

DEFINITION

a beneficial thing for which one is grateful; something that brings well-being; a person's sanction or support.

SYNONYMS: gift, good fortune, miracle, grace (*as in*, a prayer before meals), protection, favor, benediction

Taking It Home:

Activity: Pay It Forward

To pay someone back for a blessing or gift accomplishes little more than evening the score. The concept of paying it forward changes everything. Suddenly the blessings in our life are sources of abundance rather than sources of debt.

Your assignment: Two simple steps:

Spend a few days assessing the major blessings in your life. Then figure out how to share them.

The key is to identify blessings that can and should be spread beyond the circumference of your personal experience.

Book: *To Bless the Space Between Us: A Book of Blessings* by John O'Donohue

Video:

“Difficulties Illuminate Existence”

Rev. Gary Smith reads from his essay in *Landscapes of Aging and Spirituality*, and reminds all of us, regardless of age, about the hidden blessings in “the boulders of our lives.”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FTGYfkBRwi8&feature=youtu.be>

These materials are part of the small group ministry program at Jefferson Unitarian Church. For more information on using them, or to set up your small group, please contact Rev. Eric Banner.

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Jefferson Unitarian Church May 2016 Small Group Session: Blessing 1.0

**Opening/
Chalice
Lighting:**

As we come together,
I go into myself.
I dig into myself for a deep answer.
I have patience with everything that remains
unsolved in my heart, and I live the question.
What is required of us is that we love the difficult
and learn to deal with it.
In the difficult are the friendly forces, the hands
that work on us.
It is clear that we must embrace the struggle.
Right in the difficult we must have our joys, our
happiness, our dreams.
We create this space to go into ourselves and see
how deep the place is from which our
lives flow. **(RM Rilke, adapted by Scott Rudolf)**

Check In:

Up to 2 minutes per person to share what they
bring with them since the last time the group met

Reading:

Perhaps I should have said it just between
The wine and grace, the wishing and the blessing.
That was a time for words, when the scene
Had just begun, before we passed the dressing ...
I might have paused, looked up and all around
Into the eyes of each of them.
A jest came easier, wit tossed into the sound
And lost. Between the stuffing and the pie,
Was yet another quiet moment when
I could have told them all. Instead, I sighed,
And let it pass. Just once before the end,
I should have cried, "Listen, before you go,
I love you. I just wanted you to know."
--Peter LaForge

**Resting in
the
Silence:
Questions
and
Quotes
From The
Common
Bowl:**

Take 2 minutes to just sit. If your group is up to it,
go longer, as long as you let people know how
long the silence will be.

Share the quotes and questions for today's
session in the way that is customary in your small
group. You can pass the sheet, you can select
them randomly from a bowl after having cut them
into individual pieces. Or whatever works well for
your small group.

**Sharing/
Deep
Listening:**

Allow each person up to five minutes to share
what has come up for them about today's topic. If
someone does not use the full five minutes, make
sure you count to ten full breaths before moving
on to the next person, in case the speaker is not
truly finished.

**A Second
Share:**

If time allows, you may have a brief second share
from those who have found they have more to
say, keeping in mind your commitment to going
no longer than ninety minutes.

**Closing
Reading:**

To look hard, for a long time, at a single glorious
thing: a flame of red geranium outside my
bedroom window. And then another: my daughter
in a yellow dress. And then another: the perfect
outline of a full, dark sphere behind the crescent
moon. Until I learn to be in love with my life again.

-- Barbara Kingsolver

**Extinguish
the
Chalice:**

Join hands and say the following together:
**As we have been blessed by each other on this
journey, may we bless those we meet in the
days ahead.**

And then, extinguish your chalice until you meet
again.

What Does It Mean To Be A People of Blessing?

A Soul Matters facilitator writes, “I guess after plan A fails, I need to remember there's a whole alphabet.”

It's not just our friend who needs help remembering that “there's a whole alphabet” out there; it's all of us. We all get stuck in wanting things a certain way. We all, at times, focus so intently on the few things going wrong that we completely miss the dozens of things that are going right. Tunnel vision too often takes over our days.

For our Unitarian Universalist faith, this is the central tragedy of the human condition. We respect those who frame our problem as sin and tainted souls, but it's nearsightedness that our religion is most worried about. For us “a life of blessing” is less about securing eternal reward or forgiveness; it's more about widening our view.

And there's a lot at stake when it comes to this wider view. When the world seems stingy to us, we are stingy to others. Those who feel blessed have little trouble sharing blessings with others. Our tradition takes this calculus seriously. As UU minister, Rev. Don Wheat, puts it “The religious person is a grateful person, and the grateful person is the generous person.”

So this month the question in front of all of us is not simply “Do you notice the blessings all around you?” It's also, “How are the blessings in your life leading you to bless others?” There is indeed a whole alphabet out there. May we notice it, and help each other do the same.

But the discipline of blessings is to taste each moment, the bitter, the sour, the sweet and the salty, and be glad for what does not hurt. The art is in compressing attention to each little and big blossom of the tree of life, to let the tongue sing each fruit, its savor, its aroma and its use. -- **Marge Piercy**

Do you taste it? How do you take in the simple yet precious gift of food. Yes, literal food. Forget the metaphor of “nourishment.” When was the last time you just enjoyed that apple? That cup of coffee? That holiness of warm butter on freshly baked bread? Do you let this blessing slip past?

It’s hardest to love the ordinary things, she said, but you get lots of opportunities to practice. -- **Brian Andreas**

What is “working” in your life? Buddhist teachers encourage their students to pay attention to what is “working” in their lives. Often things in our lives are working so well that we should be utterly amazed. So are you? Utterly amazed by what is working?

A spring of love gushed from my heart, And I bless'd them unaware. --**Samuel Taylor Coleridge**

Despite all the darkness, human hope is based on the instinct that at the deepest level of reality some intimate kindness holds sway. This is the heart of blessing. To believe in blessing is to believe that our being here, our very presence in the world is the first gift; the primal blessing. -- **John O’Donohue**

Has age helped or hurt? At what age were you best at noticing the blessings around you? Have you gotten better as time has gone on? Or worse? What would improve your gaze?

Got no check books, got no banks. Still I'd like to express my thanks -- I got the sun in the morning and the moon at night. -- **Irving Berlin**

Have you given thanks for your work? Writing about the blessing of work, poet John O’Donohue writes, “May you see in what you do the beauty of your own soul.” This is not always the case. It isn’t always an option. But sometimes it is. Sometimes we have the power to pick work that reflects the beauty of our soul. Is that true for you? Do you want it to be?

To whom much has been given, much will be expected in return. -- **Luke 12:48**

It is one of the blessings of old friends that you can afford to be stupid with them. – **often attributed to Ralph Waldo Emerson**

What’s your question? Your question may not be listed above. As always, if the above questions don't include what the theme is asking from you, spend the month listening to your days to hear it.