

Soul Matters 2014-15

September

*What Does It Mean To Be
a People of Promise?*



“Promise is a big word. It either makes something
or breaks everything”

- anonymous

What Does It Mean To Be a People of Promise?

Say Yes. Whatever it is, say yes with your whole heart & simple as it sounds that's all the excuse life needs to grab you by the hands and start to dance."

-Brian Andreas

There is power in a promise. Maybe the greatest power of all. This is arguably the most foundational claim of our faith.

It is common for UUs to say we were born inherently good and powerful rather than inherently weak and depraved. What is not so common is remembering that this capacity for strength and goodness is rooted in our ability to make promises. Whereas other religious traditions focus on confession or right belief, we've always placed our hope in the act of making and keeping commitments. This is what is at stake in proclaiming that we are covenantal rather than creedal faith. If a new day is to come, it will arrive not when we all think alike, but when we all follow through on our commitments to love our neighbor as ourselves. If salvation is possible, it will be realized not from us noticing our need to be cleansed, but from waking up to our need to be connected. If divinity is real, we will know it not in the form of a supernatural moment, but in those everyday miracles when we look into each other's eyes and say, "You can count on me to..." Grace is not a reward for good behavior, it is the sacred and creative power that arises when two or more entwine their lives in mutual commitment. Again, there is power in a promise.

And what about the promise that life itself makes to us? This too is central to our faith. From our beginnings, we have declared life to be full of promise and potential, even when darkness seems to dominate our days. So we commit to keeping our eyes open. Trust in life and others, and life and others will prove themselves trustworthy. Shift your gaze from what you *want* to what you *have* and suddenly life is generous rather than a threat. To paraphrase Brian Andreas, say yes and life will start to dance.

So who needs a promise from you this month? What commitment is it time for you to renew? What power is waiting to be released by the simple phrase, "You can count on me to..."? And maybe most important of all, are you ready to say yes and watch life dance?

Our Spiritual Exercise:

Keep A Promise...To Yourself!

It's the promise we most often forget, or maybe it's better to say it's the promise we most often sacrifice. We are often so good at keeping our commitments to others and yet fall flat on our face when it comes to the commitments we make to ourselves. And if we can't keep our promises to ourselves, how will we ever keep our promises to each other? The commitments we make to ourselves serve as the foundation for the pledges we make to those around us. If we break our commitments to personal physical health, we sacrifice the strength to support others. If we cheat on our promises to personal spiritual health, we lose our ability to serve and see needs greater than our own. Those who can't promise kindness and forgiveness to themselves are rarely able to extend kindness and forgiveness to others.

Our spiritual exercise this month honors this sacred interdependence between staying true to oneself and staying true to those around us. Here is your challenge:

- **Read these two articles:**
<http://www.lifehack.org/articles/communication/11-promises-you-should-make-yourself.html>
AND
http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/07/30/promises-to-yourself_n_5628259.html
- **Identify one of the promises they mention that most resonates with you.** Which promise calls to you the most? Which promise is your heart most hungry for? Which promise have you wanted to keep to yourself, but regularly break?
- **Find a way to keep that promise front and center.** Print it out and tape it to your office desk. Put it in your wallet or your purse. Write it in lipstick on your bathroom mirror.
- **Spend the month keeping it!** Give yourself the gift of finally following through.
- **Come to your group ready to share your experience,** what you learned about yourself and how the month was different because you remained true.

Your Question:

*As always, don't treat these questions like "homework." You do not need to engage every single one. Instead, simply find **the one** that "hooks" you most and let it lead you where you need to go. And then come to your Soul Matters meeting prepared to share that journey with your group.*

1. If someone secretly monitored your life for a month, what would they conclude is your most sacred vow?
2. It's been said that our very humanity lies in the way we carry out our promises. How have you made yourself more human through a promise? What promise is asking you to renew your humanity right now?
3. What promises have you made to your spiritual life? We keep our commitment each day to work and earning cash? Why do the promises to our soul and spirit often take second seat?
4. Watch this video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OvIPa28cVfA>. And ask yourself, "What promise can I make to love reaching out?"
5. What promise in your life needs to be broken? Are you keeping a commitment that is keeping you in a cage?
6. Do you still need to forgive yourself for breaking a promise?
7. When promises are broken, how good are you at "beginning again in love"? Has your ability to trust survived all those promises that went unfulfilled?
8. It's been said that we promise according to our hopes, and perform according to our fears. Is there a fear in your life right now that is getting in the way of a promise you want to make?
9. Do you over-promise? When you offer others your commitment, do they take it with a grain of salt? Are you ready to do something to change that? Do you even know why you do it?
10. Has time and age changed how you think about making promises? Are you slower or quicker to make commitments? Have your commitments grown narrower or more broad?
11. When was the last time you said "Yes!" and then watched the world take your hand and dance?

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 jumpstart you, and maybe open you to new ways of thinking about what it means to “be a people of promise.”

promise n.

1. a declaration that something will or will not be done, given, etc.
 2. indication of future achievement
- synonyms: word, pledge, oath, covenant, commitment, potential, talent, possibility

promise v.

1. to afford ground for expectation
- synonyms: pledge, vow, agree, commit,

promise-breaking, promise-renewing creatures. Our very humanity lies in the way we carry out our promises to our families, our coworkers, our neighbors, and our fellow members of the human family...to be genuine, a covenant must be a covenant of being. It’s not just about good words, but about *actions*.”

--Dennis McCarty on James Luther Adams

Wise Words:

“Promise is a big word. It either makes something or breaks everything”

- anonymous

“...a covenant might be implicit, expressed by silent consent as people walk together and show concern for one another. But an explicit covenant is far better ... for reminding the members of their mutual duty and stirring them up to it. ... there is something to be said for the word *covenant*, ... It emphasizes that the church is a community of mutual obligation, which involves a sense of commitment. Even the freest of free churches needs that much discipline if it is to last long enough to accomplish anything of value in this world.”

--Conrad Wright

“Human beings are at our best when we make solemn promises to one another and try hard to keep them. We are the only animal that makes promises: we are a promise-making, promise-keeping,

Unless commitment is made, there are only hopes; but no plans.

~Peter F. Drucker

When promises are broken, “we forgive ourselves and each other. We begin again in Love.”

~Singing the Living Tradition, #637

“We must find ways to access knowledge that is in danger of being lost. ... We’re living in an age when our daily life is dominated by the [dullness of the] marketplace. ... The awareness that our intimate relationships are filled with meaning, that we are connected to and depend on the earth, that we have interests transcending our own personal lives – these dimensions are not factored into the values of the marketplace. ...

[We must resist this.] We must remember...that we have received abundantly in our lives and that our presence matters. We must remember that we are a blessing- [that we are full of promise.]”

-Rev. Rebecca Parker

When did the future switch from being a promise to being a threat?

~Chuck Palahniuk

Politicians are the same all over. They promise to build bridges even when there are no rivers.

~Nikita Khrushchev

We promise according to our hopes, and perform according to our fears.

~François VI de la Rochefoucault

The one who promises everything is sure to fulfill nothing.

~Carl Jung

Those that are most slow in making a promise are the most faithful in the performance of it.

~Jean Jacques Rousseau

And that is just the point... how the world, moist and beautiful, calls to each of us to make a new and serious response. That's the big question, the one the world throws at you every morning.

"Here you are, alive. Would you like to make a comment? [or a commitment? A promise?]"

~Mary Oliver

"Say Yes. Whatever it is, say yes with your whole heart & simple as it sounds that's all the excuse life needs to grab you by the hands and start to dance."

-Brian Andreas

You Reading This, Be Ready

Starting here, what do you want to remember?

How sunlight creeps along a shining floor?

What scent of old wood hovers, what softened

sound from outside fills the air?

Will you ever bring a better gift for the world

than the breathing respect that you carry wherever you go right now? Are you waiting

for time to show you some better thoughts?

When you turn around, starting here, lift this

new glimpse that you found; carry into evening

all that you want from this day. This interval you spent

reading or hearing this, keep it for life –

What can anyone give you greater than now,

starting here, right in this room, when you turn around?

~ William Stafford

"...[There is promise and power in those that have gone before us.] When we allow our spiritual forebears to speak,... we will discover potential mentors for our own religious pilgrimage. ...in every generation, each individual must discover and embrace those truths in his or her own way if they are to evoke the power to transform. This is the miracle of a 'living tradition' – the ability to create anew the wisdom of ... those who have come before us that can guide us as we encounter our own future."

--Rev. Tim Jensen

Videos and Online:

What Country Does the Most Good?

http://www.ted.com/talks/simon_anholt_which_country_does_the_most_good_for_the_world

The promise of a better world perhaps lies with the “Good Country Index” that Policy advisor Simon Anholt developed. Check out this talk about national behaviors and how we measure the good we do for the promise of a better collective future.

***must watch**

UU Sanctuaries, Washington, DC Video: The promise of love reaching us as we reach out to each other.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OvLPa28cVfA>

Movie Clip On Protecting the Promise and Potential Within: *Will Smith with the best advice a dad can give to his own son. Don't ever let somebody tell you, you can't do something...*

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

Articles:

Bound in Covenant,
Rev. Victoria Safford

<http://www.uuworld.org/ideas/articles/285904.shtml>

Our history of covenant and one example of its modern practice in congregational life

We Are Already in Paradise,
Rev. Rebecca Parker

<http://www.uuworld.org/spirit/articles/162500.shtml>

There is no land promised to any of us than the land already given, the world already here.

How to Make and Keep a Promise to Yourself

<http://www.theartfullifeblog.com/how-to-make-and-keep-a-promise-to-yourself/>

[Anne Lamott](http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/books/excerpts.php?id=14601) finds hope while participating in a peace march.
<http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/books/excerpts.php?id=14601>

11 Promises to Yourself

<http://www.lifehack.org/articles/communication/11-promises-you-should-make-yourself.html>

5 Promises You Should Make to Yourself Everyday

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/07/30/promises-to-yourself_n_5628259.html

20 Promises To Your Dearest Sister

<http://www.lifehack.org/articles/communication/20-promises-you-can-make-your-dearest-sister.html>

Books:

Active Hope: How to Face the Mess Where in without Going Crazy

By Joanna Macy

A celebration of promise and hope over powerlessness

***Soul of a Citizen: Living with
Conviction in Challenging Times***
By Paul Rogat Loeb
*Another celebration of promise and hope
over powerlessness*

***The Four Agreements: A Toltec
Wisdom Book***
By Don Miguel Ruiz
*Four promises that can transform how
we live our lives*

**SOUL MATTERS
FACEBOOK PAGE**

Join our Soul Matters Facebook group at:
<http://www.facebook.com/groups/soulmatters/>

This is a great way to connect the dozens of
Soul Matters groups from congregations
around the US and Canada. The goal is to
inspire each other by sharing material
related to the monthly themes (quotes,
movies, books, personal experiences related
to the monthly exercises).

So please sign up and share a post about
where Soul Matters led you this month!