

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website

Small Group Ministry

Optimism

First Parish Church of Stow and Acton, MA, October 2019

Opening Words and Chalice Lighting

“My friends, love is better than anger. Hope is better than fear. Optimism is better than despair. So let us be loving, hopeful and optimistic. And we'll change the world.” – *Jack Layton*

Check-in/Sharing: This is the time to mention briefly any major issues or events on your mind that you would like to share.

Topic: Optimism

Everyone knows an eternal optimist--the chipper person who always seems to have a spring in their step, a smile on their face, and a song in their heart, even if they're standing in the middle of a burning building. Then there's the dark-clouded pessimist, the one who can give you an hour-long lecture on the real problem with adorable puppies.

Of course most of us fall somewhere between these extremes. Many of us have never even considered where in that spectrum we find ourselves; maybe it's not a fixed point, maybe we just slide through that continuum depending on the current headlines in our lives or the company we're keeping.

In this session we'll explore how we think about the origins of our basic outlook on life, where it has taken us (both positives and negatives), and whether or not we think our outlook should, or could, change.

“What day is it?” asked Pooh.

“It's today,” squeaked Piglet.

“My favorite day,” said Pooh.” — *A.A. Milne*

“I am fundamentally an optimist. Whether that comes from nature or nurture, I cannot say. Part of being optimistic is keeping one's head pointed toward the sun, one's feet moving forward. There were many dark moments when my faith in humanity was sorely tested, but I would not and could not give myself up to despair. That way lays defeat and death.” — *Nelson Mandela*

“For myself I am an optimist - it does not seem to be much use to be anything else.” — *Winston S. Churchill*

“Be of good cheer. Do not think of today's failures, but of the success that may come tomorrow. You have set yourselves a difficult task, but you will succeed if you persevere; and you will find a joy in overcoming obstacles. Remember, no effort that we make to attain something beautiful is ever lost.” — *Helen Keller*

“Faith is taking the first step, even when you don't see the whole staircase.”— *Martin Luther King, Jr.*

“I have never had to face anything that could overwhelm the native optimism and stubborn perseverance I was blessed with.” -- *Sonia Sotomayor*

Possible Questions for Discussion:

- Do you think of yourself as an optimist or a pessimist? If so, why? Do you think others see you differently than you see yourself?
- Could you share any stories from your personal history of role models you had for optimism or pessimism?
- Could you explore with us ways in which your optimism, realism and pessimism vary by area? (e.g. time estimates, difficulty in solving a problem, how people will respond to you, sticking to resolutions, etc.)
- Can you share experiences where you tried to change your outlook to be more optimistic? How did you do it?
- Have you attempted to shift someone else's outlook to be more optimistic? How? Did it work?
- Can you describe any negative consequences you've had from taking an optimistic viewpoint on something?

(Group will take a few minutes to consider topic and questions and then share).

Wrapping Up: How did you like this topic and session?

Closing Words:

“It only ends once. Anything that happens before that is just progress.” -- *Jacob, Lost*