



The Gift of Years

Covenant Group Session Plan

Greenville Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, Greenville, South Carolina

Title from the book by Joan Chittister, author, co-chair Global Peace Initiative of Women, Benedictine nun.

Original session from "Aging" by Starr King Unitarian Universalist Church, Haywood, CA.

Revised by Betsy Beach, February 2023

Opening words: A blessing of these years is that we find ourselves at a time of life when we can finally concentrate on all the things we have ever wanted to learn and know and, as a result, become an even more important, more focused, more spiritual person than we have ever really been before. -Joan Chittister, *The Gift of Years*

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

Questions to prompt and guide discussion:

1. What has been your experience with aging over the past decade of your life? What surprises has it held?
2. How can we approach aging in a life-affirming way?
3. Has anyone served as a model for you regarding ways to grow older? What about them do you admire? What has that person taught you? What qualities in them do you want to emulate?
4. What is the greatest blessing that getting older has given you?

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

Readings- 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 responses to one or more of the session questions.

(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:

Look To This Day

Look to this day!

For it is life, the very life of life.

In its brief course lie all the verities

And realities of existence:

The bliss of growth

The glory of action,

The splendor of beauty;

For yesterday is but a dream,

And tomorrow is only a vision;

But today, well-lived, makes every yesterday

A dream of happiness

And every tomorrow a vision of hope.

Look well, therefore, to this day.

- attributed to Kalidasa. Hindu poet, 4th-5th C

Announcements/Plans

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 are together again.

Readings

A blessing of these years is that we can come to understand that it is the quality of what we think and say that makes us valuable members of society, not how fast or busy we are. - Joan Chittister

Grow old with me! The best is yet to be...-Robert Browning, poet

I have never liked the phrase that says we're just made of dust and return to dust. We are energy, which is interchangeable with light. We are fire, water and earth. We are air and atoms and quarks. Moreover, we are dreams, hopes and fears held together by wisdom and driven apart by folly. So much more than dust. The biblical verse should say, "Miracle thou art and to Mystery returneth." - Robert Fulghum, *From Beginning to End*

The most important thing about aging is this: If you really feel that you want to have an off-the-shoulder blouse and some big beads and thong sandals and a dirndl skirt and a magnolia in your hair, do it. Even if you're wrinkled. - Maya Angelou

Age is an issue of mind over matter. If you don't mind, it doesn't matter. - Mark Twain

You don't stop laughing because you grow old. You grow old because you stop laughing. -George Bernard Shaw

There is a fountain of youth; it is your mind, your talents, the creativity you bring to your life, and the lives of people you love. When you learn to tap this source, you will have truly defeated age. - Sophia Loren

Age is just a number. Life and aging are the greatest gifts that we could possibly have. - Cicely Tyson

A blessing of these years is that we can, if we will, make them something glorious, a kind of shooting star across the sky of the human race. - Joan Chittister