



# TOUCHSTONES

## *Small Group Discussion Guide*

## Respect & Deepening Connections

### Before You Gather

Read the following pieces prior to gathering.

#### 1. *The Web of Existence* by Rev. Barbara Merritt

The web of existence in which we breathe, move, and have our being includes the often-violent struggles for domination and survival, as well as breathtaking sunsets and the smile of a newborn baby. This web of existence is good and evil, comforting and terrible, a web of life, and a web of death. The seventh principle asks us to have a clear and affirming relationship with what is real. We must learn the spiritual discipline of living with respect; respectfully entering into relationship with the many conditions and challenges of this world. The spiritual discipline [of doing this] will automatically lead those who wish to advance the seventh principle into the most fundamental of religious practices; acknowledging the consequences of our actions and choices. ...We are not only a part of the grand design of natural selection and evolution; by the decisions we make, by the way we take care of, ignore, or increase the brokenness of our world, we ourselves are profoundly changed.

Source: *With Purpose and Principle*, edited by Edward A. Frost

#### 2. *Why Respect Matters*

by Richard V. Reeves and Isabel V. Sawhill

How does respect influence our quality of life?

**First, the degree to which we feel respected in our interpersonal interactions matters.** ...The way we treat every single person we encounter matters, especially as those interactions accumulate over the course of a day. ...Quality of life is a relational good, and good relationships are founded on mutual respect.

**Second, being treated with respect is a sign that we belong in a community or society, and a sense of belonging matters.** ...Respect is a signal

of mutual membership of society. To “diss” someone is to socially wound them.

**Third, respect provides an important foundation for equal treatment.** Discrimination should be seen as the ultimate form of disrespect. Interpersonal racism, for example, is disrespect of perhaps the deepest kind.

**Fourth, respect is the basis for relational equality**—of equal standing—and provides the moral basis for other kinds of equality, including legal rights and material resources. Systems of social insurance rely on a collective sense of citizenship—of what we owe each other—which in turn rests on holding each other in equal respect. ...Inequalities ...lead ...to more segregation, which further undermines empathy and respect.

**Fifth, self-respect is important to individual flourishing.** Of course, it is easier to respect yourself if others respect you (one reason discrimination can lead to such suffering). But respect from the outside alone is not enough. Agency, responsibility, and autonomy all depend on respect for oneself. ...John Rawls argued for self-respect as a “primary good” because “without [self-respect] nothing may seem worth doing, or if some things have value for us, we lack the will to strive for them.”

Source: <https://www.brookings.edu/essay/a-new-contract-with-the-middle-class-respect/>

#### 3. *Courage to Risk Telling the Truth*

by Angeles Arrien

Something definitely changes when we finally summon the courage to risk telling the truth about who we are and are not. The primary questions become: How and why do we avoid being who we truly are? What gets in the way of trusting our self completely? Under what circumstances do we deceive or delude ourselves?

When we are phony ...in order to achieve interpersonal or material gain, we diminish

ourselves and disrespect others. The extent to which we have positive regard and respect for ourselves and others determines how successfully we achieve congruity among all aspects of our character. ... We know our behavior is authentic when we can consistently say what we mean, do what we say, and say what is so when it is so. ... When our words, actions, and behaviors are in harmony, wisdom and authenticity emerge.

Authenticity is the expression of what is genuine and natural. It commands great respect because, unfortunately, it is so rare. The desire to be accepted, or to engage in competition and comparison, drives us to limit our behavior to what falls within narrowly prescribed, predictable norms. Ridding ourselves of old patterns and accessing the authentic self are entry ways to freedom and the domain of wisdom. ... Jung believed that if we do not develop inner strength as we age, we will become defensive, dogmatic, depressed, resentful, and cynical. Our homeland of authenticity is within.... Until we rediscover this ancient truth..., we are condemned to wander, seeking solace in the outer world where it cannot be found.

Source: <https://www.awakin.org/read/view.php?tid=699>

#### 4. *Overcoming the Cycle of Disrespect*

by Jim Wallis

... When it comes to equality and diversity, racism and sexism, I believe the underlying issue, and the most deeply felt pain, revolves around one word—*respect*. ... Respect is the thing we all want and need, and it is what is denied to people over and over again because of race, gender, and class. So many of the demands of protests, so much of the aggrieved voice in response to racism, and even the angry counterattack, is, down deep, a cry for respect.

... There is also a cycle of disrespect that works like this: The disrespect begins with the obvious injustice, as massive an offense as racial or sexual slavery, or the more subtle yet cruel forms of racial or gender discrimination. The pain of disrespect is felt and it hurts. Then the response begins.

... Disrespect breeds more disrespect in return, which is used to confirm the disrespect in the first place, which further increases the resentment and anger of the disrespected, and so on.

... There is only one solution to the cycle of disrespect. That answer is ultimate respect ... as an act of principle, and an act of faith. Respect for other people is not something they should be forced to earn, or to beg or fight for; it is owed to them by virtue of their very humanity. ... We get respect when we give respect. But only ultimate respect, not respect just in return for respect, will break through the cycle of disrespect. Breaking the cycle requires the reassertion of our absolute equality....

... In the end, we all pretty much need and want the same thing—just a little respect, a little kindness, and maybe even a little love.

Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/17788>

#### 5. *Respect, Though Differences Divide Us*

by James Calvin Davis

I like to define civility as the *exercise of patience, integrity, humility, and mutual respect in civil conversation, even (or especially) with those with whom we disagree.*

... *Patience* is a key component of the virtue of civility. It pushes us to relate to our ideological opponent as a conversation partner, not simply as an obstacle to getting what we want.... ... *Patience* insists that we listen....

... *Integrity* is the commitment to representing our own positions and those of our opponents truthfully. ... *Integrity* requires that we remain consistent and honest in our reasons for advocating our positions. It also prohibits the mischaracterization of our opponents' views.... ...

... *Humility* recommends that we enter every public conversation open to the possibility that we could change our minds.... ... *Humility* keeps us open to the possibility that our beliefs may be refined by what we encounter in ... conversations.

... When we take the time to listen patiently to and learn from another, we are in a greater position to exercise *mutual respect* for one another.... Civility requires that ... we ... extend the courtesy of respect. This ... means respecting each other's right to represent moral worldviews in public. ... Civility requires that, even if I think you are tragically mistaken, I honor your right to participate in the American enterprise of public moral conversation.

Because it does not ignore or whitewash differences, civility cannot guarantee consensus on any issue. ... As Os Guinness puts it, "What we are

looking for [in civility] is not so much truths that can unite us as terms on which we can negotiate and by which we can live with the differences that divide us.”

Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/20777>

#### 6. *Self-Esteem vs. Self-Respect* by Ellen Langer

Our culture is concerned with matters of self-esteem. Self-respect, on the other hand, may hold the key to achieving the peace of mind we seek. The two concepts seem very similar, but the differences between them are crucial.

To esteem anything is to evaluate it positively and hold it in high regard, but evaluation gets us into trouble because while we sometimes win, we also sometimes lose. To respect something, on the other hand, is to accept it.

...The word acceptance suggests to some readers that our culture does indeed deal with this idea of self-respect; after all, don't we have the concept that it is important to accept our limitations? Aren't many of us encouraged "to change the things we can change, accept the things we cannot change, and know the difference between the two?"

...The person with self-respect simply likes her- or himself. This self-respect is not contingent on success because there are always failures to contend with. Neither is it a result of comparing ourselves with others because there is always someone better. These are tactics usually employed to increase self-esteem. Self-respect, however, is a given. We simply like ourselves or we don't. With self-respect, we like ourselves because of who we are and not because of what we can or cannot do.

...Compared to those with high self-esteem who are still caught in an evaluative framework, those with self-respect are less prone to blame, guilt, regret, lies, secrets, and stress.

Many people worry whether there is life after death. Just think about it: If we gave up self-evaluation, we could have more life before death.

There's a big difference between self-respect and self-esteem. Choose self-respect.

Source: Ellen Langer. *Psychology Today*, Nov 1999 v32 i6 p32

### **Gathering**

**Business:** Deal with any housekeeping items (e.g., scheduling the next gathering).

### **Opening Words: *Come One, Come All***

by Rev. Ian W. Riddell

Come one, come all! Come with your missing pieces and your extra screws. Come with your hard edges and your soft spots. Come with your bowed heads and upright spines. Come all you flamboyant and drab, verbose and quiet, fidgeting and lethargic. All you with large vision and tender hearts. All you with small courage and tender fears.

Bring your lisp and your stutter and your song. Bring your gravel and your drawl and your lilt. Bring your anger and your joy and your righteous indignation. Misfits and conformists and everyone in between come into this space and be welcome. Bring who you are. Bring where you've traveled. Bring what you long for....

Source: <https://www.uua.org/worship/words/opening/come-one-come-all>

### **Chalice Lighting: *A Light Lit for Everyone***

by Rev. Elizabeth Strong

Reverently ... [we] offer this symbol of our hope and high intent. Reverently ... [we] bequeath this flame to you. This is the light that is lit for everyone who comes into the world. Bear this light to others, one by one. Let the flame go from life to life till all is lit with its warmth.

Tell that the light means wisdom. Tell that the light means kindness [and respect]. Tell that the light means understanding. Tell that the light means tolerance. Tell that the light means sacrifice. Tell that the light is a vision of a fairer world.

Tell that this is the light that is lit for everyone who comes into the world.

Source: <https://www.uua.org/worship/words/chalice-lighting/symbol-light-chalice-lighting>

**Check-In:** How is it with your spirit? What do you need to leave behind in order to be fully present here and now? (2-3 sentences)

**Claim Time for Deeper Listening:** This comes at the end of the gathering where you can be listened to uninterrupted for more time if needed. You are encouraged to claim time ranging between 3-5 minutes, and to honor the limit of the time that you claim.

**Read the Wisdom Story:** Invite someone to read aloud the following wisdom story.

***The Cleaning Lady*** by Joanne Jones

During my second month of college, our professor gave us a pop quiz. I was a conscientious student and had breezed through the questions, until I read the last one: “What is the first name of the woman who cleans the school?”

Surely this was some kind of joke. I had seen the cleaning woman several times. She was tall, dark-haired, and in her 50s, but how would I know her name? I handed in my paper, leaving the last question blank. Just before class ended, one student asked if the last question would count toward our quiz grade.

“Absolutely,” said the professor. “In your careers, you will meet many people. All are significant. They deserve your attention and care, even if all you do is smile and say ‘hello.’”

I’ve never forgotten that lesson. I also learned her name was Dorothy.

Source: <http://www.inspirationpeak.com/cgi-bin/stories.cgi?record=26>

**Readings from the Common Bowl:** Invite group members to read the following selections aloud. Leave a few moments of silence after each to invite reflection on the meaning of the words.

“Defensiveness is usually someone silently screaming that they need you to value and respect them in disguise. When you look for deeper meanings behind someone’s pain you can then begin to heal not only yourself, but others.”

*Shannon Alder*

“It’s important to recognize that self-love is an unfolding process that gains strength over time, not a goal with a fixed end point. When we start to pay attention, we see that we’re challenged daily to act lovingly on our own behalf. Simple gestures of respect—care of the body, rest for the mind, and beauty for the soul in the form of music and art, or nature—are all ways of showing ourselves love.”

*Sharon Salzberg*

“He said life is absurd, there’s no outer reason that you have to, but that suicide is the wrong step. That life is worth living, this absurd, strange thing should be witnessed, and it’s vital that you, essentially,

have some respect for your future self, who’s going to know things you don’t know.”

*Jennifer Michael Hecht*

“But what *is* being asked of you is to acknowledge that white privilege *does* exist, and to not only treat people of races that differ from yours ‘with respect...,’ but also to stand up for fair treatment and justice, to not let ‘jokes’ or ‘off-color’ comments by friends, co-workers, or family slide by without challenge, and to continually make an effort to put yourself in someone else’s shoes, so we may all cherish and respect our unique and special contributions to society, as much as we do our common ground.” *Lori Lakin Hutcherson*

“People with self-respect exhibit a certain toughness, a kind of moral nerve; they display what was once called ‘character,’ a quality which, although approved in the abstract, sometimes loses ground to the other, more instantly negotiable virtues.... character—the willingness to accept responsibility for one’s own life—is the source from which self-respect springs.” *Joan Didion*

Scout: “Atticus, you must be wrong.”

Atticus: “How’s that?”

Scout: “Well, most folks seem to think they’re right and you’re wrong. . .”

Atticus: “They’re certainly entitled to think that, and they’re entitled to full respect for their opinions, but before I can live with other folks, I’ve got to live with myself. The one thing that doesn’t abide by majority rule is a person’s conscience.”

*Harper Lee*

“The principle here is that a new generation owes a measure of thanks to every member of the previous generation. Our elders planted fields and fought in wars; they advanced the arts and sciences, and generally made sacrifices on our behalf. So, by their efforts, however humble, they have earned a measure of our gratitude and respect.” *Amor Towles*

“Liberalism is about how power is to be controlled, how human life is to be improved, and how people are to enjoy respect. Democracy is about who belongs in that happy circle of voice, progress, and protection. Liberalism answers the question ‘How?’ Democracy answers ‘Who?’ Liberalism is about

content; democracy about scope. Liberalism limits how power is exercised. Democracy insists that the control of power lies in the end with the many, not with the one (autocracy) or the few (oligarchy). Liberalism lays out the feast, democracy draws up the guest list.” *Edmund Fawcett*

“It’s very dramatic when two people come together to work something out. It’s easy to take a gun and annihilate your opposition, but what is really exciting to me is to see people with differing views come together and finally respect each other.”  
*Fred Rogers*

“Do not confuse ‘duty’ with what other people expect of you; they are utterly different. Duty is a debt you owe to yourself to fulfill obligations you have assumed voluntarily. Paying that debt can entail anything from years of patient work to instant willingness to die. Difficult it may be, but the reward is self-respect.” *Robert A. Heinlein*

## Reading

### 7. **Respect: WWJD** by Brennan Manning

One night in New York City I was standing outside the Schubert Theater during the play’s intermission. The tuxedoed gentlemen were in an intense discussion with the evening-gowned ladies on the influence of Schopenhauer on Samuel Beckett’s *Theatre of the Absurd*. I was about to deliver a timeless observation that would have precluded further discussion on the subject for at least a hundred years when an old woman peddling *Variety* newspapers approached. She was wearing sneakers and a cab driver’s hat. I thrust a coin into her hand and snatched the paper. “Could I talk with you for a minute, Father?” she implored.

In those days I always wore the clerical collar. I knew I could not distinguish myself by my virtues, but I could by my clothing. I wore the Roman collar while taking a shower and placed it under my pajamas while I slept.

“Yes,” I snapped, “just wait a minute.”

As I turned around to my friends who were breathlessly awaiting my final riposte, I heard the old woman say, “Jesus wouldn’t have talked to Mary Magdalene like that.” She disappeared down the street.

The magnitude of what had happened hit me inside the theater. I had been so preoccupied with

my own status that I treated the woman like a vending machine. I put a coin in her hand and out popped a magazine. I had shown no appreciation for the service she performed, no interest in her life, and an appalling lack of regard for her personal dignity. Preoccupation with my self-importance coupled with a failure to treat her with cordial love impregnated with respect for the sacredness of her unique personality only exacerbated her sense of worthlessness and further damaged her self-esteem.

Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/14732>

**Living the Questions:** Explore as many of these questions as time and interest allow. Fully explore one question before moving to the next. The questions do not need to be discussed in order.

1. In reading #1, Rev. Barbara Merritt writes about our 7<sup>th</sup> principle. In doing so, she asserts that “living with respect” is a spiritual discipline. This requires, “acknowledging the consequences of our actions and choices.” What are some of the consequences of respect? Of disrespect? What role does “respecting others” play for you? Of respecting the interdependent web of all existence of which you are a part? What does it mean that we suffer or thrive based on how we treat the web? How can we help others make this connection?
2. Richard Reeves and Isabel Sawhill, in reading #2, write about the ways in which respect influences our quality of life. As they note, respect 1) matters interpersonally; 2) is a sign that we belong in a community; 3) supports equal treatment; 4) fosters relational equality; and 5) leads to self-respect. Which of these five do you think is especially important? Why?
3. In reading #3, Angeles Arrien stresses the importance of summoning “the courage to risk telling the truth about who we are and are not.” She notes that doing so both commands respect and promotes self-respect. Do you agree? Why or why not? What forces conspire against this drive toward authenticity? How often are people respected for things that are not true about themselves? How does this lead to what Parker Palmer calls the “divided self?” Can self-respect really exist on top of an obvious house of cards?

Why of why not? What are the consequences of living with self-disrespect?

4. In reading #4, Jim Wallis suggests that many protests are driven by a deep demand for respect? Do you agree? Why or why not? He supports his claim by describing the all to prevalent cycle of disrespect. Why do too many people choose to disrespect others? What prompts such actions? Would they do that if they had a healthy self-respect? Why or why not? Wallis concludes that the solution is ultimate respect, but he does not define what he means except to say that it is not earned, but owed. Is ultimate respect the appropriate response to the inherent worth and dignity of every person? Why or why not?
5. In reading #5, James Calvin Davis defines “civility as the *exercise of 1) patience, 2) integrity, 3) humility, and 4) mutual respect in civil conversation, even (or especially) with those with whom we disagree.*” Which of these four do you struggle with the most? Why? Which of these four have you learned to practice? What helped you? Davis values the “American enterprise of public moral discourse.” What public figure(s) have you observed participating in public moral discourse with civility? Biden? Pelosi? McConnell? Schumer? Romney? Murkowski? Trudeau? Merkel? Macron? Others? Which of the four attributes did each seem to exhibit? What difference do those attributes make in political discourse? Os Guinness writes, “What we are looking for [in civility] is not so much truths that can unite us, as terms on which we can negotiate and by which we can live with the differences that divide us.” Do you agree? Why or why not?
6. In reading #6, Professor of Psychology at Harvard Ellen Langer compares self-esteem to self-respect. While some may value self-esteem over self-respect, Langer is clear that self-respect is more important. According to her, self-esteem fluctuates because it involves an evaluative framework. Self-respect “is not contingent on success because there are always failures to contend with.” What, for you, is the value of self-respect? Of self-esteem? Langer indicates that self-acceptance, warts and all, leads to self-respect? Do you agree? Why or

why not? For Langer, self-esteem is linked to doing, while self-respect is based on being. Do you agree? Why or why not?

7. In reading number #7, Brennan Manning, with tongue in cheek, recounts a story where his desire to puff-up his elite, personal status and self-importance resulted in his disrespecting an old woman who wanted to ask him a question. Her critique of this priest cut deep: “Jesus wouldn’t have talked to Mary Magdalene like that.” How does our need for acceptance, validation, and belonging constrict our vision and compassion? Did Manning have a deficit of self-respect? If yes, how did it influence his behavior? If no, what else accounts for his behavior?
8. In the wisdom story, *The Cleaning Lady*, Joanne Jones shares what she learned from a professor in her second month in college. A question on the pop quiz asked, “What is the first name of the woman who cleans the school?” In a sense, the professor was echoing Jesus: pay attention to, respect the least of those among you. Do people generally construct boundaries around their respect, limiting it to people like themselves? If yes, why? If no, why not? How does limiting the circle of our respect undermine the spiritual discipline (see #1) of respect? How can we extend the circle of our respect? How does knowing a person’s name change our relationship with them?

***The following questions are related to the Readings from the Common Bowl.***

9. Shannon Alder suggests that defensiveness, and, perhaps, other negative behaviors, are a plea for respect. Do you agree? Why or why not? If we respond to defensiveness and similar behaviors with disrespect, how are we reinforcing those behaviors? If we turn the cheek by responding with respect, can we change the terms of interaction in meaningful ways? Why? How?
10. Sharon Salzberg writes about the importance of “simple gestures of respect” directed towards ourself. Does how we treat ourselves influence how we treat others? Why or why not? Is self-respect a precursor to respecting others? Why or why not? What is healthy self-respect?
11. Jennifer Michael Hecht writes “have some respect for your future self.” What does she

mean? Why is this important? How does this attitude promote growth and nurture hope?

12. Lori Lakin Hutcherson, *Good Black News* Founder and Editor-In-Chief, has experienced the reality of white privilege and racism. Prophetically, she suggests that respecting people of other races is significant but not sufficient. Real respect leads to advocacy, “to stand up for fair treatment and justice.” How do we make respect visible? Does respect need to be acted upon as Hutcherson suggests? Why or why not?
13. Joan Didion writes, “People with self-respect exhibit a certain toughness, a kind of moral nerve; they display what was once called ‘character.’” Do you agree? Why or why not? What other characteristics reflect self-respect? She also writes, “the willingness to accept responsibility for one’s own life—is the source from which self-respect springs.” Do you agree? Why or why not? How does accepting failure contribute to self-respect? What is required in accepting success to exhibit/cultivate self-respect? Humility? Grace? Gratitude? How can we distinguish between authentic self-respect and its counterfeit?
14. In the conversation between Scout and Atticus by Harper Lee, Atticus supports full respect for other’s opinions. But that is not decisive or ultimate for him. What matters more is self-respect in the face of opposition. Does self-respect require courage? Why or why not? What are some examples of courage in support of self-respect?
15. Amor Towles writes that each new generation owes some degree of respect and gratitude to the generation that preceded it. Do you agree? Why or why not? What is the outcome when this is absent, as it so often seems to be in a culture of growing disrespect? What might be the legacy of the present generation’s disrespect to the previous generation rather than respect and gratitude? How is everyone diminished when this happens?
16. Edmund Fawcett writes about liberalism and democracy. In our current time, both seem to be reviled and under attack despite the fact that western liberalism includes classic conservatism. Among other things, Fawcett states that liberalism determines how people are

to be respected. Does the assault on liberalism symbolize decreased commitment to respecting ideological opponents? How does this affect the democratic enterprise? Fawcett also writes, “Democracy is about who belongs in that happy circle of voice, progress, and protection.” What happens when all sides restrict the circle of democracy? What can be done to affirm, promote, extend, and strengthen liberalism and democracy?

17. Fred Rogers suggests that violence toward the other, including the political other, is quite easy. What has promoted this over the last 30 years? What are global examples of “people with differing views coming together and finally respecting each other?”
18. Robert Heinlen contrasts other’s expectations of you with the claims of duty to which you have committed yourself. One is external, the other internal. How do we resist (or at least balance) those external expectations with the internal demands of duty? Which is more important, the external or internal?

**Deeper Listening:** If time was claimed by individuals, the group listens without interruption to each person the time claimed. Using a timer allows the facilitator to also listen fully.

**Checking-Out:** One sentence about where you are now as a result of the time spent together and the experience of exploring the theme.

**Extinguishing Chalice:** (Elizabeth Selle Jones) *We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth, the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment. These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.*

**Closing Words:** *Do It Now*, attributed to the Talmud

*Our Calling* by Rev. Jean Rowe (aka Jean Rickard) (46 words)

We have a calling in this world: we are called to honor diversity, to respect differences with dignity, and to challenge those who would forbid it. We are people of a wide path. Let us be wide in affection and go our way in peace. Amen.

Source:

<https://www.uua.org/worship/words/closing/6055.shtml>