

# Love for the Future: Being at Home on the Earth

## *Exploration Group*

### Session 5 – Stories, Songs and Sign

The theme of this session is **hope** and **fellowship**.

#### PREPARATION

Find a piece of music, a poem, a picture, a story or something else which has been a help for you in a dark time in your life.

#### THEME: HOPE AND FELLOWSHIP

Hope and optimism are sometimes confused but they are not the same thing. An optimist is not necessarily hopeful and a pessimist is often not without hope.

Hope enables people to carry on, and to carry on caring, even when things are desperate. It is a conviction that the pain, the grief, the struggle and suffering of the world are taken into a greater reality where the wounds are not removed but healed.



Out of loss comes new possibility. Out of death comes life, in time and in eternity. In the energy and new growth of the spring, in the passions and dreams of children, in the beauty that we can sometimes glimpse even in a scene of destruction, we have continual reminders of this.

But at times it is obscured. The light is hidden. Hope then is the conviction that it is still there, even if it can't be seen. A conviction that out of even the worst that can happen, God can and does create new life and possibilities. Even out of death.

Usually people don't put this into words. They are too busy doing what they need to get by, taking each day at a time. Or talking about God seems irrelevant, or crass, particularly if their idea of 'God' is of a superbeing who could make everything better but for some inscrutable reason doesn't do so. In their situation hope is lived out by carrying on caring despite the absence of 'God'.

Living with hope is not a matter of ignoring the bad and just looking at the good: watching the water lapping on the beach and not seeing the litter; seeing children round a barbecue on the shore of a loch and refusing to think about the nuclear missiles that are stored across the water; enjoying easy travel through a rugged landscape and not considering the price we are paying in changing the climate.

Hope involves recognising the pain amidst the pleasure and the bad within the good. It involves recalling our human story as one of war, violence and exploitation as well as

courage, justice and technological progress. It means recognising that there is death as well as life, but doing so with the conviction that goodness, creativity, life and joy ultimately overcome the destruction.

For most of us, hope is encouraged by other people: people we know and share our struggles with, or people of the past or in other places who write songs, compose music, tell stories or capture images in their poetry, and somehow strengthen our determination to live, and to live for justice.

In this session we will think of what has in the past helped us in dark times, and share this with each other.

## READING

David Osborne, *Love for the Future: a journey* (Glasgow: Wild Goose, 2013) chapters 9 and 10

Tom Gordon, *New Journeys Now Begin: Learning on the path of grief and loss* (Glasgow: Wild Goose, 2006)

Ruth Burgess, *A Book of Blessings, and how to write your own* (Glasgow: Wild Goose, 2001)

Jurgen Moltmann, *In the End – the Beginning* (London: SCM, 2004)

## GROUP SESSION

### 1. Looking back to last session:

In the last session group members chose one thing in their lives that they wanted to change. How is that going? What are the difficulties?

Group members may wish to share their experience so far. Other members may wish to keep to themselves what they have decided to change and how they are getting on with it. Some people find it helpful to tell others about these things; others do not. Everyone's different and everyone's circumstances are different!

In response, others in the group may wish to share what they find helpful, but should **not** (a) diminish the difficulties that someone else is having, **or** (b) tell others what they should do.

### 2. Introduction to theme: Hope and Fellowship

(i) Who was able to do the personal preparation? How did you find it?

(ii) If all the group members have read chapters 9 and 10 of the book *Love for the Future*, or the introduction above, move straight to (iii) If not, read through the introduction now.

(iii) Discuss any or all of the following:

Are you clear what is meant by 'hope' in this context?

Can you think of examples of the word 'hope' being used differently from what is being talked about here?

Can you think of any situations where you have witnessed remarkable hope in someone else?

Can you look back on times in your own life when your own sense of hope has been shaken? or been strengthened? You may wish to tell others briefly about this, or prefer to keep it to yourself.

### **3. Activity**

(i) Each person in turn share what you have chosen that has been helpful to you in a dark time: the music, reading, picture, or whatever it was. Each tell the others as much or as little about the situation as you wish.

(ii) If you have time, each choose another person's selection to hear or see again.

(iii) Together choose one piece of music to listen to again in the next session, and one thing to read.

**4. Preparation for next session:** Think of someone you know or have known, who was or is wise. They might be someone you have known personally; or a writer, artist or scientist you know something about; or a politician you know of. What was it about them that made them 'wise'?

Discuss any questions or uncertainties about this exercise.

Next week there will be a meal together. Who will bring what?

### **5. Possible action together**

In Session 3 you may have identified some action for justice which the group could take together. Decide what, if anything, you are going to do about it and when, bearing in mind that there is neither the time nor the resources to do everything that could be done.

### **6. Close with a short contemplative practice**

Take a period of silence and in that silence each think of ten good things that have happened that day. They may be very small, like a colour you have noticed or something that has made you laugh or smile; or very significant; or something that you might often take for granted, like a meal, or a dry home, or your health. As you think of them, count them on your fingers.

Then choose one of them, and after five minutes each person in turn tell the others what that thing was.

Together say this prayer:

God we thank you for the good things of this and other days through which we are blessed: good news, helpful words, people, colour, beauty, laughter, life itself; those who share our

purpose and concern; and for Jesus who has come to stay and to summon us, today, tomorrow, and for ever. Amen.

Note: Taking a few minutes each day (eg. in the evening or on a journey home) to think of ten good things can over a period of time affect your basic mood and outlook. It is promoted in the teaching of mindfulness and in cognitive behavioural therapy, and is the old Christian practice of 'counting your blessings'!

## **REFLECTION AFTER THE SESSION**

What can you do now that might help you in future dark times?

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