
Unfettered Hope: A Call to Faithful Living in an Affluent Society

Marva J. Dawn

Introduction and Chapter 1 for the First Sunday

Before reading, spend a few minutes sitting in silence. In your own words of prayer or in simple repose, entrust yourself to God for whatever the Trinity wants to do in you as you read. You might especially ask the Holy Spirit to prepare you for repentance, confession, and openness to change. This preliminary prayer is especially important because we will be dealing with a crucial topic in this study—the enormous gap in the world between the rich and the poor. This gap is certainly distressing to the compassionate heavenly Father who desires that all persons be sustained in justice. Most of all, ask Jesus to enable you to see the tremendous Joy that will be ours when we live more faithfully in His way.

Introduction

1. Some questions to guide the reading of the introduction:
 - a. For what do I hope? Are my hopes truly possible? What is the best hope? (pp. xi–xii)
 - b. What sorts of things fetter my hopes? By what things or events am I overwhelmed? (pp. xii–xiii)
 - c. What are the two major kinds of despairs in the world? How do I notice them? (pp. xv–xvii)
 - d. Note especially the last paragraph on p. xviii and the first half of p. xix. Is my faith strong enough to break whatever fetters bind me? (If not, you might want to read chapter 5 first.)
 - e. What sort of “wake-up calls” have I had? How have they affected me? (pp. xvii–xix)
 - f. What are the “principalities and powers”? How will it help me to find deeper hope if I understand them and Christ’s victory over them? (pp. xix–xxi)
 - g. How might we as a congregation encourage each other as we discuss the book?
2. David Ford gives us a good pattern for dealing with all our “overwhelmings.” What are the steps he offers? (pp. xii–xv)

How might I apply his process to my study of this book and to other situations in my life?

Chapter 1

1. Chapter 1 (pp. 1–39) is intended to be a collage of possible “fetterings” to spur thinking. Which elements in the pile are most problematic to me? How do I respond to “fetterings”?
2. Some questions to guide the reading of chapter 1:
 - a. “We have so many things to do, we forget why we are doing them; we have so many things, we forget why they matter” (p. 2) — What is the role of technology in causing this loss of context and meaning in our lives? In what other ways do I notice that technology can be destructive of humanity? (pp. 1–8, 10–13, 25–28)
 - b. With what accumulations of “stuff” do I struggle? (pp. 9–10)
 - c. Why is language a problem? What words do I find misused? (pp. 13–15, 20–23)
 - d. Do I have a problem with speed and the need for efficiency? (pp. 15–19, 23–24) What factors besides speed give me trouble with my relationships?
 - e. “. . . when technicization reduces our skills, time, and social fabric for intimacy, we reverse the poles and technologize our intimacy while we intimize our technology.” (p. 25) Is this so in my experience? In what ways have communications technologies improved my relationships with my family? friends? coworkers? neighbors? In what ways have they hindered those relationships?
 - f. What is the role of culture? (p. 28) In what ways do I feel strongly tied to others through a common culture? In what ways do I feel rootless? Are my children/grandchildren growing up with a healthy cultural identity? What is it?
 - g. What have I learned through this chapter about the needs of others in the world? What response would I like to make? What might I need to change in my own life to be more responsible? What can we as a congregation do to become more aware of the needs of others in the world?

3. What gritudes has my reading raised? What repentance? What desires for change?
4. Close your study time in prayer. Bring God all your feelings, thoughts, and desires.

Chapters 2 and 3 for the Second Sunday

2-3

Before reading, spend a few minutes in silence contemplating the goodness of God and how Triune grace is sufficient for all our needs. It is important that we begin our study of what is wrong in North American society with confidence that God's power is effective in helping us overcome the "device paradigm," which chapter 2 describes. You might ask God to grant you divine wisdom and understanding, as well as persistence, for studying chapters 2–3.

Chapter 2

1. Chapter 2 is the most difficult chapter in *Unfettered Hope*, but persevering is worth it, for this chapter helps us understand many dimensions of North American life. Albert Borgmann's explanation of the technological paradigm is extremely important because he helps us distinguish between *technology*, created for good, and its *paradigm*, which has overtaken our society. (pp. 41–50) These questions might guide your reflections on this section:
 - a. What exactly is the technological/device paradigm?
 - b. In what ways do I see that paradigm in operation—in education, business, etc.?
 - c. Has the technological paradigm affected my life? What have I lost because of it?
 - d. Do I agree with Borgmann that the paradigm is as influential as he thinks?
 - e. Has the device paradigm influenced any aspect of my relationship with the congregation to which I belong?
 - f. What other illustrations could I use to explain the device paradigm to others?
 - g. What decisions might I (my family) make to evade the control of the device paradigm?
2. How might you answer these questions in the middle sections of chapter 2? (pp. 50–56)

- a. How does the device paradigm enable us to understand our fetters?
 - b. Why do we not notice what the device paradigm does to our sense of work?
 - c. Why do we need to be entertained?
3. It is crucial, for more faithfully addressing the global crisis, that we distinguish between technology, consumerism, and the paradigm which connects them and which must be reformed. Outline for yourself the differences and the steps for reform. (pp. 56–60)

Chapter 3

1. Chapter 3 uses children's stories and a nonfiction account to illustrate focal concerns and how they help us reform the device paradigm. These questions might guide your reading:
 - a. Why are “focal concerns” so important? What are mine? (pp. 61–64, 66–69)
 - b. How might I clear more space and time for my focal concerns? (pp. 64–66)
 - c. How might I simplify the context and keep means and ends distinguished? (pp. 69–71)
 - d. Does what really matter to me (my focal concern) guide all the rest of my life? How might I “extend the sphere of engagement” so that more of my life is so focused? (pp. 71–73)
 - e. How might emphasizing focal concerns change my observation of Advent/Christmas or Lent/Easter? (pp. 73–75)
 - f. What are the focal concerns of Christian faith? Are they mine? (pp. 75–78)
2. What gritudes has my reading raised? What repentance? What desires for change?
3. Close your study time in prayer. Bring God all your feelings, thoughts, and desires.

Chapter 5 for the Third Sunday

We skip ahead this week to chapter 5 to deepen our hope before returning to chapter 4 next week to confront our failures and those of U.S. churches to live Christianity's focal concerns truly. Before reading, spend a few minutes silently contemplating the Bible's great narrative of God's grace. Meditate on your favorite stories in the Bible and how they display the Triune God's attributes and actions. Before ending this reflective time, specifically thank God for some of His great gifts to you.

1. Chapter 5 sketches the Bible's entire meta-narrative so that we can experience more richly the fullness of hope that we have in the Triune God. As you read this chapter, you might pause after each section and thank God for the grace revealed in that part of the Bible.
2. As you read chapter 5, make mental note of any biblical explanation that is new to you. Tell someone about what you have learned so that it is implanted more deeply in your mind. Also, it is a good practice for strengthening our faith to thank God specifically for each new thing we learn about God and each new understanding we gain of the Scriptures. You might also ask yourself how this new insight into God or the Bible affects your daily life's practices.
3. Some questions to ponder while reading the summaries of biblical literature:
 - a. What does it mean that the Bible "rescripts" our lives? (See pp. 109–111 and footnote 3.) How does the language of the Bible change how I think about different aspects of my life? How do I hear the Bible's rescripting in our pastor's/priest's sermons? (See, for example, pp. 188–189.) How does my daily devotional life shape my language and therefore affect how I live each moment of life?
 - b. How do the biblical accounts of human beginnings (pp. 111–112) increase my gratitude?
 - c. How do I see the theme of the LORD providing in other parts of the Bible? (pp. 113–114)

- d. How do all the commandments of the First and Second Testaments show grace? (pp. 114–116)
 - e. Have I viewed the “Old” Testament primarily in terms of Law, violence, judgment, and wrath on God’s part? How might I practice reading it more in terms of grace? (pp. 116–122)
 - f. In what ways could reading the Psalms deepen my prayer life? (pp. 122–124)
 - g. The major prophetic books (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel) share characteristics of the poetic literature and the minor prophets. (pp. 122–127) What oracles in the prophetic literature speak directly to our situation in North America today? What promises in the prophets give us hope?
 - h. Why is the narrative of the life of Jesus on earth (pp. 127–139) so central to faith? Many people in our society like to discount the Bible’s account of Jesus; how might we let the biblical descriptions instead lead us to gratitude? Why can we trust the testimonies of witnesses?
 - i. The description on pp. 139–140 of the battle for genuine Christian life sounds very hard. Do I think this arduous Christian life is worthwhile? Why? Why not? Do I tell others about it? (pp. 140–141) Why or why not? Am I willing to be “dismantled” to become wholly God’s?
 - j. Is my faith very trinitarian? (pp. 141–143) By what practices might I become more trinitarian?
4. How does chapter 5’s overview of the entire biblical meta-narrative enable me more faithfully to read individual portions of the Scriptures?
 5. What gratitudes has my reading raised? What repentance? What desires for change?
 6. Close your study time in prayer. Bring God all your feelings, thoughts, and desires.

Chapter 4 for the Fourth Sunday

Before reading, spend a few minutes in silent contemplation of how the biblical narrative of God's actions and attributes frees us to trust Him. Meditate on resting in grace, giving yourself over entirely into God's hands and direction for life. Perhaps you might want to commit yourself specifically in prayer to God for whatever wisdom or insight you will gain in your reading. Thank God for divine care for you personally and for Christ's Church.

1. Chapter 4 critiques us and North American churches for ways in which we fail to live our focal concerns. Lest we be overwhelmed by this critique, it is essential that we understand the difference between pessimism and biblical realism. (pp. 79–81) Are U.S.ers in general realistic about their lives? Are Christians in the U.S.? Are you? How does being a Christian help us face our failures more realistically? What is “hopeful realism”?
2. As you read, you might become convinced that some of the church failures documented in chapter 4 also afflict the congregation to which you belong. If so, prepare yourself to discuss these gently in the Sunday morning class so that the entire community can benefit from your “hopeful realism.” One important precaution is to pray that what you notice is God's wisdom for the church.
3. Some questions to guide your reading for the sake of your church community:
 - a. Do the members in my church understand that the point of worship is not to please our own tastes? Do the worship and activities of my church contribute to genuine culture? (pp. 81–82)
 - b. Do the members of my congregation share their faith as a gift in a pluralistic world? (pp. 82–83)
 - c. Does my faith depend upon objective truth or upon my own ideas of what I want faith to be? Is our congregational life built upon truth or are we more influenced by feelings? (pp. 83–84)

- d. How thoroughly is our entire congregation involved in mentoring our children? (p. 84)
 - e. How strong is our parish's community life? How deeply do we care for each other? (pp. 84–85)
 - f. How thoroughly do the members of my church engage in practices of the faith? (p. 85)
 - g. How might it improve community life if we practiced confession/absolution with each other?
 - h. How could we all contribute more to parish-wide discussion of our focal concerns? (pp. 86–91)
 - i. Are we as a congregation confident in our identity as a Christian church (and a church of a certain denomination)? (pp. 89–90)
 - j. In what ways do we fulfill our congregational mission to our neighbors? (pp. 91–93)
 - k. How do technology and the device paradigm affect our worship life? (pp. 93–102)
 - l. In what ways do commodifications affect our parish decisions and church life? (pp. 102–106)
4. Is Christ my only hope or do I place my trust in other things? (pp. 106–107)
 5. What gritudes has my reading raised? What repentance? What desires for change?
 6. Close your study time in prayer. Bring God all your feelings, thoughts, and desires.

Chapters 6 and 7 for the Fifth Sunday

6-7

Before reading, spend a few moments in silent contemplation of all the gifts God has given to the Church to nurture our hope in the Trinity. Thank God for specific people who have mentored you in the faith, for practices in the Church that you really love and that bring you renewed trust in God, for all the blessings in the Scriptures and the Sacraments. Open yourself to whatever direction God will give you concerning the habits of your life and the ways in which they contribute to your focal concerns and increase your hope.

Chapter 6

1. How would more thoroughly living the language of Christian faith insert “trembling freedom” into cracks in our society’s seemingly total enmeshment in the device paradigm? (pp. 147–150)
2. Are the children in our church, in your family, schooled by immersion? (pp. 150–153) How could our family develop more faith practices in our home? How could our church’s community members become more faithful so that each of us is invested in the parish children?
3. How do the practices of Baptism and the Eucharist nurture our hope? (pp. 153, 180–182)
4. As you read about all the practices given in the sections on the Ten Commandments (pp. 154–180), consider the following questions both for yourself and for the church to which you belong:
 - a. In which practices mentioned do I/we as a community participate?
 - b. Which practices would I like to begin engaging in? Why would they be helpful?
 - c. How do these discussions of practices change my attitudes about the commandments?
 - d. Why is the dialectical combination of fear and love important? (p. 154 and throughout)

- e. How does our love for God deepen our love for the neighbor and vice versa?
- f. How does participation in faith practices unfetter our hope and deepen it?
- g. How could members of our church encourage each other in engaging in faith practices?

Chapter 7

1. According to the description in chapter 7 (pp. 183–188), what is true hope? How does it redescribe the world? (pp.188–189) How can we live more fully out of hope? (pp. 191–198)
2. Why is a “theology of the cross” crucial for the true hope of living our focal concerns?
3. What gritudes has my reading of these final two chapters raised? What repentance? What desires for change?
4. What specific plans do I have for putting into practice the things I have learned in studying *Unfettered Hope*? What plans might we want to make for our congregation?
5. Close your study time in prayer. Bring God all your feelings, thoughts, and desires.

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” (Romans 15:13)