

40 ORCHARDS

Dear 40 Orchards Community,

At 40 Orchards, we mark ends and beginnings at multiple times a year. As a community that focuses on concepts like life, grief, hope, and struggle, noticing seasons becomes a natural part of the conversation.

Since much of what we do runs in a school-year rhythm, it has become our practice to use August as a time to look back on the previous year of programming and happenings.

One year ago, we were entering a new school year, and everyone was working to figure out what the next-stage of pandemic living looked like. So many were fatigued and uncertain. It became difficult to make commitments. All of us had to wrestle through a lot.

At 40 Orchards, we had to struggle to figure out the balance of in-person and virtual circles. We regularly had to discern when we needed to change something and when people were just tired. We moved forward the best we could, with some cancellations, stressors, and losses along the way. Yet, there was also good! We continued to be a place where people found a safe community, worked to find grounding and spaciousness in Scripture, and even started some new things that we are really excited about.

This report contains a snapshot of those movements. We see it all as co-creation. None of it could have happened without God, the gifts of our leaders, and the support and participation of the 40 Orchards community. We are so grateful.

In hope for all that lies ahead,
Steph, Lisa, and the 40 Orchards Board

Staff: Lisa Adams & Stephanie Spencer

Board: Michelle Bramel, Mary Eliassen, Cathy Pinske, Todd Bratulich, and Jason Steffenhagen

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2021-2022 ANNUAL REVIEW

"I love all the Scripture Circles I have attended. They have all taught me something new. Sometimes I felt like the Bible was a weapon not life giving book but actually stifling any life I had. Studying by asking questions makes me excited to read the Bible again." - Cheryl (Scripture Circle Participant)

Some highlights from 2021-2022...



WE ASKED BIG QUESTIONS.

We began a *Potentially Dangerous Questions* series in the summer of 2021, and we brought it back in 2022. We believe wrestling, wonder, and uncertainty are meant to be part of our faith experience. We have found that the safe space for big questions has been life-giving to many. We've asked questions like

- Is there original sin?
- Is hell real?
- Does the Bible have mistakes?



WE BUILT A GLOBAL COMMUNITY.

The continuation of virtual circles has allowed our local 40 Orchards community to invite friends from all over the world to participate. In one Circle this summer, we had time zones ranging from Pacific to Eastern to New Zealand!



WE ADDED TO OUR ROOTS.

We have been adding new Roots offerings each year for awhile now. Fall of 2021 saw the launch of *Daughters of the Torah*. It might be our favorite one yet! We also revamped our *Gospel Roots* to focus on Matthew, and did a soft launch for *Psalms Roots*, coming next.



WE BUILT PARTNERSHIPS.

We have had church partnerships for many years, and we found new ways of doing that this year. We continued our monthly studies with Awaken Community and Meetinghouse Church. For Upper Room Community and Genesis Church, we added Sunday teachings to our offerings, preaching and facilitating with the influence of midrash and questions. It's a fun way to expose new people to this way we hold Scripture.



WE HONORED RHYTHMS.

Like previous years, we found life in engaging in Scripture Circles for both Advent and Lent. Throughout the year, we talked about Sabbath. In spring, we had a Seder meal with the current cohort. Honoring rhythms helped us hold time with less anxiety and striving.



WE STARTED A PODCAST.

Searching the Sacred launched its inaugural season in November of 2021. We have been pleasantly surprised by how well this way of study translates into the podcast format. We love hearing people talk about the episodes when they come to Circles—we can feel the ways people are longing for their voices to be part of the conversation—which is just as it should be!

WE WRESTLED, WONDERED, AND DREAMED.

There are always less-tangible movements that are difficult to describe in brief on lists such as these.

Like Lisa's continuing studies in seminary, which are focused on working with individuals who are incarcerated. Or Steph's ongoing development of curriculum. Or our teaching of one-time studies in people's homes. Or our walks and coffees with people in the midst of faith deconstruction, who were looking for a safe place to process. Or our regular conversations about how the current state of the Church and faith effect our role in the world. Or our struggles to build and sustain community with and between 40 Orchards studiers.

This work is difficult, unpredictable, and beautiful, all at the same time.

Some numbers that stand out to us...

70

COHORT MEMBERS

One cohort closed in October, and another began in January. Cohort Vav is our sixth, which have all named by letters of the Hebrew alphabet: Aleph, Bet, Gimmel, Dalet, Hey, and Vav. This year, we have 9 new members, and 3 people doing the cohort for the second time. When we added 9 to what came before, we were in awe. It added to exactly 70 people. Wow! We couldn't have planned for that if we had tried.

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ROOTS GROUPS

Each year, we add to our Roots. This year, we launched *Daughters of the Torah*, soft-launched *Psalms*, and revamped *Torah* and *Gospel Roots*. Roots groups, which meet for 5 or 10 sessions, once or twice a month, are a consistent source of grounding and community for many. Our current Roots offerings include: *Torah* (A, B, & C), *Daughters of the Torah*, *Prophet*, *Psalms*, and *Gospel Roots*.

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OPEN SCRIPTURE CIRCLES

Not counting Roots programs or the Cohort, we had 30 Scripture Circles in the last year. *Potentially Dangerous Questions*, Church partnerships, Advent and Lent circles, and other one-time offerings are great opportunities for people to explore and experience this way of study for themselves.

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PODCAST EPISODES

Searching the Sacred has had 3 seasons, and over 3500 downloads since we began. We mark the Sabbath rhythm by having each season last 6 episodes, followed by a break.

Some things coming this Fall...

A New Roots- on Psalms!

Psalms contain some of the most quoted verses of Scripture. Lines from their poetry make their way into songs and onto paintings. What if we take the time to look deeper than quotations? This Roots will feel different from the others. Psalms open up easily into mysticism, emotion, and art- something we will invite from participants. What might come forth from you? Offered in-person, on the second Friday of each month, beginning in October.

More Open Circles

We have heard from our community that you want more opportunities to enter a circle without making an ongoing commitment, and that you want safe spaces to invite people you know. So, once a month, we will be offering a virtual, open Scripture Circle in the evening. In Open Circles, we start by checking in with each person gathered to find out what is on our minds and hearts. Then, we wrestle through whatever passage the group votes to explore. Offered virtually, on the third Thursday of each month, beginning in September.

Searching the Sacred: A Series on Ruth (with curriculum!)

We want to listeners of the podcast to be able to participate and add their voice to the conversation. We have also heard from many of you that you'd like more resources to be able to study this way with a small group outside of our offerings. So, the next seasons of *Searching the Sacred*, we will do both! The next season(s) will focus on Ruth, with book recommendations and curriculum that will be made available to Patreon supporters. Maybe you could start a podcast club! Launching sometime this fall.

A Fall Celebration in November

Watch your email for the date and registration details.

A reminder of the mission, vision, and values that guide everything we do... Thank you for being part of it.

Our Mission

Our mission is to create safe spaces for the curious, the doubters, and the hope seekers to wrestle through biblical texts using the ancient Jewish concepts of midrash so that - together - we can expand each other's experience of what is sacred, whole, and good.

Our Vision

Our vision is for all people to experience wholeness, hope, and freedom.

Our Values

We are committed to bringing our core values into every Scripture Circle—and weaving them into everything we do. We are committed to:

Seeing each other.

We believe humans are designed to be in relationship with God and with one another, and we want every person to experience what it means to see and be seen, to love and be loved.

Creating space.

In a 40 Orchards study, what is learned is not driven by outlines and agendas. We spend time listening, we get comfortable with silence, ask questions, and make room for every voice in the room, including God's.

Cultivating life.

We believe each person has unique gifts they're meant to bring to the world—gifts that rest within them like seeds waiting to burst forth.

Rooting deeply.

We believe there are threads connecting passages into the larger story of God and humanity—and that language and history can help us unlock layers of meaning, beyond the surface level.

Wrestling together.

We are committed to creating spaces that are safe for each of us to come as we are, with all our doubts and fears. We teach not through lecture, but in dialogue.

Expecting more.

We believe it's not incidental that the original dwelling place on earth—where humans and God walked side by side—was named Eden, or "delight". We look to the future through the lens of sacred possibility.

Will you help us achieve our mission, promote our values, and expand our programming in the coming year? Donate at <https://40orchards.org/donate>

40 Orchards is a U.S. tax-exempt 501(c)(3) organization.

"I truly appreciate 40 Orchards and this way of learning and studying and open conversations. It has been so life-giving and affirming to me" -Brooke (Cohort Member)