

# June Theme

## Blessing: The Practice of Grace

### FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

#### Books & Articles

- *The Gentle Art of Blessing: A Simple Practice That Will Transform You and Your World*, by Pierre Pradervand
- 'The Blessings of Atheism', by Susan Jacoby: <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/06/opinion/sunday/the-blessings-of-atheism.html>

#### Videos

- Stacey Kramer, 'The Best Gift I Ever Survived' TED talk: [https://www.ted.com/talks/stacey\\_kramer\\_the\\_best\\_gift\\_i\\_ever\\_survived](https://www.ted.com/talks/stacey_kramer_the_best_gift_i_ever_survived)
- GRATEFUL: A Love Song to the World | Empty Hands Music | nimo feat. daniel nahmod: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sO2o98Zpzg8>

#### Children's Books & Stories

- *A Child's Book of Blessings and Prayers*, by: Eliza Blanchard
- 'Count Your Blessings: A Jewish Tale': <https://thecaregiverspace.org/the-secret-to-counting-your-blessings-a-jewish-story/>
- Mullah Nasruddin Feeds His Coat (Ramadan): <https://www.uua.org/re/tapestry/children/tales/session6/123344.shtml>
- *The Blessing Cup*, by Patricia Polacco

#### Movies

- *Garden State*, 2004 (R)
- *Amelie*, 2001 (R)
- *A Wrinkle in Time*, 2018 (PG)

### QUOTES FOR CONTEMPLATION

A blessing is not something that one person gives another. A blessing is a moment of meeting, a certain kind of relationship in which both people involved remember and acknowledge their true nature and worth and strengthen what is whole in one another. By making a place for wholeness within our relationships, we offer others the opportunity to be whole without shame and become a place of refuge from everything in them and around them that is not genuine. We enable people to remember who they are.  
~ Rachel Naomi Remen

The one who offers a blessing is like a coach whispering to an athlete before a competition, "You can do it!" More than encouragement, positive spin, or sincere wish, the words of blessing literally bring forth and make real an otherwise unrealizable force. In this way, blessing is not supplication but symbiosis. God needs us to summon blessings, just as we could not live without them. ~ Lawrence Kushner

To bless is to put a bit of yourself into something.  
~ Macrina Wiederkehr and Joyce Rupp

So what, then, does it mean to offer a blessing, to be a blessing? To bless something or someone is to invoke its wholeness, to help remind the person or thing you are blessing of its essence, its sacredness, its beauty, and to help remind yourself of that, too. Blessing does not fix anything. It is not a cure... It does not instill health or well-being or strength. Instead, it reminds us that those things are already there, within us.  
~ Rev. Elea Kemler

There is a reality in blessing... It doesn't enhance sacredness, but it acknowledges it.  
~ Marilynne Robinson

To give someone a blessing is the most significant affirmation we can offer. It is more than a word of praise or appreciation; it is more than pointing out someone's talents or good deeds; it is more than putting someone in the light. To give a blessing is to affirm, to say "yes" to a person's Belovedness.  
~ Henri J. M. Nouwen

Try to be a rainbow in someone's cloud. ~ Maya Angelou

You have the power to change perception, to inspire and empower, and to show people how to embrace their complications, and see the flaws, and the true beauty and strength that's inside all of us. ~Beyonce

#### A Franciscan Benediction

May God bless us with discomfort  
At easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships  
So that we may live from deep within our hearts.

May God bless us with anger  
At injustice, oppression, and exploitation of God's creations  
So that we may work for justice, freedom, and peace.

May God bless us with tears  
To shed for those who suffer pain, rejection, hunger, and war,  
So that we may reach out our hands to comfort them and  
To turn their pain into joy.  
And may God bless us with just enough foolishness  
To believe that we can make a difference in the world,  
So that we can do what others claim cannot be done:  
To bring justice and kindness to all our children and all our neighbors who are poor.

## What Does It Mean to Be a People of Blessing?

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

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 going right. Tunnel vision too often takes over our days.

For Unitarian Universalists, this is the central tragedy of the human condition. We respect those who frame the human problem as sin or twisted wills, but it's nearsightedness that our religion is most worried about. Which is also why blessings are so central to our faith. They are, for us, a way of widening our view.

Unlike some of our brother and sister religions, we don't *say* a lot of blessings. Instead we *point* to them. For us, blessings are not something we give to each other as much as they involve us helping each other notice all that's *already been given* to us. And it's not just about widening our view to see the gifts themselves; it's about widening our understanding of life. Pointing to blessings repairs our relationship with life, allowing us to see it as generous not threatening, full of grace-filled surprises not dominated by a cold indifference.

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 passing blessings on. Our tradition takes this calculus seriously. As Unitarian Universalist minister, Rev. Don Wheat, puts it “The religious person is a grateful person, and the grateful person is the generous person.” In short, by noticing our blessings, we become a blessing.

So this month the question in front of all of us is not simply “Do you notice the blessings surrounding you?” It's also, “How are the blessings in your life leading you to bless others?” That “whole alphabet” out there doesn't just happen on its own; we add to it. Blessings don't just fill us up; they cause us to overflow. Life spills into us and we spill into others. In other words, blessings don't just enrich us; they connect us. And maybe that is the greatest blessing of all.



Photo by [Linh Pham](#) on [Unsplash](#)

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## KIDS' CORNER

### Outdoor Blessings Scavenger Hunt

Go outside and see if you can find objects and places for each sense.

Smell – A smelly sewer, a flower? What else do you smell?

Taste – Beware of berries unless you can identify them!

Sight – There's so much to see! How many things can you name?

Hearing – Quiet your voice and pay attention to the sounds all around.

Touch – Textures, rough from pavement, smooth like glass – what all can you feel?

Vibration – Like from a big truck driving by shaking the ground.

Balance – On a rock or curb, or something else. How hard is it for you to balance?

Temperature - Warm from the sun or cool in the shade. How much change in temperature do you notice?

*Make notes here about what you noticed!*



*Photo by Milada Vigerova*

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## Secret Blessings

Wayne Muller, in his book Sabbath, encourages a practice he calls secret blessing. He writes, "Bless strangers quietly, secretly. Offer it to people you notice on the street, in the market, on the bus. [Silently say to yourself] "May you be happy. May you be at peace." Feel the blessing move through your body as you offer it. Notice how you both receive some benefit from the blessing."

At first blush it's hard to imagine how a secret blessing can produce much good. How can a person receive something they aren't aware you're giving them? But, of course, this practice is more about what happens to us than what happens to them. It alters our attention, making us scan and become more aware of our surroundings. It changes our attitude toward others. Just image going through your day looking for excuses to wish people well or think the best of them rather than looking for threats and assuming ill intent. And it connects us to others, helping us acknowledge common struggles and hungers.

But how *exactly* might it change *you*? That is what this exercise is all about.



## PERSONAL REFLECTION

As always, don't treat these questions like "homework" or a list that needs to be covered in its entirety. Instead, simply pick the single question that speaks to you most and let it lead you where you need to go. The goal is to figure out what being a part of a people of creativity means for you and your daily living. So, which question is calling to you? Which one contains "your work"?

1. Is it time to embrace yourself as a blessing once again? We all forget sometimes. We all let others' definitions of worth determine how we feel about our own. The work of seeing ourselves as a blessing is ongoing. How do you need to re-claim or re-name your blessing to the world?
2. Some say a blessing is anything that helps us remember who we really are. We most often lose ourselves in work or relationships that ask us to be something we're not. Is it time to bless yourself and find yourself by saying goodbye to a job or a relationship that doesn't bless and see you?
3. 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?
4. Did your words bless or curse others this past week? A Soul Matters facilitator writes, "My Mom often told us to consider our words before offering an opinion. Her mantra was: "Are your words kind and helpful? If both adjectives do not apply, keep the thought to yourself!" What words have fallen from your lips lately that you need to go back and turn into a blessing?
5. Sometimes there *aren't* blessings hidden in our pain. Sometimes it's *not* you overlooking the blessings; they simply *aren't* there. Often we just need space to acknowledge the emptiness, rather than have people try to minimize it, make it go away or convince us we should find a silver lining. Is that the blessing you really need? The blessing of space to do nothing but mourn the loss and feel the pain? What will it take for you to get it?
6. Some blessings are always there; others are fleeting and eventually leave us. Which of your current blessings' time clock is farther along than you wish? What blessing needs noticed before it says goodbye?
7. What was your biggest "unexpected blessing moment"? When did a blessing surprise and sustain you in the midst of pain? What gift or lesson from that story do you need to most remember today?
8. **What's your question?** Your question may not be listed above. As always, if the above questions don't include what life is asking from you, spend the month listening to your days to hear it.

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## JUSTICE CORNER

*All contents adapted from the Soul Matters Sharing Circle resource materials for June 2018.*

Participate in The Poor People's Campaign! The aim is not simply trying to win on an issue, but instead building a long term movement that brings religious principles, of loving and not harming our neighbors and our earth, to the center of public discourse and policy, rooted in nonviolence. Each week focuses on a different theme, with a recognition of their connectedness.

### **Week 4 (June 3-9)**

The Right to Health and a Healthy Planet: Ecological Devastation and Health Care

### **Week 5 (June 10-16)**

Everybody's Got the Right To Live: Education, Living Wages, Jobs, Income, Housing

### **Week 6 (June 17-23)**

A New and Unsettling Force: Confronting the Distorted Moral Narrative

Contact Ellis Vance at [vev40@comcast.net](mailto:vev40@comcast.net) about UUCF's participation.

2672 E Alluvial Ave  
Fresno, CA 93720  
[www.uufresno.org](http://www.uufresno.org)  
559.322.6146