

Bulletin for Grace

Business

Chalice Lighting

This is the light of faith and hope and love, which shines in our lives even in the darkest times.
This is the light of the gathered community, which holds us and comforts us when we grieve.
This is the light of our ongoing search for truth and meaning, which gives a path even through loss. We light this light and invoke the light that illumines life and death and shines beyond both.
Christine Robinson

Sharing of Joys and Concerns

Silence with guided meditation

Shared Readings

Grace is an ability to give as well as to receive and be thankful. *C. JoyBell C.*

Grace means to get something that you do not deserve; unmerited favor. Mercy means you do not get a punishment that you deserve; compassion, forbearance. *Pamela Rose Williams*

We let go into this grace. It's something we fall into, like when we fall into the arms of another, or we put our head on the pillow to go to sleep. It's a willingness to relax, even in the midst of tension. It's a willingness to stop for just a moment, to breathe, to notice that there's something else going on other than the story our mind is telling us. In this moment of grace, we see that whatever might be there in our experience, from the most difficult emotional challenges to the most causeless joy, occurs within a vast space of peace, of stillness, of ultimate well-being.
Adyashanti

Grace shows the full extent of our universe. We are not alone; we are attended. *David Richo*

Grace doesn't depend on suffering to exist, but where there is suffering you will find grace in many facets and colors. *Wm. Paul Young, The Shack: Where Tragedy Confronts Eternity*

When grace moves in . . . guilt moves out.
Max Lucado, Max on Life: Answers and Insights to Your Most Important Questions

Virtue and genuine graces in themselves speak what no words can utter.
William Shakespeare

Grace is something you can never get, but only be given. To pursue it is fruitless.
Jeanne Harrison Nieuwejaar, UU Minister

Grace just sneaks up on us and often steals away before we know what happened. ... Sometimes a single tear is what tells us. Sometimes a feeling of calm. It could be a lump in the throat. It could take the shape of laughter. Grace is something you can't demand. Grace is beyond our understanding. But from time to time it pays us each a visit. Amazing.

David S. Blanchard, UU minister

Deep Sharing/Deep Listening

Round 1

Share briefly what grace represents for you in your life.

Round 2

Share more deeply stories and experiences of grace as a result of your exploration of the preparation materials.

Round 3

As time allows, share additional thoughts on grace or reflect on what others have shared as time allows.

Closing Words

For the sun and the dawn which we did not create,
For the moon and the evening which we did not make;
For food which we plant, but cannot grow;
For friends and loved ones we have not earned and cannot buy;

...

We lift up our hearts in thanks this day.

Richard Fewkes, UU minister

Song

The Covenant

I commit myself:

- to come to meetings when I possibly can, knowing that my presence is important to the group
- to let the leader know if I will be absent or need to quit
- to share with the leader the responsibility for good group process by watching how much time I take to speak and noticing what is going on for others
- to do the reading and thinking about the topic ahead of time
- to not gossip about what is shared in the group, and tell only my own story to others
- to honor the safety of the group by listening to what others share with an open heart
- to refrain from cross-talk, judging, or giving advice
- to share as deeply as I can when it is my turn.

Facilitator Notes for Grace

Before the Session

Read through the meditation several times.

Business

If your group is using the original session order, Music will be the next session. The Music session asks each person to play a musical excerpt that he or she finds special. Laptops, iphones, or cd players and ipods with speakers could all be used; briefly discuss whether any members are uncomfortable with the technology. Members can cooperate to bring equipment; for other technical assistance Alicia Hawkins can be a resource. Note, however, that a member can discuss the music instead of playing it.

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Sharing of Joys and Concerns (each person about 2 minutes)

Silence with guided meditation — see next page

Silence – Guided Meditation

Read the meditation slowly and calmly.

The Parable of the Gem in the Robe comes from the Lotus Sutra.

We are going to take a journey into our pasts. Please sit in a comfortable position.
(Pause as participants adjust their sitting position.)

Take three slow, deep breaths, counting to four with each inhale and again with each exhale.
(Pause to breathe deeply with the participants.)

You may close your eyes or focus on a particular object in the room. We're going to share a parable, or teaching tale, from the Buddhist tradition.
(Pause. Shift your voice, or change readers.)

A poor man visited a wealthy friend and the two enjoyed conversation, food, and drink far into the evening. After the poor man fell asleep, his friend was called away. Before he left, he sewed a priceless jewel into the lining of the poor man's coat. When the poor man awoke, he knew nothing of the gem.

Years passed, difficult years for the poor man, who traveled far and wide searching for food and clothing to keep himself alive, unaware that in the lining of his robe he carried a priceless jewel. After many years, he once again met his friend, who was astonished that he still lived in poverty. The friend showed him the jewel sewn in his robe, and the poor man was filled with gratitude and with joy, knowing that he would never go hungry again. We are like that poor man.

Think of a time that you received a gift you didn't recognize in that moment. Maybe it was the first time you learned about Unitarian Universalism. . . . Maybe it was a piece of advice. . . . Maybe it was meeting a new friend. . . . Maybe it was a decision to take one path instead of another that brought you to where you are today.
(Pause.)

Our entire lives are filled with these inconspicuous moments of grace — times when we are presented with choices or opportunities to recognize a gift in our lives. What are the moments of grace in your life? The events that changed the course of your life? These aren't just the usual milestones in life such as leaving home, finding a partner, having children, going to school, getting a job, retiring, and so on. These are also the subtle moments that resulted in our journey being what it has been. Moments, without which our lives might have been remarkably different, for better or for worse.
(Pause for about 30 seconds.)

What are your moments of grace? What are the jewels in your pocket that you didn't initially know were there? What gifts have you received along the way that have brought you to this time and place in your life? Take a moment to silently think about your moments of grace.
(Pause 60 seconds.)

As you are ready, please bring your attention back to the room with another three slow, deep breaths, counting to four with each inhale and again with each exhale.

Shared Readings

Grace is an ability to give as well as to receive and be thankful. *C. JoyBell C.*

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Deep Sharing/Deep Listening

In the rounds of deep sharing and deep listening, pay close attention to the time allotted each person to ensure that all get to share at least once.

Round 1 (each person about 2 minutes)
Share briefly what grace represents for you in your life.

Round 2 (each person about 5 minutes)
Share more deeply stories and experiences of grace as a result of your exploration of the preparation materials.

Round 3

As time allows, share additional thoughts on grace or reflect on what others have shared.

Closing Words

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Preparation for Grace

Some of our writing team asked, “Why are UUs continuing to use the term grace? Isn’t it a Christian term? What does it mean for our diverse group, many of whom don’t buy into being saved?” This session explores the question of the relevance and possibilities of grace for our church and these secular times.

Grace is one of those theological words that resist simple and easy definitions. Its meaning crosses boundaries; its nature is hard to define. A tentative working definition of grace might say that grace is favor or fortune that comes to us unbidden, that is impossible for us to do anything to merit or deserve. *Thom Belote, UU minister*

The traditional Christian meaning of grace is that God forgives our sins and redeems us through the death of Jesus on the cross. The Protestant view of grace emphasizes that it is a gift and is not earned through good works. In the twentieth century, Paul Tillich moved the concept of grace beyond the Christian definition of being saved. He says that grace is a strike of fortune that comes to us in our darkest moments, almost as if a voice were saying, “you are accepted.” He adds, “If that happens to us, we experience grace. After such an experience, we may not be better than before, and we may not believe more than before. But everything is transformed.”

Yet we all know what the state of Grace feels like. Perhaps we know it best by its absence, those painful times when we argue with Life and second-guess its incomprehensible order.

Miriam Louisa, discussing Krishnamurti on being in state of grace

The grace of God means something like: Here is your life. You might never have been, but you are because the party wouldn’t have been complete without you. Here is the world. Beautiful and terrible things will happen. Don’t be afraid. I am with you. Nothing can ever separate us. It’s for you I created the universe. I love you. *Frederick Buechner*

Grace is . . . often thought of as a rather positive moment or event. However, we’ve all had experiences of extreme difficulty where, when we look back, we see that these were times when we transformed the most, when we made the biggest leap in our personal evolution. . . . In essence, grace is anything that helps us truly open—our minds, our bodies, our emotions, our hearts. Sometimes grace is soft and beautiful. It appears as insight.

Adyashanti, Falling into Grace: Insights on the End of Suffering

In her book *States of Grace*, Charlene Spretnak considers Buddhism on the nature of the mind, the Abrahamic religions on community and social justice, and Native American and Goddess Spirituality on the relationship with nature and the personal body. Spretnak explains the experience of grace as follows: “When we experience consciousness of the unity in which we are embedded, the sacred whole that is in and around us, we exist in a state of grace. At such moments, our consciousness perceives not only our individual self, but also our larger self, the self of the cosmos.”

I do not at all understand the mystery of grace—only that it meets us where we are but does not leave us where it found us. *Anne Lamott, Traveling Mercies*

We are all neck-deep in grace. Whoever we are, we are held by the warmth of the sun and the shining embrace of the snow, nourished by the sweet waters of the rain, alive in the great mystery. Whatever our circumstances, we have the perfect capacity to awaken. With an open heart and open mind we discover a great stillness, a loving presence with things as they are.
Jack Kornfield, After the Ecstasy, the Laundry

The way I figure it, grace is closest aligned to the UU Principle of “Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.” *Jeanne Harrison, UU minister*

Questions to Ponder

1. What does grace mean to you? If you do not find the term “grace” useful, what words do you choose?
2. Think of a time when something positive happened to you unexpectedly, or when a reward came to you without your having worked for it, or when you received an opportunity you didn’t think you deserved.
3. When have you experienced grace in your life? What were the circumstances?
4. Some link a relationship between Grace and Gratitude. How does this work for you?

Questions adapted from All Souls Church, Tulsa, OK.