

# Living a Life of Joy

## Small Groups: March 2014

In a *Calvin and Hobbes* cartoon by Bill Watterson, six year old Calvin is outside playing with his stuffed tiger Hobbes. Calvin says to Hobbes: "I'm not having enough fun. I am just having a *little* bit of fun. Each moment I should be able to say, 'I'm having the time of my life right now!' But here I am, valuable minutes disappearing forever. We've got to have more fun! C'mon!" Hobbes replies, "I didn't realize fun was so much work" Calvin explains, "Sure! When you are serious about having fun, it's not much fun at all."

Welcome March! Welcome Spring! Welcome to our month long exploration of Joy!

I resonate with Hobbes in this cartoon. I am just enough of a contrarian to react negatively to exhortations "Be Joyful! Be Happy!" Joy is not something I can summon on demand, and honestly, I enjoy being melancholy at times, calm and at ease at other times, and frustrated when appropriate. Besides, I don't want to have to work hard for joy too. Can you imagine someone telling you, in a moment of exhaustion or frustration, "Just be joyful!" Most likely, it would have the opposite effect.

Joy is an intensely powerful feeling. It is a gift - and truly, I do seek to have more joy in my life. It just may be that pursuing it directly is not the best course. Take for example the ways that joy can accompany grief. It's one of the most surprising experiences - to be grieving for a loved one and be overcome with both an intense feeling of sadness and gratitude - grief and joy at once. For the grief is a reminder of the how important the relationship, the love, was to you. And while Joy is our theme for March, other themes we explored this year have brought me great joy. In November, when we looked at Wonder, the invitation to pay more attention to the wonder and beauty of nature brought more feelings of both awe and joy into my days.

Last month, one of our Small Group Ministry facilitators shared how as she did the Loving-kindness meditation, she was filled with a powerful feeling of joy. I too experienced this during the practice, although, not every morning. Some mornings it captured my spirit deeply; others I struggled to keep my mind from wandering. This is typical, and normal, in any regular meditation practice. It's like the nature of joy itself. We can't hold onto it. It comes and goes. We can only do our part to make room for it.

Perhaps joy is one of those things you can't approach directly. I don't know that we can make ourselves joyful. And like the lesson from Calvin and Hobbes, if we expect to be joyful - as joyful as possible in every one moment, it might not be any fun at all. At the same time, the practice of a religious life - even a liberal, hard to define, humanistic religious life with its focus on wonder, humility, connection and loving kindness - invites more experiences of joy. So, don't take this month to reflect on Joy as an exhortation, a command: Be Joyful! Rather, welcome it as an invitation to be aware of the things in your life, in your every day that bring you a feeling of joy, and then try to make more room for those things.

Here's to making room for joy in the journey.

Yours,  
Rev. Susan

# Living the Theme: Experiencing Joy

Use these exercises to reflect on how you experience joy and what living a life of more joy might look and feel like.

Choose one of the exercises below to engage the theme. Come to the meeting prepared to share how you tried to experience joy and what you learned from the practice.

1. **Living Joy by Heart:** In the class *Living By Heart*, the memorization of poetry or wisdom words becomes a way of integrating wisdom and understanding into daily life. Read this poem every morning close to the time when you wake up. If possible, be outside as you read it or near a window. How does beginning your day with this poem, and especially, the last lines, affect your day?

*Why I Wake Early* by Mary Oliver

Hello, sun in my face.  
Hello, you who make the morning  
and spread it over the fields  
and into the faces of the tulips  
and the nodding morning glories,  
and into the windows of, even, the  
miserable and the crotchety --

best preacher that ever was,  
dear star, that just happens  
to be where you are in the universe  
to keep us from ever-darkness,  
to ease us with warm touching,  
to hold us in the great hands of light --  
good morning, good morning, good morning.

Watch, now, how I start the day  
in happiness, in kindness.

2. **Notice when you feel Joy:** Take a week this month to pay attention to when you feel a state of joy, a feeling of delight or great happiness. What things, activities, or people seem to invite joy into your consciousness. Make a list of the things that brought you joy? How might you make room for more of these experiences of joy in your everyday life?
3. **Make Time for Joy:** Perhaps you know what brings you joy. Maybe it is a certain piece of music, or a particular hike, or just being outside. It is spring and perhaps just watching the spring bulbs emerge or the trees and flowers begin to bloom gives you joy. Whatever it is, be intentional about making time this month to do that activity, to listen to that piece of music. Bonus: Write a short poem or reflection on what this activity means to you.
4. **Practice Gratitude as a Path to Joy:** Some suggest that gratitude is linked to happiness. Consider making a list of people you're grateful for and find a time to share your thanks with them. Take note of how you feel after spreading thanks. Do you feel happier or more joyful than before you shared?

# Some Questions to Think and Talk About

As always, don't treat these questions as "homework." You do not need to engage every single one. Instead, simply look them over and find one that "hooks" you most. Live with it for a while. Allow it to regularly break into - and break open - your ordinary thoughts. Then come to your small group prepared to share that journey with the group.

1. Often times, we look to children, babies, and small animals as examples/sources of natural joy. **Why is joy so often found in the young? Does life experience take away joy or does it add to it? Besides these, are there other natural sources of joy?**
2. **Who has modeled joy for you? How do you know joy when you see it?** Who do you know who is consistently joyful? What are the signs and indicators? **How would you know if you were joyful?**
3. **What is the difference between happiness and joy?** Is happiness an emotion and joy an attitude? Are they both emotion and attitude? Could the difference be found in the source? Is the source of joy different than the source of happiness?
4. **Do you choose joy or does joy most often choose you?** Does joy sneak up on you, or is it something you have to make room for?
5. **Are there ways you hold yourself back from joy?** Sometimes joy puts us in touch with a passion or a talent that we've buried, convincing ourselves we'd never achieve it. Is it time to unbury your joy?
6. Does all this joy talk bug you? **Does thinking about joy miss something important? Is there a higher calling than mere joy?** One might argue our culture is misguided precisely because of its over-emphasis on happiness, pleasure and doing what feels good.
7. Are Unitarian Universalists "called to joy?" **Is joy a "moral imperative?" Can we make a difference in the world if we do not choose joy?** Do we encourage joy? Is one of the characteristics of "a religion" that it offers a path - or paths - toward joy?
8. **Has joy ever come at a cost for you?** Sometimes if we want more joy in our life, we have to disappoint others, who want us to focus on them and their needs. Another way to ask this: **Does joy come with a cost of guilt?** Do you wrestle with this and where are you finding help with that dilemma?
9. **What might the practice of joy look like? How might we "prepare the ground" for joy?**
10. **When was the last time you had an experience of joy that you wished could last forever? When you were so lifted up in joy that everything else fell away?**
11. A recent AARP survey shows that after age 50, the older people are, the more likely they are to feel they have control over their personal happiness.

Age	percent that feel in control of personal happiness
50-54	53%
55-59	55%
60-64	60%
65-69yrs	61%
70-74 yrs	64%
75-80 yrs	69%

  - a. At best, only 7 out of 10 people (over age 50) think their happiness/joy is under their control -- what do the other 50-30% think? **Where does happiness come from, who is responsible if you aren't?**
  - b. What would you guess the trends would be like for people under 50 years old? **Do you feel in control of your personal happiness? Is this the same as feeling in control of your joy?**
12. **Is the loss of joy with age just about acquiring capital R responsibilities, i.e. becoming serious adults? Part of reality does take the edge off joy. It may also be partly about capital F fear. What else is it about?**

# Recommended Resources

These are **not** required reading. We will not dissect these pieces in our group. They are simply meant to get your thinking started and offer different ways to see and explore the theme.

## First Thoughts and Wise Words

### Joy

! the emotion evoked by well-being, success, or good fortune or by the prospect of possessing what one desires; delight

! the expression or exhibition of such emotion: gaiety

! a state of great happiness; bliss

! a source or cause of delight

“In my own worst seasons I’ve come back from the colorless world of despair by forcing myself 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 another: the perfect outline of a full, dark sphere behind the crescent moon. Until I learned to be in love with life again. Like a stroke victim retraining new parts of the brain to grasp lost skills, I have taught myself joy, over and over again.” - Barbara Kingsolver, from Hide Tide in Tucson: Essays From Now or Never

I am in love with this world. I have nestled lovingly in it. I have climbed its mountains, roamed its forests, sailed its waters, crossed its deserts, felt the sting of its frosts, the oppression of its heats, the drench of its rains, the fury of its winds. And always have beauty and joy waited upon my goings and comings. - John Burroughs

In case you didn’t know (& if you didn’t, I wouldn’t be surprised at all, because a lot of people, even grownups, don’t know) but happiness isn’t about being happy all the time. It’s about remembering you’re alive. Sometimes that means you’re happy & sometimes it means you’re sad. But it always means you’re alive. That’s what really makes us happy. - Brian Andreas

We need joy as we need air.  
We need love as we need water.  
We need each other as we need the earth we share.  
- Maya Angelou

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

I find great joy in living-  
Being joyful is my answer to the problem of living.  
- Charlie Chaplin

The highest degree of sublimation is the culmination of insight and wisdom into joy..where head and heart join.  
- Friedrich Nietzsche

Let all the streams of joy mingle in my last song.  
The joy that makes the earth flow over in the riotous excess of the grass.  
The joy that sends the twin brothers, life and death, dancing over the wide world.  
The joy that sweeps in with the tempest, shaking and waking all life with laughter.  
The joy that sits still with its tears on the open red lotus of pain,  
And the joy that throws everything it has upon the dust  
And knows not a word.  
- Rabindranath Tagore

May we have the courage to live each new day  
as though our lives were stars.  
Burning in the summer sky of night.  
Beautiful, bright and illuminating in the eternal darkness,  
full round with joy and love and rapture.  
- Joel Scholefield

To me, when it comes to joy, music speaks louder than words. I’m especially filled with joy when I hear the great choral masterpieces: Beethoven’s *Ode to Joy*, Handel’s *Hallelujah Chorus*, Mozart’s *Coronation Mass* and many others. – Small Group Facilitator

It is characteristic of the American culture that, again and again, one is commanded and ordered to ‘be happy.’ But happiness cannot be pursued; it must ensue. One must have a reason to ‘be happy.’ – Viktor Frankl from *Man’s Search for Meaning*

There is within each of us a modulation, an inner exaltation, which lifts us above the buffetings with which events assail us. Likewise it lifts us above dependence upon the gifts of events for our joy.  
- Dr. Albert Schweitzer

You can’t have joy without letting go. Anger, fear, pride ... these are all inhibitors of joy. – Worship Associate

Happiness is not something ready made. It comes from your own actions. - Alice Walker

“Brené Brown speaks of the need to wade through the difficult stuff in order to get to the joy. We often numb or ignore the painful struggles in life. Here’s what she says:

! Numbing the pain numbs the joy.

! I feel like I have no joy in my life so I numb some more.

! Only when I let myself feel the struggle do I open myself up to feeling the joy. And feeling both of these gives me the courage and strength to make changes and feel whole.

! Feeling the struggle gives me the courage to change what’s happening and practice gratitude for what’s going well (even if I have to look hard for it).

! Feeling the joy gives me the strength and perspective to move forward, out of the dark.”

- Summarized by a Small Group Facilitator

We are shaped by our thoughts; we become what we think. When the mind is pure, joy follows like a shadow that never leaves. - Buddha

“Keeping expectations low can be a good way of experiencing joy. Sometimes when I think too much about issues in a relationship or friendship, when I see the person next, I’m happily surprised by how naturally we get along and how much I like them. Or, after a fight has been resolved, a relationship often feels more intimate. Or, the way a traveler notices the weather more in their new location than he did at home. There’s something there about removing expectations; practicing it is another story.” - Worship Associate

Loving kindness. It brings me so much joy. – Worship Associate

Laughter is the sound of joy. It’s free; share it. – Worship Associate

A joy shared is a joy doubled.- Worship Associate

“Many years ago (maybe 30), the Rev. Ray Manker gave a sermon about joy. I think it was titled “Choose Joy.” At the time, it had never occurred to me that joy was a choice, a decision to make. And I’m still working on it. I think that joy is a “do-it-yourself” project - and there is a lot of learning along the way. Mostly it’s not easy. Some days it’s really easy - and some days I can’t convince myself that the universe is anything special to feel joyful about. Practicing gratitude helps - but some days that doesn’t work - some days it’s easy to feel grateful for good friends, for beautiful landscapes, for each small thing that works, for breath and life - and some days it’s not. Practicing praise helps - but some days it’s hard to praise the ordinary, the mundane, the sun coming up yet again.” – Worship Associate

“Keep knocking and the joy inside will eventually open a window and look to see who’s there.”

- Jalaluddin Rumi

“An eye is meant to see things. The soul is here for its own joy.” - Jalaluddin Rumi

"On a day of silence ..., when things are very still, you may find that you are feeling grim and doing everything with a grim expression: grimly opening the door, grimly drinking your tea, concentrating so hard on being quiet and still and moving slowly that you’re miserable. On the other hand, you could just relax and realize that, behind all the worry, complaint, and disapproval that goes on in your mind, the sun is always coming up in the morning, moving across the sky, and going down in the evening. The birds are always out there collecting their food and making their nests and flying across the sky. The grass is always being blown by the wind or standing still. Food and flowers and trees are growing out of the earth. There’s enormous richness. You could develop your passion for life and your curiosity and your interest. You could connect with your joyfulness. You could start right now." - Pema Chodron (The Wisdom of No Escape. 25-6)

Joy seems to come after the other aspects of a satisfying life are settled: peace and ease with self, people with whom to share love, comfort, and hope, and a sense of internal confidence that comes with sustained integrity. Once you’ve attained joy, you know you’ve arrived.

– Worship Associate

“One of the things I wonder about joy is why (so many) children are so joyful and why we adults manage to train most of them out of their joy. Sometimes I remember how joyful my sons were as children - not always happy, sometimes crabby, sometimes not nice to each other or to me - but fundamentally they were eager for their days to begin, they saw life as adventures and explorations, they weren’t worried about being ‘wrong’ - they just wanted to know stuff. I find it sad that such joy was so diminished over time. I remember myself - even as late as high school - being eager for the day to begin, sorry when each day ended. Eager for the day does not describe most of my mornings... even tho’ I’m pretty sure that this is a choice I’m making and I could make a different one - I have such a lucky and rich and loving life - why should I not be eager for the day?”

– Worship Associate

Find a place where there is joy and the joy will burn out pain. - Joseph Campbell.

Joy is a feeling of great pleasure or happiness. It can be the pure and simple delight in being alive.

– Small Group Facilitator

“What do we teach - or fail to teach - that knocks the joy out of our children? We adults don't model joy much so we aren't teaching joy that way. We very often forget to value - or learn from - the joy our children show in the world. We don't ask them to practice joy the way we ask them to practice discipline, or making beds or learning multiplication tables or 'calming down' or 'knocking it off.’”  
- Worship Associate

from The Prophet by Kahlil Gibran

Then a woman said, Speak to us of Joy and Sorrow.

And he answered:

Your joy is your sorrow unmasked.

And the selfsame well from which your laughter rises was oftentimes filled with your tears.

And how else can it be?

The deeper that sorrow carves into your being, the more joy you can contain.

Is not the cup that holds your wine the very cup that was burned in the potter's oven?

And is not the lute that soothes your spirit, the very wood that was hollowed with knives?

When you are joyous, look deep into your heart and you shall find it is only that which has given you sorrow that is giving you joy.

When you are sorrowful look again in your heart, and you shall see that in truth you are weeping for that which has been your delight.

Some of you say, "Joy is greater than sorrow," and others say, "Nay, sorrow is the greater."

But I say to you, they are inseparable.

Together they come, and when one sits alone with you at your board, remember that the other is asleep on your bed.

Verily you are suspended like scales between your sorrow and your joy.

Only when you are empty are you at standstill and balanced.

When the treasure-keeper lifts you to weigh his gold and his silver, needs must your joy or your sorrow rise or fall.

The secret of contentment is knowing how to enjoy what you have, and to be able to lose all desire for things beyond your reach. - Lin Yutang

Most folks are as happy as they make up their minds to be. - Abraham Lincoln.

Happiness depends upon ourselves. - Aristotle

“I have some thoughts and ideas about what brings joy to my life:

1. Getting to a place where I let go of outcomes in my life, rather than try and control, and have faith that I will be able to handle the end result, whatever that might be, brings relief, serenity and room for joy.

2. Keeping a gratitude journal.

3. Spending time with people I love, remembering the value of that, and being present for them, completely mindful and in the moment, brings so much joy.

4. Soaking in the good things in my life on a daily basis, even just the sun and blue skies we are blessed with in Arizona. Appreciating the miracles and taking a little time to actively not think about the past or future. Mindfulness.

5. Having a creative outlet, expressing myself creatively.

6. Valuing my spiritual journey, and serving others. Giving is very fulfilling to me. Helping others to be able to lead more fulfilling and less emotionally painful lives is hugely meaningful to me and brings great joy.

7. Spend quality time with your kids or grand-kids, or nieces/nephews. They connect me with my wondrous inner child and have such a capacity for love and joy and being in the moment.

8. Remember to include random acts of kindness in your day. It's those performed by others for me that have changed my days from feeling down and sad to feeling hope and joy.

I know they are all obvious, but acting on all of them actually DOES change my life to one of great contentment and joy. When I attend to what and who brings meaning to my life every day, I feel joy.”

– Worship Associate

“Years ago, Gertrude Stein reminded me that life is a dance. And when you are dancing you are not intent on getting somewhere. You go round and round but not with the illusion that you are pursuing or fleeing from something. Meaning and joy are in the dancing. So I sing with the song of my friend Ric Masten:

*Let it be a dance we do*

*May I have this dance with you?*

*Through the good times and the bad times too.*

*Let it be a dance.*

- The Rev. Sam Wright, from an essay titled “Does the Universe Have a Purpose?”

Joy is that kind of happiness that doesn't depend on what happens ... Joy is our wholehearted response to whatever opportunity is given to us in any moment.

- David Steindl-Rast, *Music of Silence*

Joy is not in things; it is in us. - Richard Wagner

Happiness doesn't depend on any external conditions, it is governed by our mental attitude. - Dale Carnegie

Joy clarifies everything. How many times have I found myself quite simply walking along. And suddenly, I receive one of these gusts of contentment, of, so to say, "joy" or "well-being," which is a marvelous feeling because one has no idea where it comes from.

- Jacques Lusseyran, *Against the Pollution of the I*

A life of joy is not in seeking happiness. But in experiencing and simply being the circumstances of our life as they are. - Charlotte Joko Beck, in *Open Mind*, Diane Mariechild

A happy life must be to a great extent a quiet life, for it is only in an atmosphere of quiet that true joy dare live.

- Bertrand Russell

If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion.

- Dalai Lama

Don't wait for other people to be happy for you. Any happiness you get you've got to make yourself.

- Alice Walker

Your success and happiness lies in you. Resolve to keep happy, and your joy and you will form an invincible host against difficulties.

- Helen Keller

There is both sorrow and sadness and great happiness and joy in life. We must experience both to live full and rich lives. - Small Group Facilitator

Lighten up while enlightening up. Cultivate joy. Don't take yourself too seriously, or it won't be fun.

-Lama Surya Das, *The Big Questions*

Being Irish, he had an abiding sense of tragedy, which sustained him through temporary periods of joy.

- William Butler Yeats

Finding joy is the hardest in all spiritual tasks. If the only way to make yourself happy is by doing something silly, do it. - Rebbe Nachman of Breslov in *The Empty Chair*

One of the things I keep learning is that the secret of being happy is doing things for other people.

- Dick Gregory

I have no money, no resources, no hopes. I am the happiest man alive. - Henry Miller

"Growing Joy:  
tell jokes  
laugh  
return a smile  
listen to Beethoven's *Ode to Joy*  
dance  
dance with an imaginary partner."

- Small Group Facilitator

"To me, a man from India, Joy is same as *Ananda* in Hindu thought. It is pure happiness. It is also the attribute of the Formless ultimate reality, that is Nirvana, Brahman, etc. It is without its opposite. Non-dual state. Christ called it Love.

My American born daughter dreamed of my late very spiritual mother who was beaming in pure happiness in her dream and said to her just one word, 'Ananda', a word foreign to my daughter. Now she knows what it means.

We are given a glimpse into this Reality and some times find it in poetry. - Jay Alagia

"If you suddenly and unexpectedly feel joy, don't hesitate. Give in to it. There are plenty of lives and whole towns destroyed or about to be. We are not wise and not very often kind. And much can never be redeemed. Still life has some possibility left. Perhaps this is its way of fighting back, that sometimes something happened better than all the riches or power in the world. It could be anything, but very likely you notice it in the instant when love begins. Anyway, that's often the case. Anyway, whatever it is don't be afraid of its plenty. Joy is not made to be a crumb. (Don't Hesitate)"

- Mary Oliver *Swan: Poems and Prose Poems*

"When I was 5 years old, my mother always told me that happiness was the key to life. When I went to school, they asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up. I wrote down 'happy.' They told me I didn't understand the assignment, and I told them they didn't understand life."

- John Lennon

"They say success is getting what you want, and happiness is wanting what you get. I always worry about people that say, "I'm going to do this for 10 years. I really don't like it very well. And then I'll do this..." That's a little like saving up sex for your old age. Not a very good idea." - Warren Buffet, from *Tap Dancing to Work: Warren Buffet on Practically Everything*

"Happiness in intelligent people is the rarest thing I know." -- Ernest Hemingway

## Online Articles, Videos and Podcasts

“Simply Happy” TED Radio Hour

<http://www.npr.org/programs/ted-radio-hour/267185371/simply-happy?showDate=2014-02-14>

“The Science of Happiness” from SoulPancake. This video makes a connection between forgiveness and happiness.

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8o9\\_TlZyB\\_Y&list=PLzvRx\\_johoA\\_QznIVHjbByQdHZAHRQzr](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8o9_TlZyB_Y&list=PLzvRx_johoA_QznIVHjbByQdHZAHRQzr)

“You have more time than you think” by Elizabeth Dunn and Michael Norton, from CNN Opinion (because feeling time is scarce is a stressor and can undermine joy)

[http://www.cnn.com/2013/06/21/opinion/dunn-norton-time-famine/index.html?iid=article\\_sidebar](http://www.cnn.com/2013/06/21/opinion/dunn-norton-time-famine/index.html?iid=article_sidebar)

7 Things to Do in Your Bedroom That Can Save Your Life – and Only One Involves Sex (AARP)

<http://www.aarp.org/health/healthy-living/info-07-2013/things-to-do-bedroom-activities.2.html>

## Books and Movies

The Joy Diet: 10 Daily Practices for a Happier Life

by Martha Beck

**Zorba the Greek** (1964)

Happy or sad, whatever life brought, he danced with joy.

**The Muppet Show** – or any Muppet Movie

**The Bone Comics** by Jeff Smith