



Soul Matters

What does it mean to be
a people of **EXPECTATION?**

Small Group

September 2019

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*

We've all heard the line: "You get what you expect." It's very UU. Liberal religion has always emphasized the tremendous power human beings have to shape their reality. And not just with our actions, but also with our expectations. We know that if you expect people to be good, they will likely rise to the task. If you have faith in your plans, opportunities will likely appear.

And yet shaping reality and trusting reality are two very different things.

Sometimes we UUs become so focused on taking hold of life that we lose the spiritual skill of allowing life to hold us. And there's a lot at stake in being able to do both. We human beings weren't just made to manifest our power; we were born to learn we are part of a greater whole. Yes, we are strong, but we also tire. And so the question at the core of our souls is not just "Can I expect to make an imprint on life?" but "Can I trust life to carry me if I let go and rest?"

Philip Booth puts us in touch with this deep part of ourselves with his poem called [First Lesson](#). In it, he tells his daughter,

*Daughter, believe
me, when you tire on the long thrash
to your island,...
remember... what I told you:
lie gently and wide to the light-year
stars, lie back, and the sea will hold you.*

So how about you? What are your expectations of this sacred but stormy sea in which we all swim? 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? Are you willing to let life's currents lead you where they will?

And notice, this isn't just about whether or not we trust life; it's also about how willing we are to loosen our grip and let our preferred expectations go.

Which isn't easy for any of us!

It's why, ultimately, we need prayers like Michael Leunig's as much as we need poems like Philip Booth's. We need life to upend us as much as we need it to hold and carry us. Those holy disruptions force our hand. They break our grip. Only then do we fall. And discover we can count on being caught.

So bring on those unruly dogs and unpredictable tears. Let the rain disrupt our forecasts of sun. May Life indeed turn us sideways and around and lead us unexpectedly but safely home!

Our Spiritual Exercises

Option A : *What's Your Flower?*

Things in our life become routine. From the people we work alongside to the shoes we put on our feet. From the cup of coffee we drink in the morning to the seasons that come round each year. Their regularity causes them to blur into the background. We stop expecting them to surprise us. We stop noticing how they have changed and grown. And thus they lose their power to make us change and grow.

This dullness is what poet Daron Larson wants us to escape. He wants us to move from expecting “another day” to expecting a “new day.” And he does it with a simple asterisk. The poem below is about a flower, but with the asterisk he puts next to it, he invites us to replace “flower” with the thing in our life that used to glitter but has now lost its sheen.

So this month use his poem as your spiritual exercise. Read it through and think about your “flower.” He lists a bunch of things you might replace it with, but only you know what in your life need raised expectations. At the beginning of a day, pick the one thing you want to try and perceive anew. Then expect it to surprise you. And maybe you might even decide to do this exercise more than once!

Come to your group ready to read the poem with your substitute word and share why you picked the word you did.

Recognition

Daron Larson

Full poem at

http://www.athomeinyourlife.com/blog/recognition?rq=it%20is%20so%20difficult%20to%20see%20this%20flower%20*%20

Clarity, See Out

It is so difficult to see this flower*
because the countless others
we've seen before
cloud the view...

Option B: Dig Into and Defend Your Defensive Pessimism

Those optimists will believe they own this month of expectation. Prove them wrong!

There are many of us who are proud of being Eeyores and believe that our pessimistic dance with expectations is sorely misunderstood. If this is true of you, take some time this month to explore the concept of “defensive pessimism” in order to better explain your way of being in the world to others.

And if you have an Eeyore in your life and want to better understand them, maybe this is your work this month too.

Here are four great places to begin...

- Defensive Pessimism Questionnaire - <http://academics.wellesley.edu/Psychology/Norem/Quiz/quiz.html>
- Are You a ‘Defensive Pessimist’ or a ‘Strategic Optimist’? - <https://www.thecut.com/2015/12/are-you-a-defensive-pessimist.html>
- The Upside of Defensive Pessimism - <https://positivepsychology.com/defensive-pessimism/>
- [The Positive Power Of Negative Thinking](#) - by Julie Norem

Option C: Take a Penny Hike or Drive

Sometimes the best journeys are those without destinations. Letting a hike or a drive unfold in unexpected ways is a reminder that we don’t always have to be in control or bend our paths to fit our exact desires.

As a child, Rev. Jan Taddeo and her family became masters at this spiritual discipline by taking what they called “penny hikes,” which involved flipping a coin at every fork in the trail or road to determine which way they would go. You can read about the impact this left on Rev. Taddeo by following the link below.

With her story as inspiration, make time this month to take your own Penny Hike or Drive!

In the spirit of letting life lead you into the unexpected, don’t decide ahead of time what you hope to get out of the drive or hike. Don’t determine its meaning or message until you are done. Come to your group ready to share what you discovered.

Crossing Bridges, Rev. Jan Taddeo

Full reflection at <https://www.uua.org/worship/words/meditation/crossing-bridges>

“Creating adventure was a theme in my family. My father would take us out on Sunday drives just to “get lost.” He would say things like, “Let’s just turn down this road and see where it takes us.” My mother would take us on penny hikes, flipping a coin at each fork in the trail to see which direction to walk next. We explored trails, creeks, and went bushwhacking a few times, always looking for new adventures. Growing up with an appreciation for the unknown and creating adventures in unexpected ways has served me well...”

Option D: Lie Back and Lean into “Enough”!

Sometimes pausing to rest is a spiritual exercise in and of itself. We spend so much time chasing expectations, those of others and those we place on ourselves. It becomes such a way of life that we don't notice we are doing it and stop wondering why we are doing it.

To help you pause and to carve out some space to think about why you don't pause more often, take some time this month to meditate and reflect on the two pieces listed below. They are short. Made to be savored and read through multiple times. Use them as the focus of your meditation time this month.

Or take it to the next level and invite a trusted friend to listen to and discuss them with you. Invite your friend to share where the pieces take them and share where the pieces take you. Ask your friend why they think you struggle to “Lie back” and have trouble expecting that “the sea hold you.” Make space to help each other remember when you were first taught to build your life around expectations rather than “enoughness.” Yes, sometimes conversations can be the most important spiritual practices of all.

First Lesson, by Philip Booth

Full poem at

<https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/first-lesson/>

“Lie back, and the sea will hold you.”

Even This Is Enough, Rev. Vanessa Southern

Full prayer at

<https://www.uua.org/worship/words/prayer/even-enough>

“The world won't stop spinning on her axis if you don't rise to all occasions today.

Love won't cease to flow in your direction,

your heart won't stop beating...

Rest, if you must, then, like the swimmer lying on her back who floats...”

Option E: Discover What the Recommended Resources Expect of You

Our recommended resources are full of wisdom about what it means to be a people of and a person of expectation. So, if none of the above exercises call to you, engage the recommended resources section of this packet as your spiritual exercise for the month.

Set aside some regular time throughout a week to go through the resources and meditate on them until you find the one that most expands or deepens your understanding of expectation. After you've found it, consider printing it out and carrying it with you or pinning it up so you can continue to reflect on it throughout the weeks leading up to your group meeting. 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 single one. Instead, make time to reflect 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? And what is it trying to get you to notice or remember?

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

1. Who taught you the most about defying expectations? How did their courageous living spill over into your own?
2. Has life ever blessed you by upending your expectations?
3. As you've gotten older, do you expect more of life or less of life? How about people? Has age convinced you to expect the best or the worst in them?
4. Do you expect life to give you what you deserve? Is that belief one that gets in your way or helps you make your way?
5. What if the betrayals of the past aren't a good predictor of the present?
6. Do you live in the world as it should be or in the world as it is?
7. Who helps you remember that people really can change?
8. Whose belief in you helped you expect more of yourself and become more?
9. Do you know what your fellow black and brown UUs expect of you? Do you know if you've met their expectations? ([Brittany Packnett](#))
10. Do you have a spiritual practice that helps you lean into life's unexpected twists and turns? Is it time to get one?
11. What if God doesn't reside in life's dependable patterns but instead lives in the disruptions?
12. What's something you know now about expectation that you didn't know when you were 18 years old?
13. Is today the day you put down all the expectations and just lie back and float?
14. Why not make today the day you tell yourself, "I am enough"?
15. **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. Or maybe the question or call you need to hear is waiting in one of the quotes listed below. Consider looking there!

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 your thinking started and open you to new ways of thinking about what it means to be part of a people of EXPECTATION.

Word Roots

From Latin *ex* 'out' + *spectare* 'to look' + *ation* 'the state of.' In English the meaning anticipating, regarding as about to happen, was well established by the 1600s. In 1817 expecting is first as a euphemism for being pregnant.

Wise Words

I would love to live like a river flows, carried by the surprise of its own unfolding.

John O'Donohue

Life is not under my management.

It is free, and dappled, not pure.

Life is this, not something else...

Even God does not yet know

what's in store before unfolding in it.

[Steve Garnaas-Holmes](#)

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.

Rev. Dr. Frances Sink

Be careful what you water your dreams with. Water them with worry and fear and you will produce weeds that choke life.

Lao Tzu

We do not see things as they are, we see them as we are.

Anais Nin [& the Talmud](#)

What you see depends on what you're looking for.

Unknown

If you treat an individual as he is, he will remain how he is. But if you treat him as if he were what he ought to be and could be, he will become what he ought to be and could be."

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

If men could see us as we really are, they would be a little amazed; but the cleverest, the acutest men are often under an illusion about women: they do not read them in a true light: they misapprehend them, both for good and evil: their good woman is a queer thing, half doll, half angel; their bad woman almost always a fiend.

Charlotte Brontë, Shirley

Gentle One, under every bridge [I see] the ogres of people's fears and expectations... give me the grace to step outside of this illusion. To see through the smoke and mirrors of pressure and anxiety. To get out of other people's fairy tales...

[Steve Garnaas-Holmes](#)

As we release the hold of expectations and disappointments, as we stop trying to live into the imagined life and live the one we have been given, we discover a profound inner freedom to make choices out of love, rather than obligation or resentment.

Christine Valters Paintner

Remember that you are always allowed to quit. There's nothing real about expectations. Their weight can feel solid and inescapable, but they're only imaginings. Your imaginings. Their strength comes only from your consent. The first step is never easy, but trust me, by your second step, you will discover how easy it is to break free.

Rev. Scott Tayler

When we put down ideas of what life should be like, we are free to wholeheartedly say yes to our life as it is.

Tara Brach

What will mess you up most in life is the picture in your head of how it's supposed to be.

Unknown

Dashed expectations can be good for the soul. After all, always getting what we expect often leads to expecting to always get what we want.

Anonymous Soul Matters Minister

My expectations were reduced to zero when I was 21. Everything since then has been a bonus.

Stephen Hawking

Anyone who loves in the expectation of being loved in return is wasting their time.

Paulo Coelho

We must learn to reawaken and keep ourselves awake, not by mechanical aids, but by an infinite expectation of the dawn, which does not forsake us even in our soundest sleep. I know of no more encouraging fact than the unquestionable ability of [human beings] to elevate [their] life by a conscious endeavor.

Henry David Thoreau, Walden

Valentine for Ernest Mann

Naomi Shihab Nye

Poem found at

<https://poets.org/poem/valentine-ernest-mann>

On unlocking the gifts by shifting our expectations

“He really liked those skunks.

So, he re-invented them

as valentines and they became beautiful

At least, to him...”

Do you know what your fellow black and brown UUs expect of you? Do you know if you've met their expectations? Do you know that standing with the oppressed is not to save them but to save yourself?... At work you ask your manager every day, every week, every quarter exactly what they expect of you. And then you break your back to meet or exceed those very expectations in

exchange for a paycheck. Why not ask your community every day, every week, every quarter exactly what they expect of you and then use everything you got to meet or exceed those very expectations in exchange for justice? This is our work. And I promise it pays the very best dividends.

[Brittany Packnett](#)

We do not know if this arc bends toward justice. The great test of our Unitarian Universalist faith is not whether we believe we can bend the arc, but how we are when the bending looks oh so differently from what we expected... When we're met with a group of white people talking about white identity when we expected multiracial community... When our efforts feel frustrating and hopeless, when we expected to see outcomes. When our people's bodies are dying in the streets and we have no idea how to be alright.

[Rev. Elizabeth Nguyen](#)

[Religious] 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 [stories] remind us to find the mark of God less in the regularities of nature than in the unexpected turns that life can take.

Rev. John Buehrens

Even This Is Enough

Rev. Vanessa Southern

On putting all the expectations down and letting ourselves rest in the knowledge that we are already enough

Full prayer at

<https://www.uua.org/worship/words/prayer/even-enough>

The world won't stop spinning on her axis if you don't rise to all occasions today.

Love won't cease to flow in your direction, your heart won't stop beating...

Rest, if you must, then, like the swimmer lying on her back who floats...

Songs and Music

Tomorrow - cover

Haley Klinkhammer

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XlrefMv73bE>

A Change is Gonna Come

Sam Cook

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hf8y-Svywns>

Cover and tribute:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c_pmDHGtn9o

Can't No One Know

Sweet Honey in the Rock

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3RezioxXRu>

Cover: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2fG7ndu6zwQ>

"Can't no one know at sunrise how this day is going to end..."

More "Expectation Songs" are found on our September Soul Matters Spotify playlist. Click [here](#) to check them out! You can also explore the playlists from other months [here](#).

Videos

2018 UU General Assembly Ware Lecture - Spirit of Expectancy

Brittany Packnett

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WkV2fNuN1C4>

Whose expectations dictate your days?

Video & Musical Meditation on Defying Expectations

X Ambassadors - Renegades

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1u-niluB8HI>

The Power of Expectations - Invisibilia, NPR

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=110&v=hbhwlRRW_3o

The Unexpected Karate Kick

When those around us expect the best and believe in our greatness, look at what we can become!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bU5zI4I4ULA>

What Beyoncé Taught Me About Race - TED Talk
Brittany Barron

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fDzj9vRw5yM>

On America as "an expert at expecting certain things from a woman who looks like Beyoncé." A powerful engagement of Maya Angelou's admonishment, "First, recognize that I am a black woman. And then, forget that I am a black woman."

On the Expectation, Necessary and Burden of Code Switching

- What Is Code-Switching? (And the danger of not doing it):
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QNbdn0yuUw8>
- The Cost of Code Switching - TED Talk: Chandra Arthur:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bo3hRq2RnNI>
- 3 ways to speak English - A powerful spoken-word essay about the pain behind code switching:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k9fmJ5xQ_mc
- Key & Peele on Code Switching:
<https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2015/07/29/427411327/key-peelee-is-ending-here-are-a-few-of-its-code-switch-iest-moments>

"The Talk"

The painful and heart-breaking task of having to explain to your child that they need to expect that someday, someone might want to hurt you or kill you because of the color of your skin.

- Black Parents on the Talk:
<https://www.vox.com/2016/8/8/12401792/police-black-parents-the-talk>
- How to Deal with the Police | Parents Explain:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=coryt8IZ-DE>
- Dear Child:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mkw1CetjWwI>
- Darkest Truth - Mia Wright:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pQySlgRmmXI>

A Reason Not to Worry What Others Think - School of Life

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X75Roe_davA

The tragedy and liberation of not being noticed

Pessimism for Lovers - School of Life

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

Lower expectations are the key to love!

Rebel, Upholder, Questioner, Obliger: which one are you? - RSA Short

Gretchen Rubin

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QmpWW-KibOo&list=PLMo9vqiZPs0RQa_kypIS3tchANZa-MJGO&index=2

How we balance our inner and outer expectations determines who we are!

How Do You Expect to Feel at 90 Years Old?

A moving video of a couple that gets the gift of watching themselves age, together.

<http://twistedifter.com/videos/young-couple-gets-increasingly-aged-with-make-up-and-revealed-to-each-other/>
https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=341&v=X9HlHmY-PsA

Podcasts

How To Become Batman - Invisibilia

<https://www.npr.org/programs/invisibilia/378577902/how-to-become-batman?showDate=2015-01-23>

“Examines 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.”

Busted, America's Poverty Myths

A five-part series challenging our expectations and assumptions around the path of poverty.

<https://www.wnycstudios.org/shows/otm/projects/busted-americas-poverty-myths>

Articles

Article - Queering Faith, UU World

On challenging the idea and expectation of “normal” and embracing a new understanding of UU truth.

Alex Kapitan

<https://www.uuworld.org/articles/queering-faith>

“Queer theory... teaches that there is no such thing as a single, universal, absolute truth; that there are always multiple—even contradictory—equally true interpretations and meanings of something. Queer theory also questions everything that is presented as truth based on social norms like the gender binary... Instead, it emphasizes the choices we

make. It’s first and foremost about what we do and how we experience the world, not who we are or how we identify. This sounds a whole lot like Unitarian Universalism to me...”

Great Expectations: Studying Expectancy’s Effects - Utne Reader

Jessica Cohen

<https://www.utne.com/mind-and-body/expectancy-effects-zm0z16szdeh>

“Knowing which group would fail when he first met with them, he had somehow contaminated them with his expectations without knowing how...”

New Report: ‘Human Civilization Coming to an End’ Starting in 2050

On climate change and alarming expectations

https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/597kpd/new-report-suggests-high-likelihood-of-human-civilization-coming-to-an-end-in-2050?utm_campaign=sharebutton

Watch [this powerful video](#) of a young woman who is taking these predictions and expectations seriously.

Books

Originals: How Non-Conformists Move the World

Adam Grant

Book review:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=171&v=utIMVnutzAk

The Positive Power Of Negative Thinking

Julie Norem

Far From the Tree: Parents, Children and the Search for Identity

Andrew Solomon

Honors the poignant and inspiring journeys of parents whose child’s path does not fit expectations. Traces the terrain of moving beyond those expectations into love.

Movie based on the book: [here](#)

22 Things You Should Read for Bisexual Awareness Week

<https://www.pride.com/bisexual/2018/9/24/22-things-you-should-read-bisexual-awareness-week>

Movies & TV

Far From The Tree

On What happens to families when a child's journey is not the one that was expected?

"Follows families meeting extraordinary challenges through love, empathy, and understanding. This life-affirming documentary encourages us to cherish loved ones for all they are, not who they might have been. Based on Andrew Solomon's award-winning book "[Far From the Tree](#)."

Read a review [here](#)

Thelma & Louise

Time to watch this classic again about challenging expectations and discovering unexpected inner strength.

Akeelah and the Bee

Want to feel like you are capable of defying expectations? Watch it tonight!

When They See Us

On why we must confront our darkest expectations and deepest prejudices

Article on the movie found [here](#)

Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse

The highly-acclaimed animation film about navigating societal and familial expectations while at the same time being called to great expectations.

Get daily inspiration
on the monthly theme by liking our
Soul Matters Facebook inspiration Page:
<https://www.facebook.com/soulmatterssharingcircle/>

Find musical inspiration
on each theme by following our monthly
Spotify Lists:
<https://www.soulmatterssharingcircle.com/spotify-lists.html>

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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