

The Path

*Spiritual Theme Newsletter of the
First UU Society of Burlington*



soulMatters

**Living Love Through
The Practice of
Joy**



**Small Group
April 2025**

Welcome to the Practice of Joy

It's easy to get tricked,
taken for a ride,
convinced that joy
is a possession.

Something to be caught, contained and controlled
just by us.

As if it's a birthday present,
waiting for us to unwrap it
and keep forever and ever.

And who can blame us,
with pain seeming so powerfully prevalent, and permanent.
If sadness can stay for so long,
why can't joy?

But maybe it's elusive
for a reason.
Maybe it's slippery
in order to help us understand
that it was put here to fly.
Or better yet:
To be flung!
To be passed, not possessed.
To be spread
between you and me,
between the ones who receive its gift
and the ones that have been looking for its treasure
for a very long time.

Maybe it's a beautiful and elegant contagion,
over which we just might have more control than we think.
If only we share it.
If only we notice that joy is not ours to keep,
but ours to give.

Maybe joy is a gift that opens us
as much as we open to it.

Maybe that's the way light leaks into our weary world.

Our Spiritual Exercises

It's one thing to analyze a theme; it's quite another to experience it. By pulling us out of the space of *thinking* and into the space of *doing*, these exercises invite us to figure out not just what we have to say about life, but also what life has to say to us!

Pick the exercise that speaks to you the most. **Come to your group ready to share why you picked the exercise you did, where it surprised you and what gift it gave you.**

Option A *Your Box of Joy*

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!

Click [HERE](#) to read how one Soul Matters team member went about it.

Come to your group ready to share what surprised you about what made it into your box and what commonalities you noticed.

Option B *Schedule Your Joy*

Our daily calendars are full of work tasks and personal errands. They are dedicated to the things we *have* to do, not *want* to do. So why not throw a wrinkle into that and [schedule in](#) a daily dose of joy? We're being literal here: actually sit down at the start of a week and write in a joyful activity on each day of your calendar for that week. Don't pressure yourself to come up with "big" things. They can be [as simple as](#) "Call mom" on Tuesday at 7:30pm or "Walk in the sun" on Thursday at 2pm or "Eat dessert for dinner" on Sunday at 6pm. The key is to do one a day and put them in at a specific time. And to keep yourself accountable to joy, move your "[joy appointment](#)" to the next day if you don't get to it as scheduled. Do not cross it off entirely. Maybe even schedule an entire "joy catch up day" if you need to.

Come to your group ready to share how hard it was to keep this up and how it altered how you felt about the flow of your days.

Option C *Embrace The Ridiculous*

This exercise is inspired by a [squirrel census](#). You read that right: a squirrel census. In 2012, a bunch of residents from Atlanta - many strangers to each other before this - organized themselves to count every squirrel that lived in their neighborhood park. They developed a rigorous - even if not scientific - methodology and they all gave countless hours to this effort. Why did they do this? Well, for [the ridiculousness of it!](#) They figured out that

being ridiculous and being joyful go hand in hand. Silliness, it turns out, is one of the best ways to disconnect from the seriousness of life that can drain the energy from our days.

So, with this as your inspiration, do your own version of a squirrel census! (Maybe enlisting your family or a few friends!) While your ridiculous project can be a census of some kind, it doesn't have to be. Here's a list to get your imagination flowing:

- Buy 12 different types of bar soap and test one a day in your morning shower, carefully ranking each according to scent, cleanliness, and "foam-ability."
- See how big of a cookie or [pancake](#) you can make.
- Count up all the places there are for people to sit down along your walk to work or how many types of cereal your grocery store carries.
- Make a [Rube Goldberg Machine](#) in your backyard
- Instead of throwing away all those container lids, bottle caps and toothpaste tops, save up 2 weeks' worth and then make a piece of art out of them.
- Video tape yourself taking on [the character that random clothes](#)(start at 4:30) from your closet tell you to.
- See how many un-rolled toilet paper rolls are in a mile or how many bites it takes to eat an entire container of Ben & Jerry's ice cream. (Or buy three containers of Ben & Jerry's cookie dough ice cream and see if all three have the same or wildly different number of cookie dough chunks!)

You get the idea. Come up with a ridiculous project, challenge or counting effort, all for the sake of joy! And come to your group ready to share how exquisite silliness freed you from seriousness.

Option D

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.

Come to your group ready to share which new types of joy you discovered!

Option E

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.

Option F

Ask Them About Joy

One of the best ways to explore our monthly themes is to have conversations about them with people who are close to you. It's also a great way to deepen our relationships! Below is a list of questions to help you on your way. Be sure to let your conversation partner know in advance that this won't be a typical conversation. Telling them a bit about Soul Matters will help set the stage. *Remember to also answer the questions yourself as they are meant to support a conversation, not just a time of quizzing them.*

Come to your group ready to share what surprised you about the conversation and what gift or insight it gave you. As always, keep a lookout for how your inner voice is trying to send you a message of comfort or challenge through these conversations with others.

Joy Questions:

- What do you find joyful that few others do?
- What is your third favorite way to welcome in joy?
- Did you grow up in a “happy family”?
- Has choosing joy ever been an act of survival for you? Or an act of defiance?
- When was the last time you sought out joy for your body?
- What joyful memory has been with you the longest, showing up regularly like a long-time friend?
- What's something you know now about joy that you didn't know when you were younger?

Option G

Which Companion Piece Speaks to You?

Sometimes we come across a quote, song, article or movie and it perfectly captures what's going on for us right now or allows us to view our current circumstances in a new light. With this in mind, spend some time this month going through the *Companion Pieces* section below to ***find the one piece that speaks most powerfully to you.***

Go through them with an eye for the one that “shimmers” the most.

Come to your group ready to share the piece you picked, why it called to you and the journey it took you on.

Your Question

This list of questions is an aid for deep reflection. How you answer them is often less important than the journey they take you on.

So, read through the list of questions 2-3 times until one question sticks out for you and captures your attention, or as some faith traditions say, until one of the questions “shimmers.”

Then reflect on that question using one or all of these questions:

- *What is going on in my life right now that makes this question so pronounced for me?*
- *How might my inner voice be trying to speak to me through it?*
- *How might Life or my inner voice be trying to offer me a word of comfort or challenge through this question?*



1. What were you first taught about “deserving joy”?
2. Did you grow up in a “happy family”?
3. 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?)
4. Are you mostly a creator of joy, receiver of joy, notice-er of joy or spreader of joy?
5. If you could magically give a joy-filled and sorrowless week to one of your friends, family members or co-workers in the coming year, who would you choose and why?
6. Have you been hesitant or scared to ask for the thing you know will bring you joy?
7. When was the last time you sought out joy for your body?
8. Has choosing joy ever been an act of survival for you? Or an act of defiance?
9. Are you too responsible to let joy in?
10. What is one of your favorite/best moments of bringing joy to someone else?
11. Has joy ever asked something big of you? Might it be asking that now?
12. When was the last time you told your partner that they delight you?
13. **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 find it.

Companion Pieces

Recommended Resources for Personal Exploration & Reflection

The following resources are not required reading. Nor are they intended to be analyzed in your group.

Instead they are here to companion you on your personal journey this month, get you thinking and open you up to new ways of embodying the practice of joy in your life.

Wise Words

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](#)

In this world heavy with robust reasons for despair, joy is a stubborn courage we must not surrender, a fulcrum of personal power we must not yield to cynicism, blame, or any other costume of helplessness... And when the war within rages, as it does in every life, the practice of joy, the courage of joy, becomes our mightiest frontier of resistance.

[Maria Popova](#)

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](#)

What if joy and pain are fundamentally tangled up with one another? Or even more to the point: what if joy is not only entangled with pain, suffering or sorrow, but it's also what emerges from how we care for each other through those things? What if joy, instead of refuge or relief from heartbreak, is what effloresces from us as we help each other carry our heartbreaks?

[Ross Gay](#)

There's joy to be found in how people manage to survive.

[Britney Luse](#)

A person will be called to account on judgment day for every permissible thing they might have enjoyed but did not.

[The Talmud](#)

Happiness is attached to things being a certain way. But joy is about the bliss of *being*. It transcends highs and lows.

[Martha Beck](#)

Joy is exactly what is happening, minus our opinion of it.

[Charlotte Joko Beck](#)

I hadn't considered noting the difference between pleasure and joy. I hadn't considered pleasure as something you can have, and that joy was something you could enter but have to let go.

[Yolande Clark-Jackson](#)

We must reclaim joy outside of the artificial "cheer" it is often reduced to. There is a joy that is defiant. A portal to survival for our ancestors. A way to say, we will not be captive to despair nor abandon our belief in beauty. Joy with teeth.

[Cole Arthur Riley](#)

It's easy to believe Joy isn't strategic when you've never had to use it in battle...Joy keeps spirits strong. Joy keeps soldiers marching. Joy sees hope in darkness... Joy makes you keep working for the yes after a million no's.

[Brittany Packnett](#)

Joy - flighty, jumpy, startling thing that it is - often finds its true voice within its opposite... as a bright, insistent spasm of defiance within the darkness of the world.

[Nick Cave](#)

We must risk delight. We can do without pleasure but not delight. Not enjoyment. We must have the stubbornness to accept our gladness in the ruthless furnace of this world.

Jack Gilbert

When we numb out 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

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

We're a nation hungry for more joy: Because we're starving from a lack of gratitude.

Brené Brown

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

when I'm sitting in my favorite rocking chair...
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

I watched her cooking, from my chair...
"It's ready now. Come on," she said...
We ate, and talked, and went to bed,
And slept. It was a miracle.

Donald Hall

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

Videos & Podcasts

Joy vs. Happiness

<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=529823663196216>

Delight & Joy Are Survival Mechanisms & Acts of Resistance

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RnliliuYC7J8>

Joy: It's Terrifying!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RKV0BWSPfOw>

Surprising Secrets of How to Help Our Brain (and Us) Find Joy

<https://hiddenbrain.org/podcast/happiness-2-0-surprising-sources-of-joy/>

The Revolutionary Power of Black Joy

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QDE8UJdm458&t=93s>

Joy is an Act of Resistance & Nonsense is Necessary for Change!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TBnrqqRbVHw>

What is Trans Joy?

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ET0UKYvxo_M

On Joy as Healing the Past as Well as the Future

https://www.youtube.com/shorts/INYWbjXu_EM

Where Joy Hides And How To Find It

https://www.ted.com/talks/ingrid_fetell_lee_where_joy_hides_and_how_to_find_it

Finding Joy in Being a Part of the Natural World

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MI4Qoqwapo>

He Walked Away From it All and Found Joy

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C1sAsoJVN1U&t=421s>

On the joys of... [racing](#), [bubble wrap](#), [letters](#), [dance competitions](#), [the truth](#), [cold “dipping,”](#) [turning classic art into memes](#), [Rube Goldberg machines](#), and the [largest ball of paint \(and impermanence\)](#).

Articles

What to Do With Spring's Wild Joy in a Burning World
<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/07/opinion/spring-happiness-climate-change.html>

Joy is an Act of Resistance: How Celebration Sustains Activism
<https://aestheticsofjoy.com/joy-is-an-act-of-resistance-how-celebration-sustains-activism-2/>

Books

Inciting Joy, Ross Gay

On the joy we incite when we care for each other, especially during life's inevitable hardships

The Lightmaker's Manifesto: How to Work for Change without Losing Your Joy, Karen Walrond
Related podcast [HERE](#)

The Comfort of Crows, Margaret Renkl

On joy and grief in the ongoing pleasures of the natural world

The Geography of Bliss: One Grump's Search for the Happiest Places in the World, Eric Weiner
Review and related TV show

Joyful, Indrid Lee Fetell

Music

Two playlists this month!
"Deep Joy" on [Spotify](#) & [YouTube](#)
"Joy Overflowing" on [Spotify](#) & [YouTube](#)

Movies

[Perfect Days](#)
[Living](#)
[The Florida Project](#)
[Shall We Dance?](#)
[Little Miss Sunshine](#)

Packet Introduction Credit Note: Unless explicitly noted otherwise, the introductions of these packets are written by our Team Lead, Rev. Scott Tayler. Rev. Scott gives permission for his pieces to be used in any way that is helpful, including in newsletters, worship and in online service/recordings.



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