advent: <http://adventforatheists.weebly.com/>
- Solstice: <http://tinyurl.com/pdty2tm>
- Kwanzaa: <http://www.officialkwanzaawebsite.org/celebrating.shtml>
- UU Family Christmas rituals: <http://tinyurl.com/ob2ld8a>

Remember, this is a creative task. Be sure to adapt the ritual (unless you are celebrating Kwanzaa; see link above) to fit your unique circumstances and beliefs.



And the baby!  
Whoever expected a baby?  
Whoever expected the advent of God in a helpless  
child?  
Had the Messiah arrived in the blazing light of the  
glory  
of a legion of angels wielding golden swords,  
the whole world could have been conquered for  
Christ  
right then and there  
and we in the church - to say nothing of the world!

-  
wouldn't have so much trouble today.  
Even now we simply do not expect  
to face the world armed with love.

— “Kneeling in Bethlehem” by Ann Weems  
(full poem: <http://tinyurl.com/og2mgz>.)

### A Walk

My eyes already touch the sunny hill,  
going far ahead of the road I have begun.  
So we are grasped by what we cannot grasp;  
It has its inner light even from a distance-  
And changes us, even if we do not reach it,  
into something else, which hardly sensing it,  
we already are;

A gesture waves us on, answering our own  
wave...

but what we feel is the wind in our faces.

— Rainer Marie Rilke

If your heart is a volcano, how shall you expect  
flowers to bloom? — Khalil Gibran

## Books

### *UMind Over Mind* by Chris Berdik

from the author's website: “*Mind Over Mind* offers a captivating look at the frontiers of expectations research revealing how our brains work in the future tense and how our assumptions – about the next few milliseconds or the next few years – bend reality.”

### *Expectation Hangover: Overcoming Disappointments in Work, Love, and Life* by Christine Hassler

from the book review: “Expectation Hangovers happen when a desired result is not met, an outcome is achieved but it does not give us the feelings we thought it would, life throws us a curveball, or we simply do not feel we are living up to the expectations placed upon us (by ourselves or others).”

### *Unplug the Christmas Machine: A Complete Guide to Putting Love and Joy Back into the Season* by Jo Robinson and Jean C. Staeheli

from the book review: In the pages of *Unplug the Christmas Machine*, Jo Robinson and Jean Coppock Staeheli answer the questions they have heard most often in their many years of talking with people about Christmas, such as: "How can I reduce the stress of preparing for Christmas?" "How can I make our celebration more spiritual and less materialistic?"

## Videos

### *500 Days of Summer*

A romantic comedy about how our expectations about love influence our experience of love.

[http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1022603/?ref\\_=kw\\_li\\_tt](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1022603/?ref_=kw_li_tt)

### *October Sky*

This is “the true story of Homer Hickam, a coal miner's son who was inspired by the first Sputnik launch to take up rocketry against his father's wishes.” The main character sets his sights on the stars even as he comes to terms with his father's limiting expectations.

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0132477/>



This Soul Matters packet was created by Rev. Carie Johnsen at Unitarian Universalist Community Church of Augusta, ME.

Thoughts within were gleaned from the Soul Matters Network, the UUCC Resource Circle, and other sources. If you would like to share your experience and wisdom for future packets, please email [minister@augustauu.org](mailto:minister@augustauu.org). To receive an electronic copy please email [info@augustauu.org](mailto:info@augustauu.org). To learn more about Unitarian Universalist Community Church, please visit our website [www.augustauu.org](http://www.augustauu.org).