

The Energy of Paradox

1. Think about an image of an unwanted gift. What is helpful about that image as you consider the struggles you have had in life? What questions are left unanswered for you?
2. What have you learned about yourself, about God, because of an unwanted gift?
3. Jacob's story in Genesis 32:22-32 reminds us that scars tell stories. Think about a scar that you have (physical, emotional, spiritual). What story does it tell?
4. Pastor Kai describes three ways to wrestle with dark times: *acceptance* (life is hard), *resistance* (we are invited to bring hope to the world), and *presence* (being with others who are suffering). What was helpful for you in those responses? What would you add to what Pastor Kai wrote? What questions do you still have?

Closing Question & Discerning Your Next Practice (10-15 minutes)

Explore how the chapter themes can make a difference in your life by considering these questions:

- In your current life, what is draining or depletes your energy? Are there ways to release or re-think those activities/relationships?
- Did you try one or more of the faith practices? If so, how did it go? What are you discovering about yourself or about God?
- What faith practice would you like to try in the coming week or two? See pages 63 and 76-77 for ideas from this session's chapters in the book.

Closing Prayer (2-3 minutes)

Holy Spirit, you are the way we experience God's creative energy for renewal. Help us to release whatever drains our energy. Help us to release our striving. Open our hearts and minds and lives to be filled by you, the wellspring of God's energy. Until we gather next, give us grace to receive what you offer as you renew our lives and bless us to be a blessing in the world. Amen.

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Renew Your Life

Session 2: Chapter 3 and Chapter 4

The Energy of Possibility

The Energy of Paradox



Opening Questions

(10 minutes)

Introduce yourself and share your responses to one or more of these questions:

- What is something from your faith that brings you comfort or hope? Share a favorite hymn, Bible verse or Bible story, if one comes to mind for you.
- What is your favorite day and time of the week? What makes it your best time?
- What did you do this week that was life-giving?

Group Prayer Practice

(10 minutes)

Spend a few minutes in quiet as a group. With a calm, meditative voice, the leader will use these instructions to guide the group in this practice:

- Sit in a way where you feel held by your chair as God holds you in life. Close your eyes, if that is helpful.
- Inhale deeply through your nose and exhale slowly through your mouth. Focus on your breath as it slows.
- If there are thoughts or responsibilities that are distracting you, set them aside or release them for this time. Focus on simply being present in this moment. After some silence, I will give you some prompts for reflection in the continuing quiet.

Allow for a minute or two of quiet before continuing:

- As you think about the past day or week, what did you experience that was life-giving? *Pause for time to reflect.*
- As you think about the past day or week, what has been energy depleting for you? *Pause for time to reflect.*
- Now, imagine yourself being held in the expansive energies of God's love.

Breathe deeply of God's presence and peace and conclude by saying Amen.

Scripture Text

(2-3 minutes)

Mark 8:34-37 (NRSV)

He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life?"

Reading Recap

(2-3 minutes)

God offers us a renewable energy filled with possibility. Living into that possibility brings us to knowing where we are, stepping out in trust, and moving in a new direction. Some key questions for Pastor Kai in this time were: What are you afraid of? What is keeping you from stepping out? If you could go somewhere, anywhere, where would it be? What decisions would need to be made to do so? What would be the implications?

On the other side of possibility is the paradox of seeing light and darkness at the same time. Life is filled with unwanted gifts; gifts we would rather not receive. Part of our journey is finding any unexpected blessings that come with those gifts. As we journey through times of suffering, either our own or with someone, three directions to explore, at the right time, are *acceptance* (Life is difficult and light and darkness can coexist); *resistance* (God calls us to make a better world); and *presence* (our presence with others brings the light of Christ).

Essential Life Questions

(5 minutes)

Read through the essential life questions. Pause for a few minutes of silent reflection on the questions. You may also write a few notes responding to the questions below.

- What hopes shape and give meaning to my life?
- What life resources give me strength and courage to act? What life practices are sustaining and life-giving for me?
- What life circumstances have forced me to wrestle with the paradox of light and darkness?
- In what ways have I been blessed by an unwanted gift?

Questions for Discussion & Individual Reflection

(40 minutes)

Start with these 3 questions, adding in other questions to supplement

- What struck you about the opening stories? How do these stories connect with yours?
- What concepts in the chapters were life-giving for you to think about or integrate into your life?
- What concepts or stories were difficult or challenging for you to think about or integrate into your life?

The Energy of Possibility

1. What gets you out of bed in the morning and gives you the energy you need for the day?
2. Think about a time when you needed to make a decision. What dreams, values or practical considerations were important to you?
3. Would you consider yourself a dreamer or a realist? What are the advantages or disadvantages of each?
4. When in your life have you found yourself standing on one side of the "gap", hesitant to step across? Who or what encouraged you to take the next step? What kept you from taking the step?
5. "Start by doing what is necessary; then do what's possible; and suddenly you are doing the impossible" (St. Francis). How does this statement connect with you? What steps does it encourage you to take as you move forward?
6. When you've needed extra strength or courage in the past, where has it come from? How was God's energy and presence part of that experience?
7. Imagine an upcoming day in your life. How would your interactions change if you engaged them with the young physician's guiding phrase, "integrity and intention?"
8. What are some daily practices that may be energizing for you? What are some practices you're already doing? What is something you're already doing that could be reimaged as an opportunity to be open to God's presence?