



Soul Matters

December 2015

*What Does It Mean To Be
A People of Expectation?*



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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.

So, yes, this month, bring on those unruly dogs and unpredictable tears. Make our music wilder than we want and make us eventually want it to be that wild. Play with us indeed. Turn us sideways and around, and lead us expectably on!

Our Spiritual Exercises

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: Remember the Water!

We allow our expectations to control us rather than us controlling them. We have the power to choose and yet we regularly forget it when it comes to the most mundane moments of our lives. This is the challenge that author, David Foster Wallace, lifted up in his remarkable 2005 Commencement [speech](#). This month challenge yourself with the same message:

- Make time to repeatedly watch and meditate on his speech: “This is Water” <https://dotsub.com/view/6b8cc93f-3b53-486b-a1ce-025ffe6c9c52>
- Pay extra attention to the way Wallace links our forgetting with the most mundane moments in our lives.
- Figure out where the call or challenge is for you.
- Exercise your power to choose! Find opportunities to “remember the water” and practice choosing.
- Come to your group ready to share what you learned and how it altered your days.

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.

Option D: 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.

Your Question

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 "hooks" you most and let it lead you where you need to go. The goal of these questions is not to help you analyze what expectation means, but to figure out what being a person of expectation means for you today. So, which question is calling to you?

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.

Recommended Resources

As always, this is not required reading. We will not analyze or dissect these pieces in our group. They are simply meant to get your thinking started, and maybe open you to new ways of thinking about what it means to be *a people of expectation*.

Expectation

Definition: a belief that something will happen or is likely to happen; a feeling or belief about how successful, good, etc., someone or something will be (*from Merriam Webster*)

Synonyms: anticipation, assumption, hope, probability, belief

Wise Words

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**

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**

I believe that we live the story we tell ourselves—
and others—about the life we're leading...If you
constantly interview your child for pain, your

child may begin to hear a story of social
suffering emerge from her own mouth. Soon she
will begin to believe it and will see herself as a
victim. — **Michael Thompson**

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

[Faith] is the wakeful expectation of God, which
touches all our senses. The early Christians
prayed standing up, looking up, with
outstretched arms and wide-open eyes, ready to
walk or to leap forward. We can see this from
the pictures in the catacombs in Rome. Their
posture reflects tense expectation, not quiet heart
searching. ... We are watching for God's advent.
With tense attention, we open all our senses for
the coming of God into our lives, into our
society, to this earth. — **Jurgen Moltmann**

Patience is the virtue that shows us that the time
of the soul and the time of the spirit are different
than everyday time. Patience is required to be in
healthy connection with soul and spirit. Patience
concerns a particular form or way of waiting; it
is one filled with expectation. — **Robert
Sardello**

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**

Expectations are resentments under construction.
— **Anne Lamott**

Our expectations frame our view of what is to come. Too often that frame is distorted by preoccupations with where we have been, *like trying to walk forward while staring back over your shoulder*. Instead if we look to the vision of the future we seek, our highest aims, we create expectations that face us fully forward into our lives. Each step going forward toward that vision is also grounded in our present experience and creates a dialogue between what is true in our life and our expectations for what it can be.
— **Rev. Dr. Frances Sink, Soul Matters Minister**

When I first hear the word expectation, I am most tempted to say something like this: Expectation runs ahead of the present moment, teasing us into believing we know what the next moment will contain, tempting us to assert that we know what the next moment should consist of. Expectation is something we need to let go of, that gets in the way of truly being with, accepting, and loving one another.

But I recognize that part of what I'm doing there is understanding expectation as judgment, expectation as privilege. Expectation as something that gets in the way of my ability to live in the moment, to be present to what is real right now.

But expectation also leads us on, urges us on, doesn't it? I know that I live in expectation. I expect the sun to rise tomorrow. I expect that I'll be surprised again and again at the harm we can do one another. And I expect that I'll be surprised again and again by the beauty in the world, and the depth of love that people can have for other people. I expect it. And it draws me on. — **Rev. Joe Cleveland, Soul Matters Minister**

The seasons may return with regularity, but these holidays do not simply celebrate the cycles of time. Instead, they tell stories about unexpected turns in human history. They express a form of faith that dares to reflect on human expectations being upset. ... The Jewish and Christian holidays remind us to find the mark of God less in the regularities of nature than in the unexpected turns that life can take. — **John Buehrens**

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/og2mgnz>)

“The Moment of Magic” by Rev. Victoria Safford
<http://www.uua.org/worship/words/meditation/moment-of-magic>

“Expect Nothing” by Alice Walker
<http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/42100-expect-nothing-live-frugally-on-surprise-become-a-stranger-to>

“Things to Think” by Robert Bly
<http://tinyurl.com/p7gdae4>

**“The Unexpected Visitor”
a sermon by the Rev. Kate Landis**
<https://s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/sermons-uuac/2011/apr172011.pdf>

“Skydiving”

A reflection on what happens when what we think will happen doesn't match up with what actually happens!

<https://revgretchenhaley.wordpress.com/2014/02/03/skydiving-reflection-by-doug-powell/>

“Perhaps” by Shu Ting

<http://www.ayearofbeinghere.com/2013/12/shu-ting-perhaps.html>

Videos & Podcasts

“How to Become Batman”

A podcast about the power of expectations: “Alix and Lulu examine the surprising effect our expectations can have on the people around us. Plus, the story of a blind man who says expectations have helped him see. Yes, see.”

<http://www.npr.org/programs/invisibilia/378577902/how-to-become-batman>

“Don’t Interview for Pain”

A podcast centered on the quote “I believe that we live the story we tell ourselves - and others - about the life we’re leading.”

http://gretchenrubin.com/happiness_project/2015/09/podcast-28/

StoryCorps

A three-minute film about a black man, his white mother, and the brutality he faced - because of others’ expectations - when pulled over by police:

<https://www.facebook.com/Upworthy/videos/1069739096400281/>

“The Other Letter”

In this Ikea Christmas commercial, children are asked to write two letters: one to The Three Kings (Spain’s version of Santa) and one to their parents.

<http://tinyurl.com/ohv8v28>

Human Clip #2: Death is not the end of everything

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RWKNwzGL8C0>

How expectations about aging affects a young couple

<http://twistedstifter.com/videos/young-couple-gets-increasingly-aged-with-make-up-and-revealed-to-each-other/>

Articles & Online

“How the Power of Expectations Can Allow You to Bend Reality” by Gareth Cook

<http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-the-power-of-expectations-can-allow-you-to-bend-reality/>

“What We Expect Is What We Get”

If you want to change your experiences, change your expectations, studies tell us (again). What you think will happen may really affect you physically. *Psychology Today* has posted four studies that support and tease out the concept:

<http://lifehacker.com/5807819/what-we-expect-is-what-we-get>

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-big-questions/201105/we-see-in-others-what-we-expect-see>

“Children: When Expectations Don’t Meet Reality”

<http://www.pbs.org/parents/special/article-expectations-meetreality.html>

“You Can’t Always Get What You Want: On Music And Expectation”

<http://www.npr.org/sections/therecord/2012/07/13/156718598/you-cant-always-get-what-you-want-on-music-and-expectation>

The world is full of surprising treasures

<http://boredomtherapy.com/hidden-usb-treasure-hunt/?as=6025460698084>

Expectations that Empower

<http://www.upworthy.com/a-dad-took-photos-of-his-daughter-as-history-making-women-and-they-are-incredible?c=upw1&u=41aa6fc0057fcfdc850d917bc669deaf216c544e>

Advent for Atheists (website resource)

Created by a UU Soul Matters member Becca Boerger, this website offers a description of the traditional advent candles ritual, themes for each of the four weeks of advent and great readings to guide you on your way.

<http://adventforatheists.weebly.com/advent-an-introduction.html>

When Expectations Meet Reality (A bit of fun)

<http://justsomething.co/the-34-most-hilarious-pinterest-fails-ever/>

Movies & Television

How the Grinch Stole Christmas

A classic television show about what happens when things don't go according to the Grinch's expectations.

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0060345/>

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

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/>

Songs

"In the Darkness of the Winter"

A UU Christmas Carol by Rev. Suzelle Lynch, Soul Matters member

<http://tinyurl.com/o7mwxc0>

"Watershed" by the Indigo Girls

Lyrics: <http://tinyurl.com/nhamcmf>

To listen, click on "Watershed":

http://www.indigogirls.com/discography_singles.html

"Pressure Off"

A new song by 80s pop rock group Duran Duran

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5qFhSWA9Cz4>

Books

Mind 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."

http://www.amazon.com/Mind-Over-Surprising-Power-Expectations/dp/1591846579/ref=tmm_pap_swatch_0?encoding=UTF8&qid=1447001821&sr=1-1

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)."

<http://www.amazon.com/Expectation-Hangover-Overcoming-Disappointment-Work/dp/1608682412>

Seven Spiritual Gifts of Waiting
by Holly Whitcomb

from the book review: In America, waiting presents an enormous challenge. We are impatient, "fix-it" kinds of people — and not all situations can be fixed. This book presents seven spiritual gifts that waiting can teach us: Patience, Loss of Control, Live in the Present, Compassion, Gratitude, Humility, and Trust in God. An excellent resource during times of waiting within the church year including Advent and Lent, the book includes spiritual exercises and reflection questions for personal or group use as well as a retreat design.

http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B000VIHC0C?keywords=seven%20spiritual%20gifts%20of%20waiting&qid=1447001710&ref=sr_1_1&s=books&sr=1-1

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?"

http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0688109616?keywords=unplug%20the%20christmas%20machine&qid=1446928225&ref=sr_1_1&s=books&sr=1-1

List of books for children and families about expectation:

<http://amzn.com/w/1675HLJDDA067>

If you've enjoyed this packet and are not a part of Soul Matters or a Unitarian Universalist congregation, please learn more about how to join us at www.soulmatterssharingcircle.com

Join the Soul Matters Facebook page to engage in the theme with participants from all around the US and Canada: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/soulmatters/>