

Reflection pages

F A I T H
H O P E
L O V E

There are three things that remain
- faith, hope, and love -
and the greatest of these is
love

1 Corinthians 13:13

We are **Truly loved**

We are **Truly loveable**



We can **share that love with others**

You matter.
You are good enough.
You are loved.

[1 Corinthians 13: 13]

Faith Hope Love

THE GREATEST OF THESE IS LOVE

Why Faith, Hope and Love?

These three are at the heart of Christian discipleship. They are at the heart of our faith community. They are the height, length, breadth and depth of relationship with God. They describe the development of God's life within us through the Spirit. They describe our response to God and our neighbour.

The beginning, despite the order, is love.

There is no other beginning in God but love. God 'is' and 'does' love.

It is love / God that continually draws us into being.

It is love that leads God to become one with us in Christ, to invite us into relationship, to labour to heal and set free.

It is the Holy Spirit of love that burns within, leading us deeper into God and drawing us into God's active compassion for all.

Faith and hope are the fruit of love...

and the means by which we are transformed by love.

Faith is the choice made to trust God with what is important to us. Through faith we become open to receive the love that is God. Our life becomes established in love.

I pray that according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. *[Ephesians 3: 14 – 21]*

Hope leads us to act purposefully in the present as we anticipate the work of Love in the future through drawing on the memory of love received in the past. And may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace by your faith in him, until by the power of the Holy Spirit, you overflow with hope" *[Romans 15: 13]*

Faith and hope together are the human but God-given response to love. And faith and hope enable us to live within and to express the love in which we are created and held.

Through faith and hope we open the way for love to bring us into the fullness of our individuality.

Through faith and hope, love creates us, and in this love, through faith and hope, we become co-creators with God.

Faith, hope and love will often seem to overlap – because they do.

Love hopes in the other, has faith in the other's goodness.

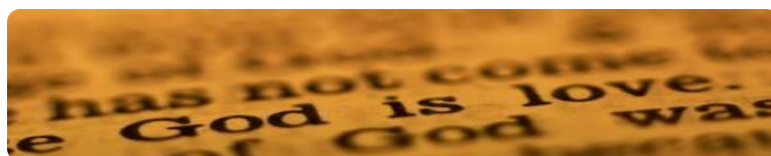
Faith is both the response to love and the means by which our capacity to receive love expands; faith flowers into hope.

Hope flows from faith in God, enabling us to express love creatively, drawing what seems lifeless into being.

But without love, faith and hope have no being.

Everything rests on this: that God is love, and love has neither beginning nor end.

And now faith, hope and love abide, these three, and the greatest of these is love



The beginning is God... the beginning is Love

'You would know our Lord's meaning in this thing? Know it well. Love was his meaning. Who showed it you? Love. What did he show you? Love. Why did he show it? For love. Hold on to this and you will know and understand love more and more. But you will not know or learn anything else – ever!'

So it was that I learned that love was our Lord's meaning. And I saw for certain, both here and elsewhere, that before ever he made us, God loved us; and that his love has never slackened, nor ever shall. In this love all his works have been done, and in this love he has made everything serve us; and in this love our life is everlasting. Our beginning was when we were made but the love in which he made us never had beginning. In it we have our beginning.

[Julian of Norwich, Showings of Love, Chapter 86]

God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love; not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another.

[1 John 4: 7-12]

God is love,
and those who live in love
live in God, and God lives in them

[1 John 4:16]

We love because God first loved us.

[1 John 4:19]



Your faith journey begins with God.

It is God who creates you, and goes on drawing you into being.

It is God who in Christ the Word comes to seek you, to call you by name, to invite you into relationship.

It is the Spirit of God, gifted to you out of love, who enables you to hear this invitation and to respond.

10 Things God wants you to remember ALWAYS

I will give you rest

I will strengthen you

I will answer you

I believe in you

I am for you

I will bless you

I will be with you

I will not fail you

I will provide for you

I love you

Love comes first, and from this we learn that God gives freely, generously, unconditionally.

Our value lies in God's beholding rather than in anything we achieve.

All notions that you or I have to earn our worth to be loved by God fall away. Love is God's name, and God's only activity. The pattern never changes.

The real question is whether we will choose to align our lives with this love. Will you and I turn our lives towards Love? Will we respond when Love invites? Will our relationship with the God who loves first become the foundation of all we do and are?

The choice is faith, the fruit is the hope through which we begin to express the love that is our beginning.

Prayer and reflection exercises

The beginning is love...

Resting in God's Word

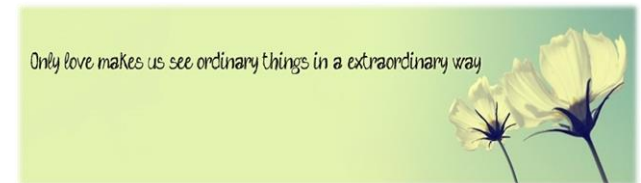
Read through the passages about love in a prayerfully reflective way – in God's company. You might want to take one each day and dwell with it. As you begin ask God to receive the grace of understanding his love more deeply. Read the passage slowly – perhaps more than once, dwelling on lines or phrases that seem to connect with you. Consider what they say and how this speaks to you – share with God thoughts and questions that emerge. Then read the passage again and let it lead you into a time of simply resting in God's presence.



A Mosaic of Memories

Sit quietly and bring to mind experiences, whether large or small, through which you have sensed genuine love. It may be people might come into your memory, or places where you felt welcomed and restored, or particular events. Write down a word or sentence that captures that time, that person, that event, without going into details; as the next memory comes write something down

about that and so on, so that you end up with a long list of moments or memories. Most of these points of connection will be ordinary, everyday things. When you've finished spend some time looking at your completed list. Reflect with God about the shape, the form love takes in your life and how love practically expresses itself.



The Gospel of Love

If you had to choose one Gospel story / event that for you speaks most clearly about the love of God expressed in Christ what would it be? Read this passage prayerfully, letting it speak to you afresh.

It might help to use your imagination to enter into the passage. Imagine the place where the event takes place using your different senses: is it a cloudy or a sunny day? Can you feel the sun on your back or the wind blowing through? What people are there and what are they doing? Where are you in the story? Perhaps you are one of the main characters or an onlooker. What do you see Jesus do, or hear him say? Are there things you want to say to him or that you sense he says to you? What different things do you think or feel as events unfold?

When you have finished your reflection ask God to help you understand your reactions, feelings and responses – what do these show you about how God is at work for you and how you might co-operate with this?

Some perspectives on faith

Part of a community of faith

The Creed expresses how we are a community of faith, not just across place but across time. We are surrounded by a cloud of witnesses [Hebrews 12] – people who have dared place their trust in the God revealed in Jesus Christ and who share their experience and understanding with us.

Faith in the 'present tense' God

God 'is'; the name of God imparted to Moses is 'I am'. The Creed expresses not who God was but who God is, here, now and for each one of us.

- **God is creative** here and now in the world and within our lives. God continues to draw us into being.
- **God is incarnate**, alongside you and I, sharing the place where we are and the challenges that face us



*Jesus invites you to follow him
and to stay in his company*

- **God is redemptive**, sharing our struggles and suffering, and by his dying and rising drawing us from death into life. God labours to make us whole, and to liberate us from all that oppresses and diminishes us.
- **God is the Lord and Giver of Life**: The Spirit of God moves to bring life to your innermost spirit. The dry bones are brought into being [Ezekiel 37]. The Spirit seeks to draw you into intimacy with God, to help you live out all that is within you and to make your life fruitful.
- **God works** to bring about community within humankind and within creation so that our relating expresses love, the relating of God: The Church, called to be one, holy, universal, is being formed as a sign of the kingdom of God for humankind.

Faith as trust in another

While we often think of faith as assent to truths, Christian faith is centred in trust in another – in God. Faith is a relational quality. Without the risk of trust there can be no deepening of relationship. Faith is the response to God's invitation to relationship.



Faith as action more than feeling

We rarely experience the feeling of total trust. More often we wonder how safe it is to give ourselves into God's hands. We would rather have life in our own control, yet recognise the limits of this way of living. Faith is an action – a choice to go where God leads, to let go into God's care even if part of us wants to draw back in fear.

Faith as 'letting go'.

Faith as 'stepping out'.

Faith expresses itself in both letting go and stepping out. It is passive and active. We let go when we renounce our need to be in total control of our life or when we choose to stay with a situation that seems to have no resolution. At these times we rest in God, knowing there is no more we can do. We step out when God invites us to move beyond the narrow confines of our existence – to take a new path, to consent to be the one who says with Isaiah 'here I am, send me' [Isaiah 6] even though we feel ourselves to be inadequate.

Faith and doubt

Faith and doubt are not, as is commonly assumed, in conflict. Faith is an action, a choice we make that often goes against or beyond our feelings. To feel doubt and yet choose to trust reveals a deeper capacity for faith than when the step we are invited to make feels entirely safe and secure. The psalms as prayers of faith are full of doubt.

Faith as a journey by night

One image used within the bible and within the Christian spiritual tradition for faith is the making of a journey by night. We do not see the way ahead, we are not wholly in control of what will take place and so we allow God to lead us.

I will lead the blind by a road they do not know, by paths they have not known I will guide them. I will turn the darkness before them into light, the rough places into level ground. These are the things I will do and I will not forsake them.

[Isaiah 42:16]



The gift of faith

Faith is a gift of God, granted through our openness to receive it. We don't have to work up a feeling of trust. The very grace to respond to God's invitation is God's gift to us. Our capacity for faith expands as we dare to trust ourselves to God.

A small boy riding a bus home from Sunday school was very proud of the card he had received. It had a picture and a caption that read, *Have Faith in God.* Then to his dismay the card slipped from his hand and fluttered out the window. "Stop the bus!" he cried. "I've lost my faith in God!" The driver pulled the bus to a stop, and, as the lad climbed out and went to retrieve his card, one of the adult passengers smiled and made a comment about the innocence of youth. A more perceptive adult observed, "All of us would be better off if we were that concerned about our faith."

Faith and prayer

To pray is an act of faith. We pray not only with words but with the inner action of our spirit. We set aside the activity of thought and enter into the stillness of prayer, even when prayer seems empty and useless. We pray not primarily to get results *[the answer we want, or a tangible sense of God's presence]* but to affirm that the relationship with God is the very heart of our existence

God's faith in you

'Faith' is not one-sided. Before ever we place our trust in God, God places trust in us. God sees what we can be and labours continually to bring this about in us. The Gospels express the vulnerable, generous and undying trust of God in humankind. All that God is and has is freely given and shared without any holding back, whether or not we choose to respond.

Faith

is seeing light
with your heart
when all your eyes
see is darkness.

A Cloud of Witnesses

To reach a new and unknown land travellers cannot rely on their own knowledge...they cannot reach new lands...if they do not take unknown roads and abandon familiar ones. [John of the Cross]

The second reason refers to the means of the road along which a person travels to union [with God]. Now this road is faith, and for the intellect faith is also like a dark night. [John of the Cross].

It is night not to know whether the path one senses oneself drawn on leads anywhere; it is night to let go into God's hands and not be sure those 'hands' are there at all; it is night to set aside the activity of thought and enter into the stillness of prayer, when prayer seems empty and useless. Those situations that take us out of our depth, and beyond our normal pattern of control, make us most vulnerable. But what if instead of resisting this vulnerability we choose it, seeing it as invitation to place our past, present and future within another's care? This way of faith might seem no more than resigned passivity. But I think of myself learning to swim, choosing between clinging to the rail on the side or launching out into the water. At the moment of letting go I chose to believe that if I swam the water would hold me up - a trust expressed in action though not in any measure felt. No effort could keep me from drowning should the water lack its natural buoyancy; but neither could I gain the freedom of swimming if I insisted on not letting go. Faith is the active choice, made not once but over and over again, to allow God to be the source of everything we are and will be - to let go and let God. It is a 'yes' to the vulnerable trust and openness that makes depth of relationship possible. [Chris Chapman]

Jesus said, 'Put out into deep water and let down your nets for a catch'. Simon answered, 'Master we have worked all night long and caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let out the nets'...When they had brought their boats to shore they left everything and followed him. [Luke 5: 1-11]

My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really

know myself, and the fact that I think that I am following Your Will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please You does in fact please You. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. [Thomas Merton]

Unfurl the sails, and let God steer us where He will. [Bede the Venerable]

The disciple simply burns his boats and goes ahead. He is called out...The old life is left behind, and completely surrendered. The disciple is dragged out of his relative security into a life of absolute insecurity... out of the realm of the finite...into the realm of infinite possibilities. [Dietrich Bonhoeffer]

Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. [Hebrews 11:1]

Now the Lord said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you...So Abram went as the Lord had told him [Genesis 12]

Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. [Hebrews 12:1-2]

God, take my by Your hand, I shall follow You dutifully and not resist too much. I shall evade none of the tempests life has in store for me; I shall try to face it all as best I can. But now and then grant me a short respite. I will never again assume, in my innocence, that any peace that comes my way will be eternal. I shall accept all the inevitable tumult and struggle. I delight in warmth and security, but I shall not rebel if I have to suffer cold, should You so decree. I shall follow wherever your Hand leads me and shall try not to be afraid. I shall try to spread some of my warmth, of my genuine love for others, wherever I go...I don't want to be anything special, I only want to try and be true to that in me which seeks to fulfil its promise. Etty Hillesum

Faith IS LIKE THE *wind*,
YOU CAN'T *see* IT
BUT YOU *know* IT IS THERE.

Faith is the choice to trust: Prayer and reflection exercises

1. Who is God for you?

The writers of the Creed drew on the revelation of God within the bible and the experience and reflection of the Church over time. Drawing not just on whatever teaching you have received but on your own experience of God, attempt to write your own Creed.



- You can write it as a personal statement of belief: ‘I believe that...’
- Or write it as an expression of your faith made directly to God – many of the psalms are personal statements of faith drawn from experience, for example: ‘Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil, for you are with me’ [psalm 23]
- Also take a blank sheet of paper and write – “For me God is ...” and let your creativeness, honesty and heart fill the page!! What image have you painted?

2. **A cloud of witnesses.** We are part of a community of faith, and are surrounded by ‘a cloud of witnesses’ [Hebrews 12]. Who has been a witness, an inspiration for you in the development of your faith? As someone comes to mind consider what they have revealed to you about who God is and what it means to centre your life in relationship with God.

FAITH
JOURNEY

3. Mapping your life / faith journey

On a large piece of paper draw a graph as below:

Significant events, people, places	
Feelings, thoughts, pictures of God	

0 3 6 9 12 15 18 21 etc.
Your age (yrs) Up to your age!

In the top row write down the major events, people, and places in your life at different times from the time of your birth to the present day. (Write down things as they occur to you - you don't have to work from your childhood to your current age in a straight line.) In the lower row write down how you felt about God, or experienced God, or pictured God at different times in your life. When you've finished, look at the complete picture. What strikes you about it? How has your life journey shaped your faith journey? How has your journey with God shaped your life journey?

4. **A Collage of Faith**: Using a large sheet of paper, make a collage of people, places and events that have been important in your life and faith journey. You may want to use photographs, postcards, names of significant people or places, bible verses, or cuttings from newspapers or magazines. You may also want to add drawings of your own. A further idea is to leave some spaces for whatever the future holds and add to it over time!



5. **Words of faith**: Read through the passages about faith in a prayerfully reflective way – in God’s company, maybe take time to find more? You might want to take one each day and dwell with it. As you begin ask God to help you understand what new step of faith God is inviting you to make. Read the passage slowly – perhaps more than once, coming back to it during the day & dwelling on lines or phrases that seem to connect with you. At the end of the day take a few minutes and consider what they say and how this phrase or passage speaks to you – share with God thoughts and questions that emerge. Then read the passage again and let it lead you into a time of simply resting in God’s presence.

6. **Stepping out and letting go**: Ask God to bring back to your mind times when you sensed God inviting you to step out or to let go in response to his invitation. How did you respond? What was the fruit of these times? In what area of your life do you now sense God inviting you to step out or let go? Share with God your hopes and fears in relation to this. Sometimes we have to act in faith in the absence of feeling full of faith – what action might you take at this time as an expression of faith?

7. **The walk of faith**: Sometimes it helps to physically act out the walk of faith. Fix a point in the near distance that symbolically represents a place you sense God is inviting you to move to in faith. Now walk slowly to that point noting the fears, hopes and energy that arise as you do so. Repeat slowly, “Lord my trust is in you, guide my steps”



At your arrival point, talk with God about what it feels like to be there. Now retrace your steps to where you began. This time turn away from your destination and walk slowly in the other direction. What do you feel as you do so? Talk with God about this.

Now repeat your journey back to your faith destination for a second time. What do you feel? Did anything surprise you? What do you learn from this exercise?

Trust in the LORD
with all your
heart, And lean
not on your own
understanding;
in all your ways
acknowledge Him,
And He shall
direct your paths.
Proverbs 3:5-6

Living in Hope

And may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace by your faith in him, until by the power of the Holy Spirit, you overflow with hope" Romans 15: 13

What is Hope?

In everyday speech we say: 'I hope it doesn't rain today' or 'I hope my bus comes soon'.

Christian hope is more than wishful thinking.

- Wishful thinking is often an avoidance of reality.
- It is passive in nature.
- It expresses a belief – or doubt – in the hand of fickle fate.
- It tends to have a fixed understanding of what the desired outcome is and how it will be achieved.



Christian hope...

- Begins with what 'is', facing this reality.
- Hope sees not just what is, but what can be; it is not blind to obstacles; it takes them seriously and is practical in addressing them.

- *Hope is active*, flowing from the activity of the Spirit within us
- *Hope is an expression of God* who is enduringly creative and resourceful within what is.
- *Hope flows from belief in God* who is ever incarnate in what 'is'. In Christ God continually enters our broken, suffering and disunited world and by his living, dying and rising makes all things new.
- *Hope is a work of the Spirit within*, drawing all that is dead into being, and leading all that is divided into unity.
- *Hope is not only about what we believe* but what we live.
- *Hope is the overflow of the Spirit* engaging us in bringing about a new creation in Christ
- *Hope moves us* into God's vision for ourselves, our church and our neighbourhood.

Hope as co-operation with the Spirit

Hope expresses the willingness to work in partnership with God. In our lives and in our work we seek to understand what the Spirit is doing and to co-operate with this work.

Hope involves waiting

We wait actively...working, and searching, for life is in our hands.

It is the one who seeks who finds, and the one who asks who receives, and the one who knocks who will find the door opened. And yet we also wait passively – for the right time to come, for growth to take its course, and to receive by gift what cannot be ours by effort alone.

Hope leads us to act purposefully in the present as we anticipate the work of Love in the future through drawing on the memory of love received in the past.

Some biblical stories of Hope

The Exodus;

I am the Lord, and I will free you from the burdens of the Egyptians and deliver you from slavery to them. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgement. I will take you as my people and I will be your God [Exodus 6:6-7]

The rebuilding of the ruined city of Jerusalem

For we are slaves, yet our God has not forsaken us in our slavery, but has extended to us his steadfast love before the kings of Persia, to give us new life to set up the house of our God, to repair its ruins and to give us a wall in Judea and Jerusalem [Ezra 9:9]

Jeremiah buys a field in a besieged city

And I bought the field at Anathoth from my cousin Hanamel...for thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: House and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land. Jeremiah complains to God:

See the siege ramps have been cast up against the city to take it... yet you, O lord God, have said to me, 'buy this field and have witnesses'.

The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah: 'See I am the Lord...is anything too hard for me? [From Jeremiah 32]

The wilderness renewed

The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom...Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who are of a fearful heart, 'Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God...he will come and save you.' [From Isaiah 35]

The vision of Ezekiel in exile- the dry bones

The spirit of the Lord set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones...The Lord speaks: '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'...Thus says the Lord God...I will put my spirit in you and you will live, [From Ezekiel 37]

The vision of Ezekiel in exile – the river of life flowing from the Temple of God

This water flows towards the Eastern region and goes down into the Arabah, and when it enters the sea, the sea of stagnant waters, the water will become fresh...everything will live where the river flows [From Ezekiel 47: 1-12]

The word from God's mouth that does not return empty

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall the word be that goes forth from my mouth: it shall not return to me empty; but it will accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it. [Isaiah 55:10-11]

The sower, and the seed that does grow

Other seed fell into good soil and brought forth grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirty and sixty and a hundredfold ...Let anyone with ears to hear listen! [Mark 4: 8-9]

The offering of what we have

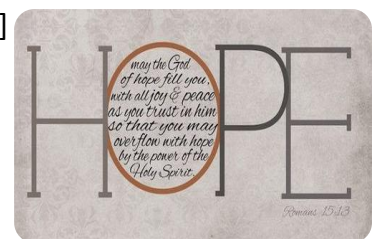
Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves and gave them to his disciples to set before the people, and he divided the two fish among them all. And all ate and were filled. [Mark 6: 30-44]

The Lord who does great things

Those who go out weeping bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves [Psalm 126]

Waiting and working in hope

This is what the kingdom of God is like: a man throws seed on the land. Night and day, while he sleeps, when he is awake, the seed is sprouting and growing; how he does not know. Of its own accord the land produces first the shoot, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. And when the crop is ready he loses no time: he starts to reap because the harvest has come... [Mark 4: 26-29]



Living in hope

Prayer and reflection exercises

1. Witnesses to hope

Read through the passages about hope in a prayerfully reflective way – in God’s company. You might want to take one each day and dwell with it. As you begin ask God to deepen your ability to see and act in hope. Read the passage slowly – perhaps more than once, dwelling on lines or phrases that seem to connect with you. Consider what they say and how this speaks to you – share with God thoughts and questions that emerge. Then read the passage again and let it lead you into a time of simply resting in God’s presence.

2. The hope we carry

Look back with God on your life and faith journey. As you reflect on your experience of life and the goodness of God what is the message of hope you have to share with others?



3. Waiting and working

Hope involves waiting and working. Gardening symbolically expresses this partnership in hope. We sow seeds and nurture them as they grow, but the growth itself is a work of wonder.

Identify a hope that you sense God has planted within you. It might be to do with your own life and growth or about others whom you labour and care for. Sow seed in a seed tray or small pot, following any instructions supplied with them. When the seeds are big enough plant them out in your garden or in a larger container.

4. The light of hope

Bring an area of your work before God in prayer. Imagine hope to be a light. Where are the darkest corners in need of this light? Move the light of hope so it shines into these dark places – into every deep recess where light has been absent. What hope do you begin to see revealed?

5. Acting in hope

Hope is an action more than a feeling. We remember the works of God in the past and so anticipate the work of God in the future, leading us to act purposefully in the present. We recognize that we are invited to co-operate with what God desires to bring into being. Read one or more of the biblical stories about acting in hope – for example Jeremiah buying a field in a besieged city. Ask God to show you an action you can take as an expression of hope, whether this in relation to your own circumstances, or someone you care for or the community or the church you are part of.

6. Acting with hope

- Set a goal for yourself, your faith, your prayer life or your outreach to others and imagine new opportunities that will allow you to meet it. Dream big but start small.
- Work slowly but steadily toward your goal. *(Even if the “new opportunity” mentioned above hasn’t shown up yet!)*
- Talk with people who seem hopeful about their future, their faith. Sometimes you need another perspective and support to see new opportunities and your sharing will give hope to others.
- Treat yourself well and be gentle with yourself. Hope flourishes—and everything looks better—when you are taking care of yourself.



Times and Seasons of Hope

In the spring-time of the year

Days grow longer and the sun's power wakes. The first buds break and green life rises from the ground. It is Spring. Spring is a word with layers of meaning, each expressing something about Hope

1] Spring - a metal coil pushed down hard and then released.



Winter winds, long nights and frost push life back deep underground. But the force used in pushing down becomes in time a force for life, pushing up. Every daffodil, crocus, unfurling leaf declares that life has rebounded.

Within each of us is a God-given irrepressible life. Whenever we have been unloved, devalued, or crushed by events beyond our control it's as if a cold dark hand has pushed our spirit down and out of sight; but through the Spirit of God within and by the loving invitation of Christ, our life is renewed.

He supports us in every hardship, so that we are able to come to the support of others, because of the encouragement we ourselves receive from God [2 Corinthians 1; 1-11]

- How have you experienced God helping you 'rebound' from difficult circumstances?
- How have you been able to use what you learnt from your difficult experience in a positive and life giving way for you or others?

2] A spring of water

Water rises cool, fresh, and clear from deep underground. The water cannot be contained by the rock that enfolds it and it finds a way to the surface

Jesus spoke of 'the Spirit within us as a spring of living water welling up to eternal life [John 4: 1-14 and 7: 37]. In Ezekiel 47 a river flows •from the Temple, and wherever the river flows it brings life and healing At this time of year it is as

if life has bubbled up to the surface and broken through in a fountain of green.

God is within you – a spring of life and love to satisfy your thirst and to refresh and revive the thirsty who come to you.

Sometimes you will witness this spring of new life bursting through difficult circumstances, bringing new hope, energy and beginnings – in you, and with individuals, groups and churches you are involved with.

Whoever drinks the water that I shall give will never be thirsty again: the water that I shall give will become in him a spring of water, welling up for eternal life

[John 4: 1-14]

- When have you experienced the Spirit of God at work in you or through you?
- When have you seen new hope and life in unexpected people and places?
- How do you experience this life of God welling up in hope within you at this time?

3] Spring is a leap forward.

Almost overnight bare branch and bare earth become a living green.

There are times when life edges forward, and time when we leap forward to a new place. Hope moves us to dare to respond to the Spirit's invitation: we take a decision we previously feared to make, or we commit ourselves to act even without knowing for sure what the result will be.

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace by your faith in him, until by the power of the Holy Spirit, you overflow with hope"

[Romans 15: 13]

Journeying in response to God's call is not risk free – but each spring forward we make in answer to God's invitation builds up our faith in God and in ourselves, strengthens our hope and roots us more deeply in love.

Looking back at your life can you think of an example of when you made a choice that proved to be a decisive step forward?

- How do you sense you are being invited to 'take a spring forward in hope' at this time?
- How do you sense the work of the Spirit's renewal in your own life at this time?

SOMETIMES,
I JUST FEEL LIKE
GIVING UP.
AND THEN I DO.

I GIVE IT UP
TO GOD.

Expressing love

God is love and those who abide in love, abide in God and God abides in them

God is love

God 'is' and 'does' love. The Trinity reveals the mutual self-giving within God: the Father and Son give all to one another in the free and generous love of the Spirit. This love overflows into all creation giving life and bringing wholeness. Humankind is made in God's image and likeness: we are made for the receiving and giving of love; it is this and this alone that makes life complete.

Becoming rooted and grounded in love through faith

The beginning, as we have seen, is God. God loves us freely and generously and without condition. God seeks us, inviting us into relationship. This is the truth unfolded to us in the life of Christ and through the gift of the Spirit. Our lives become rooted and grounded in love through faith and hope. In faith we choose to trust God with what is important to us; we choose to make this relationship the foundation for our lives. This openness creates the space to receive and to begin to be transformed by love. In hope we align our lives with the work of the Spirit within. Our seeing, thinking and responding begins to take on the shape of God's indwelling. We think and work creatively, open to new possibilities, meeting life as it is, with all its difficulties, with active hope in God who makes all things new.

Sharing the love we receive

Now our lives begin to express love, to express God. This is what we are made for; it is in the receiving and giving of love that each of us finds the fullness of our own self-expression. We become the person God made us to be, using our gifts, experiences, knowledge and

interests to make a difference to those around us. As God creates, so our actions will be ones that give life. As the Word is made flesh and dwells among us, so we come alongside others with compassion. As Christ labours in life and death to heal and to restore, so we work to remove burdens and bring wholeness. As the Spirit draws scattered humanity into one body, so we work to build community, and against injustice and exclusion.

Abiding in God through prayer

We are called to express love in our relationships and in our work. But only those who abide in God can express the love that God is. Prayerful openness to God and active service of others cannot be divided. It is God's Spirit who lives and loves within our spirit – we can do nothing by ourselves. Prayer expresses our dependence on God, and our continual need to receive so that we can give.

Prayer is a conscious way we acknowledge the call to relationship with God. We make ourselves present to God as God is always present to us. But prayer is not detached from life and relationships. True prayer is transformational, for we open ourselves to the Spirit. Through prayer we 'become'. We allow God space to set us free from what shackles us and to bring forth what is good and true within us. Through prayer we are brought into God's way of seeing and relating and acting.

Prayer is not an escape from the world of practical demands. Those who pray come to care more deeply and act more compassionately.

Prayer doesn't stop at private happiness: the further we go into God through prayer the more we are led out with God in expressing love that is practical and active.



Expressing love

If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.

[1 Corinthians 13: 1-8]

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love; not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so

much, we also ought to love one another. No-one has ever seen God. If we love one another, God lives in us and his love is perfected in us.

[1 John 4: 7-12]



God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them
[1 John 4:16]

There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear, for fear has to do with punishment and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. We love because God first loved us. Those who say, 'I love God', and hate their brothers or sisters are liars; for those who do not love a brother or a sister they have seen cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.

[1 John 4: 13-21]

I pray that according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of God that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God

[Ephesians 3: 14-21]

Contemplation is nothing but a hidden, peaceful, loving inflow of God. If it is given room, it will inflame the spirit with love.

[John of the Cross]



Expressing love: Prayer and reflection exercises

1. Contemplating love

Read through the passages about love in a prayerfully reflective way – in God’s company. You might want to take one each day and dwell with it. As you begin ask God to receive the grace of both knowing and expressing his love in your life. Read the passage slowly – perhaps more than once, dwelling on lines or phrases that seem to connect with you. Consider what they say and how this speaks to you – share with God thoughts and questions that emerge. Then read the passage again and let it lead you into a time of simply resting in God’s presence.

2. Expressing love this day

Love is an action, more than a feeling. Ask God to show you someone today he asks you to express love for. This may be through a small action, and without any direct mention of God.

3. Expressing love in our work

Our work includes anything we are paid for, time at study but also all that we do for our family, our neighbourhood or our church. God’s work is active love, expressing itself creatively in coming alongside us, in bringing wholeness and in drawing us into community.

Reflect about ways your work expresses the active love of God. Ask God to show you any other way you can use your gifts, experiences, knowledge and interests to express God’s love. Decide on one first step towards making this real or exploring a new possibility – and take it!

4. Gratitude as the seedbed for love

Our love is a response to the love we receive from God. Gratitude is a seedbed for the expression of love. Spend some moments towards the end of each day recalling the gifts of love that have come to you during that day – whether through other people, or what you have seen or experienced or heard or sensed. Give God thanks for these gifts, and ask that your life may express that same generous giving. Do not let a day go by without recognising and saying *thank you* for the love shown. And giving thanks for the love you have shown to others!

Faith
makes all things possible.
Hope
makes all things work.
Love
makes all things beautiful.

God
ALWAYS
KEEPS HIS *Promises*