

**Finding Balance, Living with Polarities Series**

**Faith and Doubt**

Small Group Ministry Session Plan, Unitarian Universalist Church in Eugene, Oregon,  
February 2010

**Chalice or candle lighting or sound a chime** (2 to 3 minutes for this and silence and opening words)

**Moment of silence**

**Opening words**

We have gathered here in search of answers to hard questions.

We have come in search of understanding, in search of community.

We have come in search of hope and healing.

Let this be a place not only of searching, but of discovery.

Let this be a place not only of learning, but of wisdom.

Let this be a place not only of meeting, but of connection.

And let this be a place where healing fosters giving, and hope fosters service.

(Adapted from Rev. Sue Ayer)

**Check-in** (Up to 20 to 30 minutes, 2 to 3 minutes per person)

**Topic and sharing** (Up to 70 minutes for reading, questions and sharing with optional 5 minute break about midway in the session)

**Readings**

Believe nothing just because a so-called wise person said it. Believe nothing just because a belief is generally held. Believe nothing just because it is said in ancient books. Believe nothing just because it is said to be of divine origin. Believe nothing just because someone else believes it.

Believe only what you yourself test and judge to be true.

(paraphrased from the Buddha)

Take the first step in faith. You don't have to see the whole staircase, just take the first step.

(By Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.)

Cherish your doubt, for doubt is the servant of truth.

Question your convictions, for beliefs too tightly held strangle the mind and its natural wisdom.

Suspect all certitudes, for the world whirls on—nothing abides.

Yet in our inner rooms full of doubt, inquiry and suspicion, let a corner be reserved for trust.

For without trust there is no space for communities to gather or for friendships to be forged.

Indeed, this is the small corner where we connect—and reconnect—with each other.

(By Michael A. Schuler)

Perhaps this tendency of humans to worship and believe was rooted in our physiology, written into our genes, and encoded in our very makeup...Perhaps instinctively, human beings had always known that worshipping a higher power was good for them! And indeed, if they were calling forth the relaxation response, medical science could prove it was good for them! I speculated that perhaps humans are in a profound physical way, "wired for God"...I am referring to all the deities of the Judeo-Christian, Buddhist, Muslim, and Hindu traditions, to gods and goddesses, as well as to all the spirits worshipped

and beloved by humans all over the world and throughout history. In my scientific observations, I have learned that no matter what name you give the Infinite Absolute you worship, no matter what theology you ascribe to, the results of believing in God are the same.  
(By Herbert Benson, in "Timeless Healing: the Power and Biology of Belief")

**Questions** (Please respond to whichever question or questions you feel moved to answer. It is not necessary to respond to all of the questions.)

1. What do you have faith (trust, a sense of confidence, belief) in? How has this affected you? How has this changed over the years?
2. What do you have doubts about? How has that affected you? How has that changed over the years?
3. What experiences have you had in which both faith and doubt were present, and how did that impact you?

**Sharing** (up to 6 to 8 minutes each, depending on the time available, with time at the end for comment and discussion if the group wishes)

**Administrative matters (service project, future meeting dates and topics, etc.)** (Up to 5 to 10 minutes)

- Confirm next meeting date, time, location, and topic.
- Consider discussing the service project.

**Likes** (celebrations, gratitudes, appreciations for needs met) **and wishes** (mournings, requests, acknowledgements of needs not met)/**check-out** (a few words or phrases from each who wants to share, up to 5 minutes total)

**Closing words** (2 minutes)

Go your way, knowing not the answers to all things, yet seeking always the answer to one more thing than you know.

(By John W. Brigham)

**Extinguish the chalice or candle or sound a chime** (and additional optional closing ritual if agreed to)

(Preparation for the facilitator. Please bring the SGM Facilitator Training Manual, paper and writing implements, the lesson plan, and your date book.)

(Lesson plan prepared by the Small Group Ministry Steering Committee curriculum subcommittee [Rev. Stephen A. Ames, Dick Loescher, Leora White] 10/24/09)