

# Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website

## Session Plan

### God

Philadelphia/Germantown, PA, 2.2013

#### Chalice Lighting

“Since truth in religion is like truth in poetry, by its very nature the language of religion is poetic language: *God, soul, angels, spirit...salvation and sin*. Because such words are imprecise, many people shy away from them. Today, however, I need such words. Rather than abandon it, I do my best to rescue the old language from captivity by literalists, who strip it of all poetry, diminishing its symbolic nuance and vitality. Though easily reduced to an idol, God is still the biggest word I know. It points toward a power beyond our own yet mysteriously present within us. I am no longer ashamed to mine the poetry of my forebears in search of touchstones for my faith.” - Forrest Church, *Bringing God Home*, p. 23

#### Check-in

*Share briefly what has been on your mind lately or your highs and lows since we last met.*

#### Readings/Quotes - FISH BOWL!

*Cut out each quote and put them in a bowl. Have group members take turns pulling a quote out of the bowl to read to the group. As each person reads their quote, others should close their eyes and deep listen.*

“God is an unutterable sigh, planted in the depths of the soul.” -Jean Paul

“I believe in God, but not as one thing, not as an old man in the sky. I believe that what people call God is something in all of us. I believe that what Jesus and Mohammed and Buddha and all the rest said was right. It's just that the translations have gone wrong.” - John Lennon

In response to a question about whether or not he believed in God, Albert Einstein said: “Your question [about God] is the most difficult in the world. It is not a question I can answer simply with yes or no. I am not an Atheist. I do not know if I can define myself as a Pantheist. The problem involved is too vast for our limited minds. May I not reply with a parable? The human mind, no matter how highly trained, cannot grasp the universe. We are in the position of a little child, entering a huge library whose walls are covered to the ceiling with books in many different tongues. The child knows that someone must have written those books. It does not know who or how. It does not understand the languages in which they are written. The child notes a definite plan in the arrangement of the books, a mysterious order, which it does not comprehend, but only dimly suspects. That, it seems to me, is the attitude of the human mind, even the greatest and most cultured, toward God. We see a universe marvelously arranged, obeying certain laws, but we understand the laws only dimly. Our limited minds cannot grasp the mysterious force that sways the constellations.”

“We need to find God, and he cannot be found in noise and restlessness. God is the friend of silence. See how nature - trees, flowers, grass- grows in silence; see the stars, the moon and the sun, how they move in silence... We need silence to be able to touch souls.” - Mother Teresa

“No pessimist ever discovered the secrets of the stars, or sailed to an uncharted land, or opened a new heaven to the human spirit.” - Helen Keller

“Humanism teaches us that it is immoral to wait for God to act for us. We must act to stop the wars and the crimes and the brutality of this and future ages. We have powers of a remarkable kind. We have a high degree of freedom in choosing what we will do. Humanism tells us that

whatever our philosophy of the universe may be, ultimately the responsibility for the kind of world in which we live rests with us.” - Kenneth Phifer, UU Minister

“God, to me, is the Spirit of a spiritual universe in which all life shares an associated and interdependent destiny. God is the glorious sum of the living process, in which I, as a person, live, strive, and die. God is the existence I share with all that is or is to be.” - Jack Mendelsohn, UU Minister

“God is not an all-determining creator. Each creature is self-creating in relationship with all other creatures, including God. So we are co-creators with the Divine. We make God, as much as God makes us.” - Rebecca Parker, UU Minister

“When I am asked if I believe in God, I am either impatient or amused and frequently decline to reply. All I know, all I want to know is that I have found in my relations with others and in my glad beholding of the universe a reality of truth, goodness and beauty and that I am trying to make my life as best I can dedication to this reality.” - John Haynes Holmes, UU Minister (helped found the NAACP and ACLU)

“I would say that God is the creative force that has cast each of us into this world. God is the love in and between people. God does not willfully direct hurricanes onto the beaches of the unjust. God is the moral conscience that demands we walk these beaches hand-in-hand, building together where hurricanes have destroyed.” - Jane Mauldin

“I believe in God, but I don’t believe God cares about us...God doesn’t watch or know us. God has no eyes to see, no mind to know, except in the sense that you and I have eyes and minds and we are a part of God. And since we are a very limited part, mostly God is blind and unthinking.” - Ricky Hoyt, UU Minister

### **Spiritual Exercise:**

This month try to suspend **your** beliefs about theism, atheism, and agnosticism. Talk to a friend whose beliefs are opposite yours. (Ex: If you believe in a God(s), talk to an atheist or agnostic.) Ask that person what their view on God is and how they draw strength from their beliefs. As they describe their thoughts, close your eyes, imagine you are in their shoes and try to feel what they feel about God, and just *deep listen*. This exercise is about hearing someone else’s beliefs and reserving judgment about their beliefs. All views on God and religions are just beliefs, and as UU’s we must practice our principles that every person has a right to a free search for truth and meaning (Principle 4) and the acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations (Principle 3).

### **Questions to Contemplate:**

- ⤴ Richard Dawkins created a scale which can be used to quantify personal beliefs, where 1 represents a person who is 100% a theist, 4 represents a person who is a pure agnostic (believes there is an equal probability of a god existing and not existing), and 7 represents a person who considers themselves 100% atheist. What is your personal truth about the existence of a god or gods? Where would you place yourself on Dawkins’ scale?
- ⤴ Both theism and atheism require belief and faith, since there is no proof either way confirming or denying the existence of a god or gods. What specifics have confirmed your beliefs?
- ⤴ What significant role does this belief in theism, atheism, or agnosticism have in your life and your interactions with people who have other beliefs?

- △ How as a UU, can you be kinder and listen to others beliefs and accept that it is okay for them to have beliefs different than your own?
- △ Across the board in science, the more we learn about the world around us the more complex it becomes. Some people use science to explain a world without a creator, while others see the complexity of the universe as proof positive of a creator. Where do you stand in this debate? Whether a believer or atheist, do you believe that the other side of the argument is just as powerful as yours? Do you think science will ever provide us with the answer to this age-old question?

### **Sitting in Silence:**

*Take a few moments to sit quietly and gather your thoughts on this topic.*

### **Sharing / Deep Listening:**

*As you are moved to do so, please share your thoughts and experiences on this topic. As each person shares their thoughts, others in the group should practice “deep listening”.*

### **Reflection:**

*This is a time to respond briefly to something another person said or to relate additional thoughts that may have occurred as others shared.*

### **Extinguishing the Chalice:**

“I thought I heard the voice of the spirit cry:

Come and find me. You won’t have to look hard. Come to where the ocean touches the shore; find me in the bright-light promise of morning on the waves; look carefully at the bubbles breaking on the wet sand—there I am. Turn over the glistening rock, slippery with its cushion of seaweed—here I am. Hear the gulls crying news of the endless ocean—that is my news, my voice. Lie with me in the tall, green marsh grass; see my footprints in the sand you have walked upon. Do not say I am lost, for you have found me. I am here.” - Rev. Elizabeth Tarbox

### **Additional Resources:**

Explanation of Humanism - [http://www.americanhumanist.org/Humanism/What\\_is\\_Humanism](http://www.americanhumanist.org/Humanism/What_is_Humanism)

Parody of Theism vs. Humanism done by Davies Church:

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1rgQmZK\\_ASo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1rgQmZK_ASo)

Many musicians create musical testimonials. Below are two such songs: John Lennon’s “Imagine” (considered a Humanist anthem) and India Arie’s “God is Real”.

### **John Lennon - Imagine**

Imagine there's no heaven  
It's easy if you try  
No hell below us  
Above us only sky  
Imagine all the people living for today

Imagine there's no countries  
It isn't hard to do  
Nothing to kill or die for  
And no religion too

Imagine all the people living life in peace

You, you may say  
I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one  
I hope someday you'll join us  
And the world will be as one

Imagine no possessions  
I wonder if you can  
No need for greed or hunger  
A brotherhood of man  
Imagine all the people sharing all the world

You, you may say  
I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one  
I hope someday you'll join us  
And the world will live as one

### **India Arie - God Is Real**

Sweetest honey to the brightest flower the largest plant  
Into the smallest atom, snowflakes in the bird kingdom,  
Smaller than the eye can see,  
Bigger than the mind can conceive. (oh)  
Heard a man on the radio today,  
Must confess I disagreed with what he had to say.

How can he not believe that God is real,  
I don't understand how he could feel that way. When  
There's earth air water and fire.  
So many different flowers, sunshine and rain shower,  
So many different crystals and hills and volcanoes.

[Chorus]

That's how I know that God is real  
(all of this is not by chance)  
That's how I know that God is real  
(all of this is not by chance)  
That's how I know that God is real  
(I know this is not by chance)  
That's how I know that God is real  
That's how I know that God is real.

In Saint Lucia, I jumped in the water.  
For the first time I understood its power.  
As I swam, I was cleansed.  
If I had any doubts, this experience

cleared them.

Now I know for sure that God is real.  
I know that it's the truth by the way it feels (uh-huh)

Cause I saw starfish and sponges,  
Fish and black trumpets,  
So many different colors I stayed  
Out there for hours and I only saw a fraction of a fraction,  
Of the deep of the deep,  
Of the great blue wide.  
It Brought a tear to my eye.

[Chorus]

We're made of the same stuff as the moon and stars.  
The ocean's salt water just like my tears are.  
You feel me the sun rises and sets everyday without fail

That's how I know that God is real  
(all of this is not by chance),  
That's how I know that God is real  
(all of this is not by chance),  
That's how I know that God is real  
(all of this is not by chance),  
That's how I know that God is real

Earth, air, water, and fire  
Earth, air, water, and fire  
Earth, air, water, and fire  
That's how i know that God is real

***What If God Was One Of Us - Joan Osbourne***

If God had a name, what would it be  
And would you call it to his face  
If you were faced with him in all his glory  
What would you ask if you had just one question

And yeah yeah God is great yeah yeah God is good  
yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah

What if God was one of us  
Just a slob like one of us  
Just a stranger on the bus  
Trying to make his way home

If God had a face what would it look like  
And would you want to see  
If seeing meant that you would have to believe  
In things like heaven and in Jesus and the saints and all the prophets

And yeah yeah god is great yeah yeah god is good  
yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah

What if God was one of us

Just a slob like one of us  
Just a stranger on the bus  
Trying to make his way home  
He's trying to make his way home  
Back up to heaven all alone  
Nobody calling on the phone  
Except for the pope maybe in Rome

And yeah yeah God is great yeah yeah God is good  
yeah yeah yeah yeah

What if god was one of us  
Just a slob like one of us  
Just a stranger on the bus  
Trying to make his way home  
Just trying to make his way home  
Like a holy rolling stone  
Back up to heaven all alone  
Just trying to make his way home  
Nobody calling on the phone  
Except for the pope maybe in Rome