



THE PRACTICE OF JOY

Covenant Group Session Plan

Greenville Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, Greenville, South Carolina

Based on material from Soul Matters-Small Group April 2025: Living Love Through the Practice of Joy

Compiled & adapted by Marie McIntyre, March 2025

Optional Spiritual Practices

*This month we are sharing three spiritual practices that can be found on the last page of the handout.
If you choose to complete any of the activities, please feel free to share your experience during our sharing.*

Welcome & Chalice Lighting

The flame of our chalice
symbolizes the warmth and brightness of our connections.
It lights our way back together again
from our separate lives
and lights our way forward
into the coming days.
~Janet Parsons, UU minister

Personal Check In

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

Opening Words

when I'm sitting in my favorite rocking chair
and the clock on my wall ticking
and the evening sky a particular shade of blue
halfway between periwinkle and midnight,
I feel so content with the way
my feet push off gently against the wooden floor . . .
that I just have to sigh
with the sheer delight of knowing
that everything I want is everything I have.
~Leslea Newman, author & speaker

Questions for reflection & discussion

1. What simple joy rescues you over and over again? (What might you do to make a little bit more room for it in your life?)
2. If you could be given the gift of a completely joy-filled week, how would you spend that time?
3. Which joyful memories from your life do you particularly enjoy revisiting?
4. When have you experienced personal joy by bringing joy to someone else?
5. Have you ever made a conscious decision where you chose joy? How did that decision turn out?

Readings

1. The high value put upon every minute of time, the idea of hurry-hurry as the most important objective of living, is unquestionably the most dangerous enemy of joy. ~Herman Hesse, author
2. I don't think anyone "finds" joy. Rather, we cultivate it by searching for the preciousness of small things, the ordinary miracles that strengthen our hearts so we can keep them open to what is difficult. ~Dawna Markova, author & speaker

3. A person will be called to account on judgment day for every permissible thing they might have enjoyed but did not.
~ Jerusalem Talmud, Kidushin 66b
4. I watched her cooking, from my chair
"It's ready now. Come on," she said...
We ate, talked, and went to bed,
And slept. It was a miracle.
~Donald Hall, poet, excerpt from the poem *Summer Kitchen*
5. I hadn't considered noting the difference between pleasure and joy. I hadn't considered that pleasure was something you could have, but that joy was something you could enter but have to let go.
~Yolande Clark-Jackson, author & speaker
6. When we numb ourselves or rush past grief, we also limit our capacity for joy and presence. You can't selectively numb out one emotion without compromising your ability to feel another. ~Kelly Wendorf, author & coach
7. I slept and dreamt that life was joy.
I awoke and saw that life was service.
I acted and, behold, service was joy.
~Rabindranath Tagore, poet
8. We're only here for a minute. We're here for a little window. And to use that time to catch and share shards of light and laughter and grace seems to me the great story.
~Brian Doyle, author & poet

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 any of the session questions, readings or optional spiritual practices.

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

Even a wounded world is feeding us. Even a wounded world holds us, giving us moments of wonder and joy. I choose joy over despair. Not because I have my head in the sand, but because joy is what the earth gives me daily and I must return the gift.

~Robin Wall Kimmerer, Potawatomi botanist and Author

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 PRACTICES

Your “Memory Box” of Joy

During difficult times, a “memory box” of joyful experiences can help to carry us through. This exercise invites you to consider what might be included in your memory box of joys.

We all travel roads that turn long and lonely sometimes. We make it through such stretches of loss and struggle only because of the joy we carry with us and within us. It’s like having a box of remembered joy that we can draw from for sustenance and strength. This exercise invites you to think about what you want to put in your “box.”

Make a list or poem of what brings you joy. Fill it with past memories as well as current ones. Take your time with it. Maybe even fill it up over a matter of days. The hard part will be keeping your joy list/poem to a single page!

Start by making a list of memories - long ago or recent - which remind you of the joyful moments in your life, then spend some time reflecting on each one. How did remembering those experiences make you feel? Did you recall experiences or events which you had forgotten?

Consider saving your list of joyful memories and reviewing it again whenever you need a quick uplift.

Search Your Photos for Joy (and the Many Types of Joy!)

We often underestimate the amount of joy in our lives. So, remind yourself by going back through all the photos on your camera or computer from the past year and pick out one for each type of joy you can think of. Besides helping you realize how blessed you are with joy; it will enable you to think more deeply about how you relate to joy. And with a better ability to name different forms of joy, the better you will be able to notice them when they show up in your life.

Please feel free to share your experience with this exercise during our Sharing.

The Story of a Joke

Spend some time thinking of your best joke story. Not your best joke. Instead, one of the best stories you have about the role of jokes or a joke in your life. It might be a time when a joke brought needed levity to a sad or tense moment. Or when a great joke came from an unexpected person. Many of us will have stories of practical jokes that testify about how teasing can often be a tender way of saying “I see you” or “I love you.” Or how about a time when a joke went contagious and made everyone gathered laugh uncontrollably, feeding off each other’s joy in an endless loop.

So, what’s your joke story?! Come to your group ready to share it and why it means so much to you.

Please feel free to share your experience with this exercise during our Sharing.