



Film Festival! **The Power of Music in the Midst of Difficult Times** **Small Group Version** **(for Adults)**

To accompany this series, we have included a collection of documentaries all about the power of music in difficult times. The format for each week written in this document could be used for small group gatherings during each week to discuss these films (there is also a version in your downloads for individual or family units to do on their own). Here is a guide to hosting small groups, including discussion questions, information about the documentaries, and more. Thanks to WDS Associate, Shelley Walters for putting this together!

Setting the Space

We're glad you are delving deeper into our Advent season together with this small group study! Through five sessions, we will journey through this amazing collection of films. We recommend groups of 7 – 9 people gather together for about an hour each week during the series. If you are meeting in a larger group via Zoom, we recommend using breakout rooms so ensure manageable and open conversation with less than 10 people.

The videos are accessible either for rent or purchase on Amazon Prime Video or on YouTube, with the links provided. We recommend that you ask participants to view the films each week prior to the group gathering.

This group study is scripted so that anyone in the group can be in the role of leader on any week with minimal preparation other than viewing the films. We have prepared a separate "Take Home" document with the links and questions to send to participants.

Materials needed

- Computer with internet connection and good sound (if gathering together online or including participants in the group remotely)
- Paper or notebook and pen or pencil for each participant
- A copy of the Leaders' Notes
- Candle and matches
- Clock or watch to keep track of time

Gathering Schedule

First minutes - Gather together and settle in

3-5 minutes - Opening circle with candle, scripture and introduction read aloud

30-35 minutes – Group discussion (all together or in breakout rooms)

2-3 minutes – Personal, silent reflection or journaling on final question

Last minutes – Share “I believe” sentence reflections, Closing prayer/ritual

Film Schedule and Links

Week 1 - Defiant Requiem

Click the photo to watch the trailer.

For more information, check out <https://www.defiantrequiem.org>

Watch the entire movie here:
Included with [Amazon Prime video](#)



Week 2 - Girls on the Wall

Click on the image to watch the YouTube trailer. Please be advised that this film has very strong language (not so much in the trailer). We encourage you to embrace the language as an act of deeper love and listening for greater understanding. Don't dismiss too soon.

Watch the entire movie here:
Rent 1.99 on [Amazon Prime Video](#)
You can also check out the "[Behind the Scenes](#)" clip on YouTube.

Week 3 - Following the Ninth

Check out the trailer by clicking on the image

You can [Watch](#) the film in its entirety on the director's YouTube channel



Week 4 - Sweet Honey In The Rock: Raise Your Voice!



At this writing, we have not been able to find a movie trailer for but documentary but this YouTube video is a great introduction to this singing ensemble.

Rent the documentary for \$1.99 on [Amazon Video](#).

Week 5 - The Singing Revolution

Click on the image to see the trailer.

Available on [Vimeo On Demand](#) for \$3.99

Or on [Amazon Prime Video](#) for \$3.99

See [bonus features](#) (director's commentary and interview with the filmmakers).

[Lots of information](#) about the film.



LEADERS' NOTES

WEEK 1 - "I Believe in the Sun: Hope for Tomorrow"

Opening Circle – Once people are gathered together, light the candle, then read aloud the scripture and prayer for the day.

Isaiah 40: 1-11

Mark 1: 1-15

Let us pray.

Gracious God, gather us in and center us in the Spirit's presence.

Open us to your hope in the stories we have heard and in our own lives.

In Christ's name we pray, Amen.

Introduction to the film –

This first week's film is called "Defiant Requiem." It was chosen because the theme song for our worship series "I Believe" is based on an anonymous poem, believed to be written by a Jewish person hiding from the Nazis in the 1940's.

This week's documentary is also about that time period.

Defiant Requiem highlights the most dramatic example of intellectual and artistic courage in the Theresienstadt (Terezín) Concentration Camp during World War II: the remarkable story of Rafael Schächter, a brilliant, young Czech conductor who was arrested and sent to Terezín in 1941. He demonstrated moral leadership under the most brutal circumstances, determined to sustain courage and hope for his fellow prisoners by enriching their souls through great music. His most extraordinary act was to recruit 150 prisoners and teach them Verdi's Requiem by rote in a dank cellar using a single score, over multiple rehearsals, and after grueling days of forced labor. The Requiem was performed on 16 occasions for fellow prisoners. The last, most infamous performance occurred on June 23, 1944 before high-ranking SS officers from Berlin and the International Red Cross to support the charade that the prisoners were treated well and flourishing.

Discussion Questions – Use these questions as a guide, or talk about whatever comes up in the group.

Help establish the trusted space by reading this invitation aloud:

"In our conversation, everyone is invited to share, but sharing is not required. Please make room for all voices. Whatever is said here stays here – not because we are telling secrets but because we honor that what a person says here is their story to share."

1. What was a particular moment or scene that surprised you or that resonated with you?
2. The conductor stated, "when common language can't get even close to what it is we're feeling, that's when art begins." Have you had an experience

where art - whether it be music or another art form - has expressed what you are feeling more than words could?

3. One survivor from Schächer's choir said that during the time of their performances they were "dancing under the gallows." What do you think hope looks and feels like when facing such fear?

4. "Libera me" of Verdi's Requiem includes,

*Deliver me, O Lord, from eternal death on that awful day,
When the heavens and the earth shall be moved:
When you will come to judge the world by fire.
I tremble, and I fear the judgment and the wrath to come,
when the heavens and the earth shall be moved.
The day of wrath, that day of calamity and misery;
a great and bitter day, indeed.
Grant them eternal rest, O Lord,
and may perpetual light shine upon them.*

What might these words have meant to those in Terezín? How might this meaning have been different from our understanding?

Individual Reflection -

Please take a couple minutes to reflect and journal.

Fill in the blanks with words that those in the chorus at Terezín might have used to complete this statement (and how would you?):

"I believe _____, even when _____."

If you are meeting online, you may add something like, "while silence during online meetings may feel awkward, let it be a space where the Spirit meets us - even in this place." You could choose to play soft music - without words - during this time.

Share Reflection -

Invite participants to share their "I believe" sentences if they'd like to share. Only share the sentences so that this is a simple sharing, not a discussion.

Closing Prayer -

Holy One,
we thank you for the glimpses we catch
of your gift of untiring hope.
Even in the midst of fear,
of challenge, of struggle—
even when our view is obscured
by clouds of doubt,
ignite the flame of hope within us,
**People: ... that we might glow with its brilliance
from the inside out.**

WEEK 2 - "I Believe in Love: Daring Right Relationship"

Opening Circle – Once people are gathered together, light the candle, then read aloud the scripture and prayer for the day.

Isaiah 7: 1-14

Matthew 1: 18-25

Let us pray.

God-with-us, gather us in and center us in the Spirit's presence.

Open us to your love in the stories we have heard and in our own lives.

In Christ's name we pray, Amen.

Introduction to the film –

In this second week's film, *Girls on the Wall*, the teenage girls of Warrenville Prison are not your average delinquents. Having "graduated" from juvie to prison, these are the kids most likely to remain in the correctional system their whole lives. They are also some of the sharpest and most irrepressible young women you'll meet. When the girls of this heartland prison are given an unlikely shot at redemption — the chance to write and stage a musical based on their lives — they must relive their crimes, reclaim their humanity, and take a first step toward breaking free of the prison system.

Discussion – *Use these questions as a guide, or talk about whatever comes up in the group.*

Help establish the trusted space by reading this invitation aloud:

"In our conversation, everyone is invited to share, but sharing is not required. Please make room for all voices. Whatever is said here stays here – not because we are telling secrets but because we honor that what a person says here is their story to share."

1. What was a particular moment or scene that surprised you or that resonated with you?

2. When the girls wrote their individual stories, Whitney was reluctant to share. But she eventually wrote about her father,

*"It say, 'broken' which many of us are
Then I just put, 'you're an Indian Giver, dog.
You just give me money, you take it back
That ain't cool
You give me love, you take it back
That ain't cool either
You were my life, my smile
Now all I do is think, what if you were a different man
You could've accomplished many things
But yet instead, you love that pipe first
You loved your broad the same as that*

But never showed me love at all.”

How do you think Whitney defines love? And what kind of love is she looking for from her father? Do you see this longing for love in her behavior toward others are well?

3. Our Gospel reading for this week includes background of Jesus' family and of his birth. What do we know about the backgrounds of the girls in Warrenville Prison? Does that affect how we hear their stories? Does it affect how they are understood and accepted in society?
4. Mrs. Palidofsky mentions that there are risks in telling one's story. What do you think are some of the risks? How do you think we can overcome those risks?
5. Over the course of Mrs. P's process, the girls took their own stories and together created one story for them to share in their musical. In what ways do we - in our lives, in our rituals, in our faith - blend our individual and collective stories?

Individual Reflection -

Please take a couple minutes to reflect and journal.

Fill in the blanks with how you think the girls in Warrenville Prison might complete this statement (and how would you?):

“I believe _____, even when _____.”

If you are meeting online, you may add something like, “while silence during online meetings may feel awkward, let it be a space where the Spirit meets us - even in this place.” You could choose to play soft music - without words - during this time.

Share Reflection -

Invite participants to share their “I believe” sentences if they'd like to share. Only share the sentences so that this is a simple sharing, not a discussion.

Closing Prayer –

Holy One,
we thank you for the glimpses we catch
of your gift of daring love.
Even in the midst of fear,
of challenge, of struggle—
even when we cannot yet see a better day
when we will act like the human family we are,
ignite the flame of love within us,
**People: ... that we might glow with its brilliance
from the inside out.**

WEEK 3 - "I Believe in God: Ode to Joy"

Opening Circle – Once people are gathered together, light the candle, then read aloud the scripture and prayer for the day.

Isaiah 57: 14-19

Luke 1: 1-4; 26-56

Let us pray.

Loving God, gather us in and center us in the Spirit's presence.

Open us to your gift of joy in the stories we have heard and in our own lives.

In Christ's name we pray, Amen.

Introduction to the film –

Filed on four continents, this documentary film looks at the global impact of Beethoven's hymn to humanity, his battle cry of freedom, his Ninth Symphony. The Ninth was at Tienamen Square in the Spring of 1989 during the student revolt. The same year, when the Berlin Wall came down, the Ninth was there to amplify the celebrations. Under the Pinochet dictatorship in Chile, women marched on torture prisons with the Ode To Joy as inspiration. And in Japan, the Ninth was there to repair and heal after the devastating Tsunami of 2011. Following The Ninth is both inspirational and hard-hitting, and a testament of hope.

Discussion – *Use these questions as a guide, or talk about whatever comes up in the group.*

Help establish the trusted space by reading this invitation aloud:

"In our conversation, everyone is invited to share, but sharing is not required. Please make room for all voices. Whatever is said here stays here – not because we are telling secrets but because we honor that what a person says here is their story to share."

1. What was a particular moment or scene that surprised you or that resonated with you?

2. Billy Bragg reimagined Ode to Joy in his words:

*"See now like a phoenix rising from the rubble of the war,
Hope of ages manifested, peace and freedom evermore.
Brothers, sisters, stand together. Raise your voices now as one.
Though by history divided, reconciled in unison.*

*Throw off now the chains of ancient bitterness and enmity.
Hand in hand, let's walk together on the path of liberty.
Hark! A new dawn is breaking. Raise your voices now as one.
Though by history divided, reconciled in unison.*

What's to be then, o my brothers? Sisters, what is in your hearts?

*Tell me now the hopes you harbor.
What's the task and where to start?
Though speak ten million voices, every word is understood.
Furnish every heart with joy and banish all hatred for good."*

The word "joy" is not included in these lyrics until the end, but where else do you hear joy in this rendition?

3. The early Christian movement was an illegal movement at the time, and as an early Christian (much like those in this week's film who were part of movements for change), you could be punished for your allegiance. What motivated the early Christians to keep going? What motivated those who told their stories in *Following the Ninth*?

4. Throughout this film, this piece of music resonated throughout these four different events: at Tiananmen Square in 1989, in Chile, as the Berlin Wall came down in 1989, and in Japan each December following the tsunami. How did this piece resonate or relate to each event differently?

Individual Reflection -

Please take a couple minutes to reflect and journal.

Fill in the blanks with words that those in the film - in China, in Chile, in Germany, or in Japan - might have used complete this statement (and how would you?):

"I believe _____, even when _____."

If you are meeting online, you may add something like, "while silence during online meetings may feel awkward, let it be a space where the Spirit meets us - even in this place." You could choose to play soft music - without words - during this time.

Share Reflection -

Invite participants to share their "I believe" sentences if they'd like to share. Only share the sentences so that this is a simple sharing, not a discussion.

Closing Prayer -

Holy One,
we thank you for the glimpses we catch
of your gift of the depths of joy.
Even in the midst of fear,
of challenge, of struggle—
even when we are not sure
of your presence,
ignite the flame of joy within us,
**People: ... that we might glow with its brilliance
from the inside out.**

WEEK 4 - “I Believe in the Light: Illuminating Peace”

Opening Circle – Once people are gathered together, light the candle, then read aloud the scripture and prayer for the day.

Isaiah 9: 2-7

John 1: 1-18

Let us pray.

God of hope and love and joy, gather us in and center us in the Spirit’s presence. Open us to your find your peace in the stories we have heard and in our own lives. In Christ’s name we pray, Amen.

Introduction to the film –

A description of this week’s film, from the Director, Stanley Nelson: Emerging from the strong tradition of Freedom Singers, Sweet Honey in the Rock is a group that’s as soulfully rich as it is provocative. Using song to stand in unison, five African American women sing solely a cappella, along with a sign language translator. Their music evokes stories from the past, encourages introspection in the present, and inspires progress for the future. Since it was founded in 1973, over twenty different women have contributed to the Grammy Award–winning group’s distinct sound, which embraces semblances of gospel, blues, and hip hop, all with a political tone. The film features a trove of concert and rehearsal footage as it follows the group on their thirtieth anniversary tour, which is also coincidentally when founder Bernice Johnson Reagon announces she will retire. Through a variety of interviews with members, historians, and fellow artists, the film explores the roots of Sweet Honey in the Rock’s existence and influence.

Discussion – *Use these questions as a guide, or talk about whatever comes up in the group.*

Help establish the trusted space by reading this invitation aloud:

“In our conversation, everyone is invited to share, but sharing is not required. Please make room for all voices. Whatever is said here stays here – not because we are telling secrets but because we honor that what a person says here is their story to share.”

1. What was a particular moment or scene that surprised you or that resonated with you?
2. Is a story told differently when shared in song? Is a story heard differently when experienced in song? How so?
3. One of Sweet Honey in the Rock’s classic pieces is “Ella’s Song.” This piece, with words from freedom fighter Ella Baker, was set to music by Bernice Johnson Reagon, and released in 1988:

*We who believe in freedom cannot rest
We who believe in freedom cannot rest until it comes
Until the killing of black men, black mothers' sons
Is as important as the killing of white men, white mothers' sons*

*That which touches me most
Is that I had a chance to work with people
Passing on to others that which was passed on to me*

*To me young people come first
They have the courage where we fail
And if I can but shed some light as they carry us through the gale.”*

What words still resonate over 30 years later? What could they teach us about peace today and what we are called to do in this moment?

4. Part of this film was the story of how Bernice Johnson Reagon, who had been with Sweet Honey in the Rock since the beginning, moves on to retirement. Even though she is the only remaining original member, the group remains strong as she passes the torch. What does it take to build something that lives beyond your involvement? How does the group move forward, and how could this be a model for discerning transition, change, and leadership?

Individual Reflection -

Please take a couple minutes to reflect and journal.

Fill in the blanks with words that those who Sweet Honey in the Rock first sang to might have used complete this statement (and how would you?):

“I believe _____, even when _____.”

You could choose to play soft music - without words - during this time.

Share Reflection -

Invite participants to share their “I believe” sentences if they’d like to share. Only share the sentences so that this is a simple sharing, not a discussion.

Closing Prayer –

Holy One,
we thank you for the glimpses we catch
of your gift of peace on earth.
Even in the midst of fear,
of challenge, of struggle—
even when we aren’t sure that
goodwill among us can be found,
ignite the flame of peace within us,
**People: ... that we might glow with its brilliance
from the inside out.**

WEEK 5 - "Believe This: The Time Has Come"

Opening Circle – Once people are gathered together, light the candle, then read aloud the scripture and prayer for the day.

Isaiah 61:10 - 62:3

Luke 2: 22-40

Let us pray.

Creator God, gather us in and center us in the Spirit's presence.

Open us to your promise in the stories we have heard and in our own lives.

In Christ's name we pray, Amen.

Introduction to the film –

Most people don't think about singing when they think about revolutions. But in Estonia song was the weapon of choice when, between 1987 and 1991, Estonians sought to free themselves from decades of Soviet occupation. During those years, hundreds of thousands gathered in fields to sing forbidden patriotic songs and to rally for independence. The Singing Revolution documents how the Estonian people regained their freedom and helped topple the Soviet Union along the way.

Discussion – *Use these questions as a guide, or talk about whatever comes up in the group.*

Help establish the trusted space by reading this invitation aloud:

"In our conversation, everyone is invited to share, but sharing is not required. Please make room for all voices. Whatever is said here stays here – not because we are telling secrets but because we honor that what a person says here is their story to share."

1. What was a particular moment or scene that surprised you or that resonated with you?
2. The film states that heroes in Estonia are different from how much of the world defines a hero. "In Estonia, fairy tale heroes are not brave noblemen who slay dragons and save damsels. Their hero is the shrewd old barn keeper who sits by the fire, waits, watches, and acts only when the time is right." How does this model of a hero help Estonians through these times? How do our current cultural models of heroes affect us? What can we learn from the Estonians' type of hero?
3. The Estonian National Anthem "Mu isamaa, mu õnn ja rõõm" was written in the 19th century and later set to music.
*"My fatherland is my love, and I want to rest,
I lay into your arms, my sacred Estonia!
Your birds will sing me to sleep,
you will bloom flowers from my ashes,
my fatherland, my fatherland!"*

How do these words evoke hope, love, joy, and peace? And with this, how do these words sustain a revolutionary movement?

4. The prophet Isaiah says, “for Zion’s sake I won’t stay silent, and for Jerusalem’s sake I won’t sit still.” Do you see this refusal to stay silent in the people of Estonia? How might “not staying silent” look in different times and cultures, including today?

5. Throughout this series, we have experienced stories where music was central in revolution, singing was weapon, a chorus was liberating, song was the glue that connected people. How did music do this? And how could song help us, even now?

Individual Reflection -

Please take a couple minutes to reflect and journal.

Fill in the blanks with words that the Estonians who sang under Soviet occupation might use complete this statement (and how would you?):

“I believe _____, even when _____.”

You could choose to play soft music - without words - during this time.

Share Reflection -

Invite participants to share their “I believe” sentences if they’d like to share. Only share the sentences so that this is a simple sharing, not a discussion.

Closing Prayer –

Holy One,
we thank you for the glimpses we have caught
throughout this season of Advent and Christmas
of your gifts of hope, love, joy, and peace.
Even in the midst of fear,
of challenge, of struggle—
even when we have not been sure of tomorrow,
you have ignited the Light within us,
**People: ... and we have glowed with its brilliance
from the inside out.**