

"Thank You for Your Loving Hands"

Thank you for your loving hands, your loving heart, your loving ways—
Thank you for the gifts you bring into the world each day.
And if you ever doubt yourself, remember us, who love you well—
We know all the gifts you bring into the world each day.
So thank you for your loving hands, your loving heart, your loving ways,
Thank you for the gifts you bring into the world each day.
—by Judy Fjell and Lisa Bregger

The Covenant

I commit myself:

- to come to meetings when I possibly can, knowing that my presence is important to the group
- to honor the group by letting the leader know if I will be absent, and to come to the group one last time and say good-bye if I need to quit
- to avoid cross talk, giving feedback or trying to fix anyone
- to share with the leader the responsibility for good group process by watching how much time I take to speak and noticing what is going on for others
- to not gossip about what is shared in the group, and not tell other people's stories
- to listen to what others share with an open heart, and to share deeply in my turn

Covenant Groups

The Big Questions



Fractal: A fractal is a rough or fragmented geometric shape that can be subdivided in parts, each of which is (at least approximately) a reduced-size copy of the whole. Fractals are generally self-similar and independent of scale.

The Big Questions

Chalice Lighting

Let there be light

The light of joy, the light of happiness, and the light of contentment

May it illuminate our paths and fill our lives with peace

And let there be dark

For it is from our dark places that we are brought forward

Tried and tested And impelled toward growth

It is in these places that we realize compassion and learn to love

And there was day and there was night.

And there was joy and there was sorrow.

And it was good.

—Andrew Pakula

Sharing of Joys and Sorrows

Silence

Silence, holding ourselves and each other in silent support.

Shared Readings

God is like a mirror. The mirror never changes, but everybody who looks at it sees something different.

—Rabbi Harold Kushner

We are each of us a snowflake

A falling star in flight

A traveler through the universe of our own light

Unique in form and beauty, of infinite design

Transitory dancers on the windowpanes of time.

—Barbara Meslin

We all experience “soul moments” in life—when we see a magnificent sunrise, hear the call of a loon, see the wrinkles in our mother’s hands, or smell the sweetness of a bay. During these moments, our body, as well as our brain, resonates as we experience the glory of being a human being.

—Marion Woodman

I was at this time living in a whirl of contradictions. I maintained that God did not exist. I was also very angry at God for not existing.

—C. S. Lewis

This is what I believe:

That I am I.

That my soul is a dark forest. That my known self will never be more than a little clearing in the forest. That gods, strange gods came forth from the forest into the clearing of my known self, and then go back.

That I must have the courage to let them come and go. Then I will never let mankind put anything over me, but that I will try always to recognize and submit to the gods in me and the gods in other men and women.

—D. H. Lawrence

Deep Sharing and Deep Listening

Round 1: Take a few moments to review and observe your Big

Questions from the homework. Share these with the group, taking turns until all have their questions heard.

Round 2: Share a story from a time when your questions clashed or aligned in your world.

Round 3: Continue deep sharing.

Closing Words

As UU minister Rev. Forrest Church was dying, he deeply explored what it meant to live. Rev. Church explained that to die is easy; that is a natural act. It is living that takes work. Rev. Church says that we “should laugh, really live and love.” His mantra is:

“Want what you have. Do what you can. Be who you are.” (repeat)

Closing Song

“Thank You for Your Loving Hands”

Group Business

Homework for the next meeting.

Homework: The Big Questions

As you look at the universe and your place in it, questions arise. Before one can seek, though, questions must be asked. As Unitarians, the questions we ask can become the center of our faith.

In looking at the Big Questions, there appear to be several categories about the nature of the universe and our place in it. Here are a few:

- What does it mean to be human? Why do humans exist? What is my place in the universe?
- Who, or what, is in charge? Is there a God guiding our lives and everything we know? Or do laws or forces govern the universe? Or is everything random?
- What is the meaning of life? Why are we here?
- Why is here good and evil? Is there more good than evil?
- Are we alone in the universe? Why is there something rather than nothing in the universe?
- How do I decide what is right and what is wrong?
- What is my life all about? Have I made any difference at all? Does my life have a purpose?
- Does/should religion provide answers for life's Big Questions?

Sacred texts hold paths, direction, answers, or truths for many of these topics. Yet many of us are not settled with those answers. Many of us still question.

As a child, the world was fresh, open and new. Many of us were held in a safe rhythm of life moving in an ebb and flow within our family units. As children we developed an understanding for what we came to know as truth, and those truths have shaped who we are as adults. Individuals name their truths and develop belief systems often influenced by our caregivers and cultures, and sometimes not.

The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and science.

—*Albert Einstein*

God is a mystery, too, a mysterious connecting force that makes everything one a force you can call “Divine” or “Holy” or whatever you want. God is the name many people use for the Highest Power we know, but God is not a “puppet-master.”

—*Forrest Church*

Man is the only significant link between the physical order and the spiritual one. Without man the universe is a howling wasteland contemplated by an unseen Deity.

—*Morris West*

The divine attributes are first developed in ourselves, and thence transferred to our creator. The idea of God, sublime and awful as it is, is the idea of our own spiritual nature, purified and enlarged to infinity. In ourselves are the elements of the Divinity.

—*William Ellery Channing*

God gave us the opportunity through science to understand the natural world, but there will never be a scientific proof of God's existence.

—*Francis Collins*

The process of formulating and developing questions can lead us on a never-ending quest for answers, which may be everlastingly elusive. How does this sit with you? Can you find peace in the search? Can you find peace in the unknown?

I discovered that science doesn't deal with the really interesting questions, so I turned to philosophy.

—Terence Stamp

The Universe is made of stories—not atoms.

—Muriel Ruykeyser

In the long run nothing can withstand reason and experience; all the contraction which religion offers to both are too palpable.

—Sigmund Freud

Ideas to Ponder

- Make a list of your Big Questions.
- Think about your list of Big Questions. Have your questions changed over time? What influenced the changes? What influenced stability in your questions?
- Tell a story about a time when a Big Question in your life clashed or aligned with your cultural understandings that led toward a growth in you.

Leader's Guide: The Big Questions

Chalice Lighting (2 min)

Ask someone to light the chalice. Ask someone to read the chalice lighting reading found in the bulletin.

Let there be light
The light of joy, the light of happiness, and the light of contentment
May it illuminate our paths and fill our lives with peace
And let there be dark
For it is from our dark places that we are brought forward
Tried and tested And impelled toward growth
It is in these places that we realize compassion and learn to love
And there was day and there was night.
And there was joy and there was sorrow.
And it was good.

—Andrew Pakula

Sharing of Joys and Sorrows (10 min)

Check in since our last meeting. Share any relevant information about missing members.

Silence (3 min)

A meditative time. Hold in your hearts all you have heard as well as those who are not with us tonight as we center for this session.

Shared Readings (5 min)

Go around your group, letting each person in turn read from the shared readings found in the bulletin until all the readings are finished.

Deep Sharing and Deep Listening (65 min)

Do your rounds of deep sharing and deep listening. Pay close attention to the time allotted each person to ensure that all get to share at least once.

Round 1 (10 minutes): Take a moment to review your list of big questions. When all are ready, share. Take turns, going around the group until all questions large and small are voiced.

Round 2 (30 minutes): Talk about a time when one of those questions clashed or aligned with cultural values and perspectives.

Round 3 (25 minutes): Continue deep sharing.

Closing Words (1 min)

Shortly before his death, UU minister Rev. Forrest Church said that we “should laugh, really live and love.” His mantra was:

“Want what you have. Do what you can. Be who you are.” (repeat)

Closing Song (1 min)

“Thank You for Your Loving Hands”

Group Business (5 min)

Pass out the homework for next time.