

"If someone were to write a memoir of your life, what would you want them to say were your guiding principles?" asked 'Melissa' following a reading she had brought to our Spiritual Journey Circle. Each participant in this weekly discussion group periodically brings something that they have been reading or reflecting on. After sharing the reading, they give the group a question to journal about that prompts further reflection. Taking time for silence and journaling has become a regular habit in this group. Some days people are pulling out their journals and beginning to write long before the time that is set aside for journaling!

Many of these students have been part of this Open Circle discussion group for a few years and it is evident that their spiritual lives have deepened significantly over this time. I (Marybeth) am privileged to a special glimpse of the beautiful deep human beings they are when they bring readings and questions for the group to reflect on. Each week, I'm awed and inspired by what comes out of our time together. I would like to share with you some of the gifts that have emerged.

This week, Melissa's reading highlighted how "true worth is in being not seeming." She has kindly agreed to anonymously share with you her response to the question she asked the group. Here's an excerpt of the ideals that flowed out of her journaling time as she listened deeply to her own question:

If someone were to write a memoir of your life, what would you want them to say were your guiding principles?

- Each person has an understanding of which life to live, once wholeness is fostered within them.
- Life's necessities consist of yearning, living from within, being fully present and experiencing interconnectivity.
- Making mistakes can be fun. They humble us, make us laugh, give us new direction, teach us to ask for help and remind us of how we are human.
- Love is the highest energy. Devote time to it as it invites grace and strength into our lives.
- Leave room for the Holy Spirit. If there is not even space for the Holy Spirit, there will not be enough space for anything of real value in our lives to grow.
- Spend a balanced amount of time "being" and "doing."
- Understand, trust and rely on God.
- Frequently ask the question "What does that mean?" Many terms and concepts used in daily life are misunderstood, even by the people who propagate them.
- Have the courage to admit your mistakes and weaknesses. Trust that help will be provided for you once you release your responsibility of taking control of the circumstances of your life.
- Go outdoors a lot.
- Listen to the insights people are so willing to share with you.
- Spend time delighting in your friends' joy.
- Sit with your friends in times of sorrow. Whether through food, touch or words our friends need to know they are loved in times of weakness.
- Dance as you walk down the street.
- Say thank you a lot (understanding the meaning of the phrase, rather than using it as a formality)
- Be who your soul knows you are.
- Know that all people want to love, but that some have been hurt in ways that makes them fear it does not exist.

Melissa is reticent to say that these are her ideals, recognizing how hard it is to live up to these, so would prefer that we think of them as her suggestions or ideas. The young adult stage in life is a time of intense exploration and of sifting through values to determine what ideals to live by. It is such an important time, building a foundation for the rest of life! I'm encouraged to see the foundation that is being built in these student's lives. To further give you a glimpse into the exploration that happens in our Spiritual Journey Circle group, here are a few other quotes and questions that students have shared recently for the group to contemplate:

- "I wait with joy the coming years, My heart shall reap where it has sown" (John Burroughs). What do I feel I'm waiting for?
- Leonard Cohen says that success is "waking up every morning in a state of grace." Where have you experienced grace?

Continued...

- One student, who was in the process of moving, reflected on the feelings associated with this by sharing a song by a favourite artist. Her question for us was: "What would you appreciate about your house or life if you were moving out?"
- Is the way that you are living now the best way you could be living? Could we be living in any better way?
- "Only when we can hold the emptiness does it become filled with the divine voice" (Mark Gafni). Where do you find that you are speeding up a process that should possibly be taken slowly?

Of course, you don't answer any of these questions fully in a day! These are lifetime questions and I encourage you to sit with and reflect on one of these questions over the next week. See what calls to you as you do so - and in this way share in the experience that students are having in Open Circle discussion groups.

A special *thank you* to those whose support provides this space where students are being challenged, growing, and setting a course for life. You are making it possible! And if you are someone who is wondering how you can become involved in partnering with us, there are a variety of ways outlined below in which your help would be valued. Thank you for considering!

Sincerely,
Marybeth & Jeff



Volunteer Groups Exploding at the Seams!

This fall, most of our 28 weekly volunteering groups filled up within the first week of recruitment! Many of our group facilitators graduated last year and we have trained over 35 facilitators for this year, most of them new to this role. Through regular group and individual meetings, we continue to mentor them for their leadership responsibilities.



Several new volunteering groups began this fall including an Environmental Action Group and five groups volunteering with new community centers, filling gaps in under-served neighbourhoods. At the new Eva Rothwell Centre, our student volunteers are part of the 85 in 5 project, aiming to transform the current 50% high school drop out rate so that within 5 years, 85% of youth in the neighbourhood are pursuing post-secondary education.

Student Open Circles

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For tax-receipted donations to the work of Marybeth and Jeff, please make cheques payable to Student Open Circles and address to our bookkeeper, Dorothy Isaac. For monthly or other periodic support, you may choose to send a group of post-dated cheques. Online donations and automatic monthly support is available at our website. Charitable Registration No. 89144 4309 RR0001

Note: In August it came to our attention that our post office box was returning mail for no reason. This is now resolved. If you have had something returned, please contact us by phone or e-mail. Thank you!

www.studentopencircles.com

How can you help?

- **Financial donations:** People often ask us how we're funded. Support for our work with students currently comes from individuals, Hamilton Mennonite Church and the occasional grant from a foundation. Our funding depends heavily on support from individuals like you. However, we've seen a significant drop in support from individuals. We ask you to consider giving monthly, annually, occasionally or however it works for you. If you know of others who might be interested in hearing about and supporting this work, please pass along our newsletter.
- **Volunteer bookkeeper:** 1 hour per month plus an extra 2 hours a few times per year. Also, some initial training.
- **Prayer:** For the many students whose lives are being transformed through volunteering and discussion groups.
- **Art supply donations:** We would value donations of art supplies such as: paints, canvas, clay, brushes, art paper, musical or rhythm instruments, drawing pencils, markers, etc. In a world where we are so often encouraged to be passive consumers of other's "expert" abilities, young people are craving the opportunity to express their own creativity! As we provide opportunities to engage creatively, students are connecting to the deeper part of themselves and opening up spiritually. This year we began a weekly Creativity Circle.