



## The Practice of Freedom

Covenant Group Session Plan

Greenville Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, Greenville, South Carolina

*Based on material from Soul Matters-Small Group: Living Love Through the Practice of Freedom,  
Compiled & adapted by Marie McIntyre, June 2025*

### Optional Spiritual Practice

*This month's spiritual practice can be found on the last page of the handout. If you choose to complete this activity, please feel free to share your experience during our discussion.*

### Welcome & Chalice Lighting

You must learn one thing.

The world was made to be free in.

Give up all the other worlds

except the one to which you belong.

Sometimes it takes darkness and the sweet

confinement of your aloneness

to learn

anything or anyone

that does not bring you alive

is too small for you.

[\*David Whyte\*](#) (author & poet)

### Personal Check In

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

### Opening Words

Freedom has two faces. According to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, “freedom from” refers to the absence of obstacles or barriers, while “freedom to” is the ability to feel in control and take positive action. “Freedom from” may mean leaving behind something you wish to escape, but “freedom to” allows you to move in a direction which will enhance your life.

True freedom, therefore, is not just about removing constraints – it also means being able to follow a path which will gladden your soul. As Unitarian Universalists, we don’t simply ask, “what do we need to get away from?”. We try to focus on the deeper question of “what do we want to run toward?”.

Our greatest frustrations in life often come from self-imposed barriers which block us from taking an untraveled path or making a different choice. So what does this mean for you? Are there areas of life where you keep saying “no” when you really want to shout “yes”? And if so, what might you do about that? ~Adapted from *Soul Matters, The Practice of Freedom*

### Questions for reflection & discussion

1. During your lifetime, when have you felt the most free? The least free? How did you feel about those experiences?
2. Can you describe a time when you chose to quit something in the hope of increasing your freedom? How did that work out?
3. Have you ever had the feeling that you were living in someone else’s story? How did that affect you?

4. How has growing older affected your sense of freedom? Has it increased, decreased, or both?
5. Are there ways in which simplifying your life might bring you more freedom?

## Readings

The bird you put inside a cage, you will have to find it another name, for it is no longer a bird. ~[Shenaz Patel](#) (author)

Had I not created my whole world, I would certainly have died in other people's. ~[Anaïs Nin](#) (author)

The eyes of others are our prisons, their thoughts our cages. ~[Virginia Woolf](#) (author)

As long as you make an identity for yourself out of pain, you cannot be free of it. ~[Eckhart Tolle](#) (spiritual teacher & author)

I used to feel a lot of guilt or shame about feeling emotions like jealousy or insecurity, but they have been and are a path to my freedom. They show me what work still needs to be done. They are an inner compass for healing. ~[Katie Creel](#) (life coach)

the days are all too heavy; and then we lift together ~[adrienne maree brown](#) (poet)

Some days you have to turn off the phone and step out to the porch and rock all afternoon and allow the sun to tell you what to do... ~[Philip Terman](#) (poet)

Juneteenth exists as a counterpoint to the Fourth of July; the latter heralds the arrival of American ideals, the former stresses just how hard it has been to live up to them. ~[Jelani Cobb](#) (journalist)

**Sitting in silence** - Time to reflect on the questions and readings before sharing begins.

## Sharing

Time for deep listening and speaking without interruption. Deep listening means no interrupting, no fixing, no saving, no advising, and no setting each other straight. Please share your responses to one or more of the session questions or readings.

**(This is usually a good time to take a brief break)**

## Response – Hold Up & Hold Out

Hold up with gratitude one thing that you heard in the sharing that especially struck you as you listened. Hold out how that connects to your life or clarified something about your own situation. Continue to practice deep listening

## Closing reading

Being clear about our core values is a key to freedom. The more distant or blurry our values become, the easier it is to be lured by and trapped in priorities and projects of someone else's making. Keeping your values close and clear will help to keep you free. ~*Soul Matters, The Practice of Freedom*

## 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.

## OPTIONAL SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

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### Finding Carefree Moments

Some stressors cannot be easily avoided: family responsibilities, medical issues, work demands, the loss of a loved one, or simply the constant pressures of daily life. When circumstances become overwhelming, and you begin to feel anxious, angry, or depressed, consider taking an emotional timeout – that is, a brief break to help restore your energy and resilience.

To implement this strategy, start by creating a “carefree escape plan”. List two or three (or more) enjoyable activities which can be accomplished with minimal preparation and time. Examples might include taking a short walk, doing some relaxing reading, listening to a podcast, working out, meditating, sitting in nature, watching a television program, playing with a pet – or any other distracting and calming activity.

Then, the next time you begin to feel overwhelmed, give yourself the gift of a brief escape. Shift your attention away from the pressures and focus on one of your relaxing pastimes for as long as possible. Even better, try to get ahead of the tension by making one of these “carefree moments” part of your daily routine.

Here are some steps to find carefree moments recommended by the Soul Matters session on Freedom. A spiritual exercise to carve out some space to feel carefree.

1. Find a moment of quiet and watch this video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pMWU8dEKwXw>. It may not exactly represent what’s weighing you down but use the emotions that arise from it to spark your imagination and motivation.
2. Spend some time identifying the burden, weight or responsibility from which you need to break free from, if only for a short time.
3. Then come up with and do something to give yourself that escape. Do something that leaves you feeling carefree. Take your time figuring this out. In fact, pushing yourself to identify exactly what allows you to feel carefree is the whole point!

Should you decide to explore this strategy, please feel free to share your experience with your group.