



Light & Darkness

Gatherings

Spiritual & Modern

Spiritual + Modern



Vibe: This framework provides for a comprehensive, contemporary style gathering. Suitable for an inter-faith gathering and/or those individuals who might be at the edges of faith.

Length: 20 - 30 minutes

Materials: Post-it notes (purple & yellow), candles

Resources:

- **Visual:** Slideshows of lament and hope. Short film, “The News”.
- **Literary:** Martin Luther King Jr., A Christmas Sermon on Peace (1967)
“Life Goes On”, by Howard Thurman, Parker Palmer Quote - Being Light
- **Auditory:** “Hallelujah”, “Immanuel”, by Jason Morant, “Anthem” by Leonard Cohen

Within this gathering your role is to select which visual/literary or auditory method best suits the group. We have provided some options for you within the darkness and light sections. Please take time to preview the options as to promote a meaningful space for all. In some cases you could likely utilize the same piece for both darkness and light (i.e. MLK Jr.’s Christmas sermon). As always feel to augment as you see fit!

Gathering

Leader Script: “Tonight, we gather together in the Christmas season, set in the darkest month of the year, by the time of the Winter Solstice. You are invited into a space today, to recognize and name both the light and the darkness that you might carry. For many of us, this last year we’ve felt and watched as much darkness has moved into our hearts, our lives, our communities, our nation and our world. And yet, we hold sparks and voices of light in our days and hopes for a better world around us. We will take time, this evening to individually and collectively, identify and voice our darkness and our light.”

Time of Darkness

Visual/Literary/Auditory Invitation (5 minutes):

Leader Script: “For centuries there have been passionate expressions of lament or darkness found in the modes of music, poetry or song - we will view/read/listen (to) the following now, as a way to face the pain and darkness in and around our own lives.”

Personal Reflection (5 minutes)

Play instrumental music in background (option: “Hallelujah” or “Immanuel”)

Leader Script: “I now invite you into a time of stillness to write down where you identify darkness, on the purple post-it notes. Use as many as you’d like to name areas of loneliness, confusion, frustration, pain, grief or anger.”

Sharing Time (5 minutes)

Play instrumental music of your choice in background or enjoy silence.

Depending on the size of your gathering you may want to break down into smaller groups of 5-6, if you follow option (a) below. If you are hoping for a more casual feel to sharing, you can stay as a larger group and go to option (b) below. If you are looking for a more conversive response in lament please see option (c), this option will likely be much longer than 5 minutes.

Leader Script:

(a) “In your smaller groups, I invite each of you to read as much or as little of what you’ve written on your post-its. The person talking should simply read what they have written. Don’t comment on them or tell stories or expand. Just read what you’ve written. If you are not sharing, please simply honor and hold the lament being read, by listening. Refrain from offering advice or suggestions or comfort. To mark the end of your sharing, please put your post-it notes in the designated area, (*Middle of the circle in a pile, spot on the wall, etc.*).

(b) “We will now enter into a time of sharing what you’ve named as darkness. As you feel comfortable please read what you’ve written on your post-it notes. To mark the end of your turn, please put your post-it notes in the designated area. Please only share as you feel comfortable.

(c) “We will now open up space for you to respond to the visual/literary/auditory piece that we experienced and/or your personal time of naming darkness. What struck you? Expand upon what you named as darkness, as you feel comfortable”.

Darkness Options:

Visual Option:

- Slideshow of Darkness - reservoirchurch.org/lead
- “The News”, link: <http://www.rethinkworship.com/?s=the+news>

Literary Options:

- Martin Luther King Jr., A Christmas Sermon on Peace, 1967

Auditory Options:

- “Immanuel”, by Jason Morant
- “Hallelujah” sung by Rufus Wainwright
Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PBo-n_17XU0

Time of Light

Visual/Literary/Auditory Invitation (5 minutes):

Leader Script: “We come together tonight in community as a way to still seek goodness and light despite the darkness. As we view/read/listen to the following piece, make space for where light might come into view”.

Personal Reflection (5 minutes)

Play instrumental music (any selection from Sleeping at Last’s, “Many Beautiful Things” soundtrack)

Leader Script: “I now invite you into a time of stillness to write down where you identify a sense of hope, desire or longing, on the white post-it notes. Use as many as you’d like to name these pictures of light in your life and in the world around you.”

Sharing Time (5 minutes)

Play instrumental music of your choice in background or enjoy silence.

Depending on the size of your gathering you may want to break down into smaller groups of 5-6, if you follow option (a) below. If you are hoping for a more casual feel to sharing, you can stay as a larger group and go to option (b) below. If you are looking for a more conversive response to name light, please see option (c), this option will likely be much longer than 5 minutes.

Leader Script:

(a) “In your smaller groups, I invite each of you to read as much or as little of what you’ve written on your post-its. The person talking should simply read what they have written. Don’t comment on them or tell stories or expand. Just read what you’ve written. If you are not sharing, please simply honor and hold the hope being read, by listening. Refrain from offering advice or suggestions or comfort. To mark the end of your sharing, please put your post-it notes in the designated area, (*Middle of the circle in a pile, spot on the wall, etc.*).

(b) “We will now enter into a time of sharing what you’ve named hope. As you feel comfortable please read what you’ve written on your post-it notes. To mark the end of your turn, please put your post-it notes in the designated area. Please only share as you feel comfortable.

(c) “We will now open up space for you to respond to the visual/literary/auditory piece that we experienced and/or your personal time of naming light. What struck you? Expand upon what you named as light, as you feel comfortable”.

Leader Script:

“As you feel comfortable, you may light a candle as a symbol of hope and as a symbol that all of us in this space acknowledge and honor your light. When you are ready we will all read Howard Thurman’s, “I Will Light Candles this Christmas” together, to close our gathering.”

Hope Options:

Visual Option:

- Slideshow of Hope
- “Saturn”, by Sleeping At Last (Video)
- “Oh Light”, by Gungor (Video)

Literary Option:

- “Life Goes On”, by Howard Thurman.
- Parker Palmer Quote, Being Light

Auditory Option:

- “Advent for Weary Souls”, Amena Brown
- “Find the Light”, David Ramirez

Candle Reading:

- “I Will Light Candles this Christmas”, Howard Thurman

Resources

Spiritual + Modern Gathering: Resources

LAMENT

Visual Option:

- Slideshow of Lament - reservoirchurch.org/lead

- "The News" video.

Link: <http://www.rethinkworship.com/?s=the+news>

This is a 3:45 minute short film that invites lament by naming key items from the global news of 2015. (We hope the 2016 version will be available soon.)

Literary Option:

- Martin Luther King Jr., A Christmas Sermon on Peace, 1967

Link for full Sermon: http://www.ecoflourish.com/Primers/education/Christmas_Sermon.html

Sermon excerpt:

"There are three words for "love" in the Greek New Testament; one is the word "eros." Eros is a sort of esthetic, romantic love. Plato used to talk about it a great deal in his dialogues, the yearning of the soul for the realm of the divine. And there is and can always be something beautiful about eros, even in its expressions of romance. Some of the most beautiful love in all of the world has been expressed this way. Then the Greek language talks about "philia," which is another word for love, and philia is a kind of intimate love between personal friends. This is the kind of love you have for those people that you get along with well, and those whom you like on this level you love because you are loved.

Then the Greek language has another word for love, and that is the word "agape." Agape is more than romantic love, it is more than friendship. Agape is understanding, creative, redemptive good will toward all men. Agape is an overflowing love which seeks nothing in return. Theologians would say that it is the love of God operating in the human heart. When you rise to love on this level, you love all men not because you like them, not because their ways appeal to you, but you love them because God loves them. This is what Jesus meant when he said, "Love your enemies." And I'm happy that he didn't say, "Like your enemies," because there are some people that I find it pretty difficult to like. Liking is an affectionate emotion, and I can't like anybody who would bomb my home. I can't like anybody who would exploit me. I can't like anybody who would trample over me with injustices. I can't like them. I can't like anybody who threatens to kill me day in and day out. But Jesus reminds us that love is greater than liking. Love is understanding, creative, redemptive good will toward all men. And I think this is where we are, as a people, in our struggle for racial justice. We can't ever give up. We must work passionately and unrelentingly for first-class citizenship. We must never let up in our determination to remove every vestige of segregation and discrimination from our nation, but we shall not in the process relinquish our privilege to love.

I've seen too much hate to want to hate, myself, and I've seen hate on the faces of too many sheriffs, too many white citizens' councilors, and too many Klansmen of the South to want to hate, myself; and every time I see it, I say to myself, hate is too great a burden to bear. Somehow we must be able to stand up

before our most bitter opponents and say: "We shall match your capacity to inflict suffering by our capacity to endure suffering. We will meet your physical force with soul force. Do to us what you will and we will still love you. We cannot in all good conscience obey your unjust laws and abide by the unjust system, because non-cooperation with evil is as much a moral obligation as is cooperation with good, and so throw us in jail and we will still love you. Bomb our homes and threaten our children, and, as difficult as it is, we will still love you. Send your hooded perpetrators of violence into our communities at the midnight hour and drag us out on some wayside road and leave us half-dead as you beat us, and we will still love you. Send your propaganda agents around the country, and make it appear that we are not fit, culturally and otherwise, for integration, and we'll still love you. But be assured that we'll wear you down by our capacity to suffer, and one day we will win our freedom. We will not only win freedom for ourselves; we will so appeal to your heart and conscience that we will win you in the process, and our victory will be a double victory."

Auditory Option:

Song: "Immanuel", by Jason Morant

<p>Lyrics: "Carry me to the place unknown where the river runs so deep where the water cold washes over me and I all but drown in Your mercy. Carry me from this hell called home where the walls like shepherds sleep congregations fall from the Gospel's heart to the desert of prosperity. Immanuel God with us Where are you now? Immanuel God with us Be here somehow. Lift me up to the place unknown in the shadow of Your wings where I'm safe from harm hidden in Your arms never far from the sound of your breathing.</p>	<p>Oh lift me up from this hell called home where the blood of children speaks of the wars we've made of the lives we trade for this desert of prosperity for this desert of prosperity. Immanuel God with us Where are you now? Immanuel Our God with us, be here somehow. Immanuel God with us, where are you now? Immanuel God with us Be here somehow. God with us, be here somehow."</p>
---	--

HOPE

Visual Option:

- Slideshow of Hope: reservoirchurch.org/lead
- Song & Video: “Oh Light”, by Gungor
Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZcZGS8sfEFk>

Lyrics: Oh light Come to reconcile Come in like a child Holy night Oh light Our hopes and all our fears Met within your sight Holy night Hallelujah God is with us Hallelujah A light has come Oh light God and man entwine Of earth and of divine Holy night Oh light Mending fractured earth The soul now felt its worth Holy night	Hallelujah God is with us Hallelujah A light has come Hallelujah Holy God is with us Love is always born within Hallelujah Light will chase and find us Love is facing us again Hallelujah Holy God is with us Love is always born within Hallelujah Light will chase and find us Love is facing us again Hallelujah God is with us Hallelujah A light has come A light has come Oh a light has come
--	---

Song & Video: “Saturn”, by Sleeping at Last

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dzNvk80XY9s>

<p>Lyrics: You taught me the courage of stars before you left. How light carries on endlessly, even after death. With shortness of breath, you explained the infinite. How rare and beautiful it is to even exist.</p> <p>I couldn't help but ask For you to say it all again. I tried to write it down But I could never find a pen. I'd give anything to hear You say it one more time, That the universe was made Just to be seen by my eyes.</p>	<p>I couldn't help but ask For you to say it all again. I tried to write it down But I could never find a pen. I'd give anything to hear You say it one more time, That the universe was made Just to be seen by my eyes.</p> <p>With shortness of breath, I'll explain the infinite How rare and beautiful it truly is that we exist.</p>
---	--

Literary Options:

- “*Life Goes On*”, Howard Thurman

During these turbulent times we must
remind ourselves repeatedly
that life goes on.
This we are apt to forget.
The wisdom of life transcends our wisdoms;
the purpose of life outlasts our purposes;
the process of life cushions our processes.
The mass attack of disillusion and despair,
distilled out of the collapse of hope,
has so invaded our thoughts that what we know
to be true and valid
seems unreal and ephemeral.
There seems to be little energy left for aught but futility.

This is the great deception.
By it whole peoples have gone down to oblivion
without the will to affirm the great and permanent strength
of the clean and the commonplace. Let us not be deceived.
It is just as important as ever to attend to the little graces

by which the dignity of our lives is maintained and sustained.

Birds still sing;
the stars continue to cast their gentle gleam
over the desolation of the battlefields,
and the heart is still inspired by the kind word
and the gracious deed....

To drink in the beauty that is within reach,
to clothe one's life with simple deeds of kindness,
to keep alive a sensitiveness to the movement
of the spirit of God in the quietness of the human heart
and in the workings of the human mind—
this is as always the ultimate answer to the great deception.

- Parker Palmer Quote:

“In times of deep darkness, we not only need light - we need to be light for one another. That's a message we must take to heart as we find ourselves lost once again in the all-too-familiar darkness of America's culture of violence.

Who better to deliver that message than Mary Oliver, in a powerful poem that re-tells the story of the Buddha's last words. Before he died, she tells us, "He looked into the faces of that frightened crowd" and said, "Make of yourself a light."

We are the frightened crowd the Buddha looked into as he drew his last breath. We are the people who need to be light for one another.

There are many kinds of light. There's the light that allows people lost in the dark to find their way home. There's the light of compassion that comforts everything it touches. There's the light of truth-telling about ourselves that allows us to see what we are doing — or allowing — that has helped bring this darkness upon us. There's the light that shows us the way forward toward a better world. There's the light of courage to walk that path no matter who says "Stop!"

No one of us can provide all of the light we need. But every one of us can shed some kind of light. Every day we can ask ourselves, "What kind of light can I provide today?"

Auditory Options:

- “Advent for Weary Souls”, Spoken word by Amena Brown
Link: [:https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=feUOZOB5g7o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=feUOZOB5g7o)
**Please note this piece is from 2015.*

Lyrics:

This year has brought us tears and sorrow
Watching our world, like the very ground beneath us tremble with fear racism death hate
So many questions without answers
So many mothers who have had to bury their children
We cannot unplug from the noise of news
Our world is being torn at its seams by the tug of war
Finding it difficult to make or keep peace
The fight for human rights
The fear of disease
The violence of militants, lives are being snuffed and stolen
Typhoons, airstrikes, open fire
This year nearly 300 girls were kidnapped in Nigeria while getting an education
And most of them have still not returned home
The protests in Venezuela, china, mexico, Ukraine are the same as the protests happening in New York,
Atlanta, Ferguson
Our cities and towns are at an unrest
As we wrestle with the violence of lone gunmen, immigration, race relations
As we watch our neighborhoods turn into war zones, we don't hear the wounds
We just take sides and divide to find our "us" so we can accuse "them"
We have stopped listening
We find ourselves with angry fists in what is supposed to be the season of giving
There have been breaches in our confidence and trust
We have lost our ability to mourn with those who mourn
To see injustice with disgust
#bringbackourgirls
ebola
ice bucket challenge
#i cant breathe
why I stayed
renisha mcbride
occupy hong kong
#black lives matter
gaza under attack
yes all women
#breakthe internet
take down that post
mh370

#prayforsouthkorea
mh17
hands up don't shoot
until our souls need a cease fire

sometimes it's hard to light the candle and drink the tinsel
when Christmas seems to not unwrap gifts but wounds
reminding us of the people we've lost
of the things that have been stolen
of despair of grieving
the kind of sadness a Christmas carol can't seem to shake
and what do we do with this baby?

This savior whose arrival had no celebrity, no red carpet, no paparazzi
Just mary and joseph, and manger animals
And stars to lead wise men
What does this Jesus have to do with our brokenness and wounds?
What does he have to say when the plotlines of our lives don't wrap up neatly like a Christmas tune?
This Jesus is not just a baby.
He is the radical revolutionary who came to do the saving
Who spoke uncomfortable truth to the narrow minded religious
Who turned over tables for justice
Who used his voice to speak for children, orphans, widows
Who became freedom for the oppressed, yes
He wanted us to know peace so badly he sacrificed himself.
So we could realize we are not us vs. them
We are us with Him
Us, who want to walk in love and serve like Him
Fight against injustice and poverty with him
Let's listen to those who are hurting
Mourn with those who are weeping
Let's do what we hear the angels singing
For love for peace for goodwill for all humanity this Advent
May jesus teach a weary world and our weary souls to fight for justice
And someday live in peace

- **“Anthem”, Leonard Cohen**

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mDTph7mer3I>

<p>Lyrics: The birds they sang At the break of day Start again I heard them say Don't dwell on what Has passed away Or what is yet to be</p> <p>Ah the wars they will Be fought again The holy dove She will be caught again Bought and sold And bought again The dove is never free</p> <p>Ring the bells that still can ring Forget your perfect offering There is a crack, a crack in everything That's how the light gets in We asked for signs The signs were sent: The birth betrayed The marriage spent Yeah the widowhood Of every government Signs for all to see</p>	<p>I can't run no more With that lawless crowd While the killers in high places Say their prayers out loud But they've summoned, they've summoned up A thundercloud And they're going to hear from me</p> <p>Ring the bells that still can ring Forget your perfect offering There is a crack, a crack in everything That's how the light gets in</p> <p>You can add up the parts You won't have the sum You can strike up the march There is no drum Every heart, every heart To love will come But like a refugee</p> <p>Ring the bells that still can ring Forget your perfect offering There is a crack, a crack in everything That's how the light gets in</p> <p>Ring the bells that still can ring Forget your perfect offering There is a crack, a crack in everything That's how the light gets in That's how the light gets in That's how the light gets in</p>
--	--

- **“Find the Light”, David Ramirez**

Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BKS2_DdrV5s

<p>Lyrics: I wish upon you peace I wish upon you grace I wish for less of what you want And more of what you need</p> <p>I wish upon you an old life With a heart that stays young But most of all I wish upon you love</p> <p>I wish upon you truth When all you feel is doubt I hope you know that an open mind Still knows when to shut things out</p> <p>I wish upon you a brave heart That will always rise above But most of all I wish upon you love</p> <p>As the sun sets the moon begins to rise So even in the darkness you'll find the light</p>	<p>You'll find the light You'll find the light Yes, even in the darkness you'll find the light</p> <p>I wish upon you an easy life I wish upon you hard times I hope you know that both joy and pain Each need their moment to shine</p> <p>I wish you ears that are quick to listen That you're slow to use that tongue But most of all I wish upon you love</p> <p>As the sun sets the moon begins to rise So even in the darkness you'll find the light</p> <p>You'll find the light You'll find the light You'll find the light Yes, even in the darkness you'll find the light</p>
---	--