



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

To accompany this series, we have included a collection of documentaries all about the power of music in difficult times. These are not just for adults! Youth, ages 11 - 18, can have important conversations and reflections experiencing these films. Here is a guide to hosting those gatherings, 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 collection of films and fruitful small group gatherings. 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.

We recommend groups of 7 – 9 youth gather together for about 50 minutes 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.

If you are hosting both adult and youth group gatherings, this is a great opportunity for families to watch the films together, then have peer discussions. The youth and adults studies differ in a few ways: some of the facilitation techniques vary; only one scripture is read for youth; the youth discussion time is a bit shorter; many of the discussion questions are different. Feel free to use the questions and/or simply invite them to tell about what scenes were the most powerful, and why. 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.

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

25-30 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 – As people are gathering together, ask one youth to read the scripture and another to read the opening prayer. When the group settles, light the candle, then have the youth read aloud the scripture and prayer for the day. If you are meeting online, briefly share your screen so that youth can read along with the scripture.

Isaiah 40: 1-11

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 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 – 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. 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? Is there a song you have heard recently that has expressed something you were feeling?

2. When the Nazis were trying to make Terezín look like it was a great place for the Jews to live, they had the prisoners create fake storefronts, temporary playgrounds, and they fed the children bread with butter for the day. Why did they do this? How did this make you feel? Have you seen other examples of this type of false representation?

3. One survivor from Schächer's choir said that while they were singing, this "was not the world with the Nazis; this was our world." How was this their own "world"? Why was it important for them to have this special "place" that was their own? Have you ever needed space like this?

4. Take just a moment and close your eyes. *(If you're gathering online, you can tell folks if they'd like to turn off their camera when they have their eyes closed, that's just fine.)* Think of a scene from the film that you remember well and picture it in your mind. It may be when the modern-day choir sang where the choir rehearsed long ago. It may be when the survivors sat in the audience, listening to the choir. It may be something else. *(As a leader, take some time between these questions - you are leading a kind of guided reflection.)* As you have this picture in your mind, do you see any particular faces? What are the expressions on the faces? Do you see any colors? Do you see the space - the buildings, the walls or ground, and whatever else is around? Do any smells come to mind? Do any sounds come to mind? Is there anything else you notice? Go ahead and open your eyes. What scene came to your mind? Why do you think this one stayed with you?

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 – As people are gathering together, ask one youth to read the scripture and another to read the opening prayer. When the group settles, light the candle, then have the youth read aloud the scripture and prayer for the day. If you are meeting online, briefly share your screen so that youth can read along with the scripture.

Matthew 1: 1-25

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. How did this film (what you saw the girls at Warrenville Prison do and experience) remind you of school? How was it not like school?

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

*"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 would define love? What kind of love is she looking for from her father?

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? How would these girls fit in (or not) at your school - or at our church?

4. Mrs. Palidofsky mentions that there are risks in telling one’s story. What do you think are some of the risks (for those in Warrenville Prison and for anyone)? 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 – As people are gathering together, ask one youth to read the scripture and another to read the opening prayer. When the group settles, light the candle, then have the youth read aloud the scripture and prayer for the day. If you are meeting online, briefly share your screen so that youth can read along with the scripture.

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 –

Filmed 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. Have you heard or played or sung "Ode to Joy" before? When and in what setting?

2. Were any of these historical events - some of which happened in your lifetime and before you were born - familiar to you? Which had you heard of or learned about before?

3. 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? If you don't hear joy in this, what might make someone hear joy in these words?

4. 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 to this illegal movement. Have you thought of the Church being connected to illegal movements? What makes it morally right to go against the law, or not?

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 _____."

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 – As people are gathering together, ask one youth to read the scripture and another to read the opening prayer. When the group settles, light the candle, then have the youth read aloud the scripture and prayer for the day. If you are meeting online, briefly share your screen so that youth can read along with the scripture.

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. 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."*

If you read these words or heard this song for the first time today, would you think it was written over 30 years ago? How do these lyrics resonate today - or not? Do you agree with Ella's words about young people and courage?

2. Is a story told differently when shared in song? Is a story heard differently when experienced in song? How so?

3. Over decades, this group has been 5 or 6 members, but the members have changed over time. How is this different from other music groups? What does it mean that this group has continued with different people keeping this particular music and this particular group going? Do you think this group still has the same purpose they started with?

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 – As people are gathering together, ask one youth to read the scripture and another to read the opening prayer. When the group settles, light the candle, then have the youth read aloud the scripture and prayer for the day. If you are meeting online, briefly share your screen so that youth can read along with the scripture.

Isaiah 61:10 - 62:3

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. 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."
What is your definition of a hero? How is it similar or different to this Estonian concept of a hero? 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?
2. 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!"*
Do these words sound like anything else you have heard or are familiar with?

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

3. Throughout these films, we have experienced stories where music was central in revolution, singing was a 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?

What was your favorite film of this series, and why?

Individual Reflection -

Please take a few minutes to reflect and journal.

Fill in the blanks with words that YOU could use in situations that are difficult, or that you would share with your friends, your family, or your church. Make as many “I believe” statements as you would like.

“I believe _____, even when _____.”

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

Give plenty of time, as youth are summarizing this last reflection for themselves.

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.**