

**WHAT I BELIEVE ABOUT HUMAN NATURE**

First Universalist Church Unitarian Universalist, Auburn, ME, Rev. Glenn H. Turner, March  
2015

**OPENING WORDS & CHALICE LIGHTING:**

We are all wanderers passing through,  
guests of the universe,  
and our job as a religious clan is to share earth's bounty  
and to set a warm, inviting place for one another.

- Carolyn and Tom Owen-Towle

**CHECK IN: (40 - 50 minutes)**

What you share may be about your physical or spiritual health,  
cares or concerns for loved ones, issues you are facing.

Each person in the group speaks uninterrupted, for five minutes each, if there  
is time remaining, additional sharing and responses are welcome.

**FOCUS: WHAT I BELIEVE ABOUT HUMAN NATURE**

What we believe about human nature matters. It affects our theology, our politics, our education,  
our parenting. Are people born good or bad? Are we improvable? Do we need more laws to  
constrain us, or more freedom to explore who we can be? Spare the rod and spoil the child? Or,  
treat children with kindness? Our Unitarian Universalist heritage emphasized early on both  
God's love and the goodness of human beings. Continual war, greed, and violence challenge our  
assumptions. How do we feel about each other? Here are a few quotations to ponder.

“Assume friendship.”

- Gilbert Bordillon

Human nature is complex. Even if we do have inclinations toward violence, we also have  
inclinations to empathy, to cooperation, to self-control.

[Steven Pinker](#)

“It's really a wonder that I haven't dropped all my ideals, because they seem so absurd and  
impossible to carry out. Yet I keep them, because in spite of everything, I still believe that people  
are really good at heart.”

— [Anne Frank](#), *The Diary of a Young Girl*

“In Adam's fall, we sinned all.”

` New England Primer

“...tell them that we have some good in us, too. And the only thing worth living for is the good.  
That's why we've got to make sure we pass it on.”

— [Billie Letts](#), *Where the Heart Is*

Man's mind is like a store of idolatry and superstition; so much so that if a man believes his own  
mind it is certain that he will forsake God and forge some idol in his own brain.

[John Calvin](#)

Emerson was an optimist about a lot of things-- about the goodness of human nature, and the goodness of the universe as a whole, among other things. But he was also an optimist about our ability to know the truth. Emerson's basic message is that if we will just be self-reliant, if we will trust our deepest instincts and most basic beliefs, we cannot go wrong.

- George Miller

Discussion:

Do you believe people are basically good?

If we are basically good, why do we stray?

Is it nature or nurture that makes us good or bad?

What is it that is good about human nature? What is it that is evil? Is evil too strong a word to describe our destructive tendencies?

What has to happen for us to be saved? (Think liberally on this one)

LIKES AND WISHES

CLOSING WORDS

"Each moment is a chance for us to make peace with the world, to make peace possible for the world, to make happiness possible for the world. ... Every thought you produce, anything you say, any action you

do, it bears your signature."

- Thich Nhat Hanh -

Breathe deeply, walk lightly...and go in peace.

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website  
**WHAT I BELIEVE ABOUT HUMAN NATURE (continued)**

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What we believe about human nature matters. But, sometimes it seems as if we think of some  
people as human and others less than human. Howard Thurman was an extraordinary, and  
compassionate black preacher and author. I recall his story of how a young white girl once stuck  
needles into him. When he expressed his pain, she replied: "You can't feel." How do we  
engage others? Here are two quotations to ponder.

"Assume friendship." - Gilbert Bordillon

"When you extend your goodwill in every direction, regardless of circumstances, you begin to  
see that we are all one." - Lao-Tzu

**Discussion:**

If we are basically good, why do we stray?  
What is it that is good about human nature? What is it that is evil? Is evil too strong a  
word to describe our destructive tendencies?  
What keeps us from extending our compassion to others outside our family, religion,  
race, sexual orientation, nation?  
What makes the "other" other in a way that challenges your compassion or sympathy?  
What has been your personal experience in dealing with the other and becoming more  
inclusive? What areas do you still have to work at? Did you ever buy into stereotyping?  
How did you move beyond it?  
What experiences in your life have modified your prejudices?

**LIKES AND WISHES**

**CLOSING WORDS**

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