

Gratitude as Spiritual Practice

Covenant Group Session, Countryside Church UU, Palatine, IL (2009)

Adapted from materials by UU churches of San Jose, Albuquerque, and Palatine, IL

Preliminaries

Chalice Lighting (Participant lights chalice while this is read as a shared reading)

From Ann Sexton, *The Awful Rowing Towards God*

There is joy in all:

in the hair I brush each morning

in the Cannon towel, newly washed, that I rub my body with each morning

in the chapel of eggs I cook each morning,

in the outcry from the kettle that heats my coffee each morning,

in the spoon and the chair that cry "hello there, Anne" each morning,

in the godhead of the table that I set my silver, plate, cup upon each morning.

All this is God, right here in my pea-green house, each morning

and I mean, though often forget, to give thanks,

to faint down by the kitchen table in a prayer of rejoicing as the holy birds at the
kitchen window peck into their marriage of seeds.

So while I think of it, let me paint a thank-you on my palm for this God, this

Laughter of the morning, lest it go unspoken.

The Joy that isn't shared, I've heard, dies young.

Check-in

Meditation

Instruct for silence. Then, instruct about the Litany of Gratitude, inviting those who wish to participate to read one item from their list, going around the circle relatively quickly, until all lists are complete. Remember, items should be 1-3 words

(Silence)

Deep Sharing/Deep Listening

In the respectful process of deep sharing and deep listening, let's share our reflections on gratitude. These can be ideas you had from the pre-thinking you did, or experiences, thoughts, observations that have just occurred to you.

Questions from Pre-Thinking

- Are you as grateful as you would like to be?
- What keeps you from your gratitude?
- What does gratitude feel like?
- In what ways do you practice your gratitude?

Optional Questions for Facilitator—for Open Discussion

- As you go about a day with a grateful attitude, what small things do you notice that you might have missed?
- Gratitude is about keeping an open mind. It is about not having your mind so set on an apple, that you can't be grateful when given a luscious pear. How have you found ways to be grateful for the ways that life turned out, rather than the ways you expected it to be?
- Have you found ways to be grateful for difficult people or circumstances?
- How do you cultivate a thankful heart?

Check-out

Closing Reading/Extinguishing the Chalice

Facilitator: Gratitude is also about thanking those around us. During this week, thank someone who deserves but rarely gets your thanks. Now, to close our discussion, please take turns reading a quote as we go around the circle. This can be seen as closure to the "Litany of Gratitude" with which we opened this session.

"There is a calmness to a life lived in Gratitude, a quiet joy."
-- Ralph H. Blum

"It is gratefulness that makes the soul great." Rabbi Joshua Heschel

"If the only prayer you ever say in your entire life is 'thank you,' it will be enough."
--Meister Eckhart

It is the wise person who sees near and far as the same,
Does not despise the small or value the great.
--Chuang Tzu

Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life.
.—Melodie Beattie

In relation to others, gratitude is good manners.
In relation to ourselves, it is a habit of the heart and a spiritual discipline.
--Daphne Rose Kingma

Gratitude is heaven itself.
--William Blake

Thank you for the reflection of Your Smile in all we see.
--Kenneth Kurtz

For all that has been – Thanks!
For all that shall be – Yes!
-- Dag Hammarskjold

So may we be.

Participant “Pre-Thinking” for Covenant Group Session: “Gratitude as Spiritual Practice”

In the next session we will explore various aspects of gratitude. Think about gratitude as a spiritual practice. Gratitude is a way of being in the world that goes beyond thank-you notes. A wise person once said, “Gratitude is like a flashlight. If you go out into your yard at night and turn on a flashlight, you suddenly can see what’s there. It was always there, but you couldn’t see it in the dark.” (From Dawna Markova, Attitudes of Gratitude.) Together, we’re going to see what we can see.

Meditation Reading By Max Coots

Let us give thanks for a bounty of people.

For generous friends with hearts and smiles as bright as their blossoms;

For feisty friends as tart as apples;

For continuous friends, who, like scallions and cucumbers, keep reminding us that we've had them;

For crotchety friend, as sour as rhubarb and as indestructible;

For handsome friends, who are as gorgeous as eggplants and as elegant as a row of corn, and the others, as plain as potatoes and as good for you;

For funny friends, who are as silly as Brussels sprouts and as amusing as Jerusalem artichokes, and serious friends, as complex as cauliflowers and as intricate as onions.

For friends as unpretentious as cabbages, as subtle as summer squash, as persistent as parsley, as delightful as dill, as endless as zucchini, and who, like parsnips, can be counted on to see you throughout the winter;

For old friends, nodding like sunflowers in the evening time, and young friends coming on as fast as radishes;

For loving friends, who wind around us like tendrils and hold us, despite our blights, wilts, and witherings;

And finally, for those friends now gone, like gardens past that have been harvested, and who fed us in their times that we might have life thereafter;

For all these we give thanks.

An Assignment to Bring With You

To open our discussion, we will create our own “Litany of Gratitude.” To participate, make a list of 15 things you’re grateful for. Each one should be only 1-4 words.

“Pre-thinking” Food for Thought

- Are you as grateful as you would like to be?
- What keeps you from your gratitude?
- What does gratitude feel like?
- In what ways do you practice your gratitude?