



Staying Positive in a Negative World

Covenant Group Session Plan

Greenville Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, Greenville, SC

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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: I have for many years endeavored to make this vital truth clear, and still people marvel when I tell them that I am happy. They imagine my limitations weigh heavily upon my spirit, and chain me to the rock of despair. Yet, it seems to me, happiness has very little to do with the senses. If we make up our minds that this is a drab and purposeless universe, it will be that and nothing else. On the other hand, if we believe that the earth is ours, and that the sun and moon hang in the sky for our delight, there will be joy upon the hills and gladness in our fields because the Artist in our souls glorifies creation. Surely it gives dignity to life to believe that we are born into this world for noble ends, and that we have a higher destiny that can be accomplished with the narrow limits of this physical life. ~Helen Keller

Questions to prompt and guide discussion:

1. Sometimes it may seem that the unpredictable happens and we find ourselves caught in a maelstrom not of our making. Have you ever been in this situation? How did you avoid the feelings of helplessness, powerlessness, confusion and/or despair in which we may find ourselves?
2. In this high tech world in which we are living, filled with internet, social media, 'instant' worldwide news and such, how do you manage to remain positive in the face of all the negativity that is thrown so graphically and constantly at us?
3. Negativity is actually necessary, for without negativity, we cannot grow. However, too much negativity can stop us in our tracks. How have you been able to use a negative situation to turn your life around and grow from it?
4. How has being a UU helped you live a more positive life?

Sitting in Silence: (Reflect on questions just posed as you prepare to hear readings.)

Readings: Words from the Common Bowl (see below)

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 the Sharing 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 shares their thoughts on this topic. Continue to practice Deep Listening.

Closing Reading:

Each morning when I open my eyes, I say to myself, I, not events, have the power to make me happy or unhappy today. I can choose which it shall be. Yesterday is dead, tomorrow hasn't arrived yet. I have just one day: today and I'm going to be happy in it.

~Groucho Marx

Announcements/ Plans:

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

Extinguish the Chalice

READINGS:

The greatest discovery of our generation is that human beings can alter their lives by altering their attitudes of mind. As you think, so shall you be.

~William James

Each problem has hidden in it an opportunity that it literally dwarfs the problem. The greatest success stories were created by people who recognized a problem and turned it into an opportunity. Joseph Sugarman
Being miserable is a habit; being happy is a habit, and the choice is yours.

~Tom Hopkins

I truly believe that everything we do and everyone that we meet is put in our path for a purpose. There are no accidents; we are all teachers if we are willing to pay attention to the lessons we learn, trust our positive instincts, not be afraid to take risks or wait for some miracle to come knocking at our door.

~Marla Gibbs

When you squeeze an orange, you get orange juice because that is what's inside. The very same principle is true about you. When someone squeezes you – puts pressure on you – what comes out is what is inside. And if you don't like what is inside, you can change it by changing your thoughts>

~ Dr. Wayne Dyer

Whether you think you can or think you can't, you're right. ~Henry Ford

Don't let someone who gave up their dreams talk you out of yours. ~Zig Ziglar

The most common way people give up their power is by thinking they don't have any.

~Alice Walker.

The greatest discovery of all time is that a person can change his future by merely changing his attitude.

~Oprah Winfrey

Welcome every morning with a smile. Look on the new day as another special gift from your Creator, another golden opportunity to complete what you were unable to finish yesterday. Be a self-starter. Let your first hope set the theme of success and positive action that's certain to echo through your entire day. Today will never happen again. Don't waste it with a false start or no start at all. You were not born to fail.

~Og Mandino

Each [of us] is building our own world. We both build from within and we attract from without. Thought is the force with which we build, for thoughts are forces. Like builds like and like attracts like. In the degree that thought is spiritualized, it becomes more subtle and powerful in its workings. This spiritualizing is within the power of all. Everything is first worked out in the unseen before it is manifested in the seen; in the spiritual before it is manifested in the material. ~Ralph Waldo Trine

I have no romantic attachment to suffering as a source of insight or virtue. I would like to see more smiles, more laughter, more hugs, more joy. Once our basic material needs are met – in my utopia, anyway – life becomes a perpetual celebration in which everyone has a talent to contribute. But we cannot levitate ourselves into that blessed condition by wishing it. We need to brace ourselves for a struggle against terrifying obstacles, both of our own making and imposed by the natural world. *And the first step is to recover from the mass delusion that is positive thinking.* ~Barbara Ehrenreich, UU Minister

The imagined is what tends to become real (French surrealist Andre Breton). If we imagine a goal, then even if we don't right now know how to reach it, our focus primes us to recognize an opportunity, a potential pathway we might otherwise overlook. ~Guy Newland, UU Minister

I think that life is difficult. People have challenges. Family members get sick, people get older, you don't always get the job or the promotion that you want. And really, life is about your resilience and your ability to go through your life and all of the ups and downs with a positive attitude. ~Jennifer Hyman

...the capacity to be resilient, to respond to difficulty with development, is rooted in many diverse factors, but it consistently depends on one thing: the meaning you, the individual, make of who you are. When suffering leads to meanings that unlock the mysteries of life it strengthens compassion, gratitude, joy and wisdom. When suffering leads to barriers and retaliations and hatred, it empties you of hope and love, and then misery will lead to misery... ~Polly Young-Eisendrath, PhD

Constant positive thinking, some researchers say, means a person can never relax – because that's the moment a "negative" thought might squirm its way to the surface. And insisting that "everything works out" offers positive thinkers no back-up plan for when things don't. These criticisms are backed by a lot of research. One study found that when people think others expect them not to feel negative emotions, they end up feeling more negative emotions more frequently. Another study found that people with low self-esteem who repeated a positive self-statement ("I'm a lovable person") ended up feeling worse than people who didn't repeat the phrase. Some researchers have linked the pressure to "think positive" to personal self-blame ("I can't be happy, it must be my fault for not being positive enough") Denial is another potential side effect of positive thinking, and some experts even blame the current economic crisis partly on people's refusal to consider potential negative outcomes.

~Laura Newcomer, March 27, 2015, *Why Positive Thinking Doesn't (Always) Work*,

<https://greatist.com/happiness/positive-thinking-negative-benefits>