



Generosity (Soul Matters Edition)

Covenant Group Session Plan

Greenville Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, Greenville, South Carolina

Based on material from Soul Matters-Small Group: The Gift of Generosity - November 2023

Compiled and adapted by Jim Hennigan, October 2023

Welcome, Chalice Lighting: *Here we are, together in this space. By our love and by our covenant, we make this a holy place. We light the chalice of Unitarian Universalism in honor of the light that lives in each of us, the light that shines among us, and the light we bring into the world.*

Personal Check In: Briefly share something from your life since we last met and how you are feeling now.

Opening Words: Generosity transforms us. Generosity connects us. Generosity challenges us. These are probably not the usual words we pair with generosity. And maybe that's the point. Maybe the invitation this month is not just to be more generous, but to notice how generosity is bigger than we think. – *Soul Matters*

Questions to prompt and guide discussion:

1. Transform. Connect. Challenge. Can you relate, from your own experience, how one (or more) of these concepts have been associated with acts of generosity? Do these associations happen differently based on the times you've been on the "receiving" or "giving" end of instances of generosity?
2. Is it reasonable or fair to *expect* generosity from others? Was there a time when someone (or others) denied you generosity that you sought? If so, how did the *withholding* of generosity transform you?
3. How have you learned about generosity? Who taught you? How has your understanding of it evolved?
4. Generosity is often tied to sharing wealth, valued objects, or someone's time, but it's challenging to be generous with *yourself* in those ways. Have you experienced or expressed generosity in other forms? How did these alternative expressions of generosity compare to more customary types of generosity?

Readings – see next page

Sharing - This is a time to speak without interruption and for deep listening. Deep listening means no interrupting, no fixing, no saving, no advising, and no setting each other straight. Please share one or more responses to the session questions.

(After each person has shared once without cross-talk, this is usually a good time to take a brief break)

Open Discussion - This is a time to respond to something another person said about the topic or to relate additional thoughts that may have occurred as others shared their thoughts on this topic. Continue to practice deep listening.

Closing reading: "Complete possession is proved only by giving. All you are unable to give possesses you."
– **André Gide, French author and awardee of 1947 Nobel Prize in Literature**

Announcements / Plans

Personal Check Out: As we close today, how are you feeling now?

Extinguish the Chalice *We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth, the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment. These we carry in our hearts until we meet again.*

READINGS

Generosity Transforms: A person notices we forgot to bring our bus pass and pays for us before we have to ask. The neighbor shovels our part of the driveway while she does hers. The nurse takes a half hour to sit with us while we wait for the results. It wasn't her job, and she doesn't have the time, but she did it anyway. In those simple moments, the world suddenly feels less cold. A crack sets in. – *Soul Matters (November 2023)*.

Generosity Connects: Charity is taken from our "extra." Generosity is taken from what is essential to us. It's the difference between giving our loose change and giving of ourselves. And when you hand over a part of you to someone else, you're tethered. Your vulnerability meets their vulnerability. You haven't just helped; you've shown you care. Both of you feel seen. And less alone. – *Soul Matters (November 2023)*.

Generosity Challenges: True generosity doesn't just ask us to care for people, it also asks us to call them out. When you look at life through the lens of generosity, charity loses its sheen and many of those who have much are exposed as hoarding what others need. It's sneaky that way. Generosity undermines our comfortable views and invites justice in. It doesn't just ask us to be kind to others, it also asks us to question why some have so much more than others. – *Soul Matters (November 2023)*.

As we see ourselves as the world, as we see the oneness of life, the whole world becomes available. – **Bernard Glassman Rick Fields, *Instructions to the Cook: A Zen Master's Lesson In Leading A Life That Matters* (1996)**

Gracious acceptance is an art – an art which most never bother to cultivate. We think that we have to learn how to give, but we forget about accepting things, which can be much harder than giving.... Accepting another person's gift is allowing them to express their feelings for you. – **Alexander McCall Smith, British legal scholar and author of fiction**

I tell my students, 'When you get these jobs that you have been so brilliantly trained for, just remember that your real job is that if you are free, you need to free somebody else. If you have some power, then your job is to empower somebody else. This is not just a grab-bag candy game.' – **Toni Morrison, interview for *O: The Oprah Magazine* (November 2003)**

The ultimate expression of generosity is not in giving of what you have, but in giving of who you are. – **Dr. Johnetta Betsch Cole, American anthropologist and educator**

Too many have dispensed with generosity in order to practice charity. – **Albert Camus, Algerian-French philosopher, author, dramatist, journalist, and political activist**

Attention is the rarest and purest form of generosity.... Attention, taken to its highest degree, is the same thing as prayer. It presupposes faith and love. – **Simone Weil, French philosopher**

Oh my life is arm in arm with you / When you've got trouble I've got trouble too.
So I'm wise what do you need / I kiss you awake when you've had a bad dream
And I tell you a story make it up as I go, / Or I sing you a song that I know that you know.
It goes 'my heart is tangled all around you, / When you've got trouble I've got trouble too.'
– **Liz Longley, "When You've Got Trouble" (2010)**

When criticism is good will, when it's for the purpose of having a person be all she can be, criticism is love. – **Alan Shapiro, Poet and English Professor**

A student went to his master and said, 'I am very discouraged. What should I do?' The Zen Master replied, 'Encourage others.' – **Nakagawa Roshi, Taiwanese-born Japanese rōshi and Zen Buddhist master**