

**Wisdom Circle - Gratitude
November 2014**

PREPARATION

Words of Wisdom

“Gratitude bestows reverence, allowing us to encounter everyday epiphanies, those transcendent moments of awe that change forever how we experience life and the world.” -
- John Milton

“Gratitude is not only the greatest of virtues, but the parent of all the others.”
- Marcus Tullius Cicero

“When you think things are bad, when you feel sour and blue, when you start to get mad... you should do what I do... Just tell yourself, Duckie, you’re really quite lucky! Some people are much more... oh, ever so much more... oh, muchly much-much more unlucky than you!”
- Dr. Seuss

“Nature says that we have “just so much and no more. Just so much soil. Just so much water. Just so much sunshine. Everything born of the earth grows to its appropriate size and then stops. The planet does not get bigger, it gets better. Its creatures learn, mature, diversify, evolve, create amazing beauty and novelty and complexity, but live within absolute limits.” – Donella Meadows, Environmentalist

“There are hundreds of ways to kneel and kiss the ground.” - Rumi

Spiritual Exercise – A Litany of Gratitude

Make a list of 10 things that you are grateful for and bring it with you to your wisdom circle. Keep your descriptions short (at most a sentence, not a whole paragraph). The list could include particular things from your life this week, or broader things from your past or the world. In our Wisdom Circles we will do a “Litany of Gratitude” by reading aloud from our lists. If, as you are coming up with your list, you think of some things for which you are grateful, but that you do not wish to share aloud, you might write them down on a separate piece of paper.

EXTRA CREDIT ACTIVITY:

To be done individually or together as a group. Materials: Paper, Envelopes, Cards, Pens, Markers, etc...

Make a card or write a letter to someone, telling them how thankful you are for something that they did. Write to someone you wouldn't ordinarily send a letter to (ie, not a thank you card for a gift or a yearly holiday card). You can do this activity on your own, or if there is time everyone in the Wisdom Circle could spend some time together during their meeting making cards.

Questions for Reflection:

- Have you ever felt gratitude during a time of your life that was particularly difficult? What made gratitude possible even during hard times?
- Does the experience of gratitude have an effect on your actions? How do you behave differently when you are feeling gratitude?
- How has gratitude been part of a spiritual practice or cultural practice in your life?
Ex: saying grace before meals, giving thanks on Thanksgiving Day, including thanks in bedtime prayers, keeping a gratitude list, the custom of sending thank-you cards.

Readings:

Reflections by Rev. Jennifer Channin

Gratitude comes most easily for me when I am observing the natural world—taking a walk through the woods, searching for seashells on the beach, watching the squirrels dart around in the trees. It is easy to be in awe of the amazing beauty and novelty and complexity found in nature. I don't think—gee, I wish these flowers were more fragrant, or I wish this tree were taller, or these squirrels were more playful. It is easy to feel grateful for the simple flowers, trees and the animals, without asking anything more of them than that they exist.

Gratitude is not so easy in other areas of life. When a check arrives in the mail, do we think, "oh, I am so grateful," or do we think, "I wish there were more zeros on the end of this number"? When a family member washes the dishes after a meal, do we think, "It's so wonderful to have someone who helps out," or do we think, "I wish they would also empty the dish rack." When I am not taking a leisurely stroll through the woods, gratitude has to be something I practice, rather than something that happens automatically.

There are times when practicing Gratitude is downright hard. It is hard to practice gratitude when life seems unfair, when things are not going well—when one's health is failing or when one's family relations are strained.

When searching for things to give thanks for, it is easy to be thankful for the ways our lives have improved during the past year—new relationships, for prosperity, health, and happiness. But what if we have recently seen our fortunes take a turn for the worse? Does gratitude have a purpose for us then? It is tempting, in such circumstances, to see a call for gratitude as just another way to make us stop complaining and accept the hand we've been unfairly dealt. We've earned our right to complain, to be bitter, to be resentful.

It is one thing to tell people who are prosperous and healthy that they should have gratitude. But try telling someone who is down on their luck that they should be more grateful. It probably won't turn out well for you.

However, gratitude is not a privilege of the prosperous. Some of the wealthiest people are those who never feel that they have enough, and are always comparing themselves to someone who has a few more millions than they do. We know that it is possible to be materially rich, but to suffer from spiritual poverty. Likewise, we know that some of the people who have the least in terms of material possessions, are also the happiest and most generous.

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**“For All the Gifts of Life” by Barbara Rhode, in *All the Gifts of Life: Collected Meditations, V.3*, ed. Patricia Frevert. Skinner House Books. 2002**

<http://www.amazon.com/Gifts-Life-Collected-Meditations-Volume/dp/1558964371>

One summer morning—the morning of our forty-fifth wedding anniversary—we were awakened by the sound of two hummingbirds hovering among the feathery pink blossoms of the silk tree outside our bedroom window.

It was a small sound, more clicks than notes. It had none of the calling beauty of a cardinal’s song, for example. And yet we experienced it as a gift, something life offered us for our particular delight.

Any event, when it nourishes our spirits, delights us, brings us energy or vision or direction or courage, is experienced as a gift. It is the genesis of all songs of praise.

Despite objective knowledge, we experience the sense of a gift as highly personal. I know, for example, that Channing did not write his sermon on spiritual freedom hoping that some day in the future someone like me would read it and see more clearly, but when a sentence from the sermon leaps off the page at me, I feel I have been directly addressed. Time has vanished and Channing is speaking his truth into my ear.

In our time it is difficult not to feel guilty about life’s gifts, knowing that there are millions for whom a handful of rice would be the most important gift they could receive, knowing that millions are awakened by the sound of guns rather than by two hummingbirds in a silk tree.

A great temptation for the privileged is to ease our guilt by convincing ourselves that we have earned our gifts, by hard work or good deeds or the right creed. Or we go to the other extreme and adopt a kind of spiritual austerity program.

I believe such guilt is fruitless. Our task is to remember three things: gifts that are not received die; gifts that we try to hoard die; gifts that we cannot or do not hand to another die.

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**“Pop’s Prayer,” by Robert R. Walsh, in *All the Gifts of Life: Collected Meditations, V.3*, ed. Patricia Frevert. Skinner House Books. 2002**

<http://www.amazon.com/Gifts-Life-Collected-Meditations-Volume/dp/1558964371>

My earliest memory of prayer is the table grace my grandfather used to say. I associate it with holiday meals, with extended family crowded around a long dining room table. I remember the smell of turkey gravy, the sight of bowed heads—and then the gruff voice of this old man delivering the prayer as if it were one long word accented on the first and last syllables:

*“Lordmakeusthankfulfortheseprovisionsweaskinchristsakeamen.”*

The last word sounded like “gah-men!” I thought that was the way one ended a prayer.

I remember years when I had no idea what he was saying. The prayer had meaning that did not depend on knowing. It was an invocation for the larger liturgy of the meal. Its meanings, beyond language, had to do with bonds: my bonds to the food, my parents and sister, the aunts and uncles and cousins and grandparents there, the warmth of the room, the celestial and human rhythms that brought us to that table, and other mysteries beyond these.

There came a time when I figured out the words to Pop’s prayer, but that did not seem to affect its meaning. It was much, much later, after turning this memory over until it was worn smooth, that I realized something important about the prayer. I had thought it was a prayer of thanksgiving. But Pop did not say, “Lord, thank you.” He said, “Lord, make us thankful.” It was a prayer of petition.

We were beginning those special meals, not with thanks for the bountiful gifts before us and around us, but with a confession that we were not thankful enough. “Make us thankful.” Wake us up. Our gratitude is dulled by the very abundance of what we have. Bring us, somehow, to enough clarity of vision to see what a miracle is this creation in which we find ourselves.

In truth, we are not thankful enough: a confession with which to begin our thanksgiving.  
*Gah-men!*

## **Wisdom Circle – Gratitude**

### **Session Plan**

*This session plan is a suggested guide, not a rigid set of rules. You may adjust this plan as you feel is appropriate in your group.*

### **Gathering & Welcome (~5 min)**

#### **Chalice Lighting (~2 min)**

*Optional Reading:*

Thank You God for this most amazing day:  
for the leaping greenly spirits of trees and a blue dream of sky; and for everything  
which is natural which is infinite which is yes

[I who have died today am alive again today and this is the sun's birthday; this is the birth  
day of life and of love and of wings and of the gay great happening illimitably earth]

how should tasting touching hearing seeing breathing any - lifted from the no of all nothing  
- human merely being doubt unimaginable You?

[now the ears of my ears awake and now the eyes of my eyes are opened]

e.e. cummings

#### **Check-In (20-30 minutes)**

*As you feel comfortable, take 2-3 minutes to share one thing that is lifting your spirits, and  
one thing that is weighing you down. This is a time for sharing, but not for discussion.*

#### **Business (10 minutes)**

*Use this time for any new business: Welcoming new members; Scheduling future meetings;  
Revisiting the Covenant; Answering questions about Wisdom Circle processes; Etc...*

#### **Litany of Gratitude (5-10 minutes)**

*Each person should have brought a list of 10 things for which they are grateful. Going clock-  
wise around the circle, have each person read aloud one item from their list, without pausing  
between people, until you've gone around the circle 10 times and everyone has read  
everything from their list.*

*Then say together: "We Give Thanks"*

## **Discussion (60 minutes)**

*Introduce Topic. Take Turns Reading aloud the "Words of Wisdom."*

- Have you ever felt gratitude during a time of your life that was particularly difficult? What made gratitude possible even during hard times?
- Does the experience of gratitude have an effect on your actions? How do you behave differently when you are feeling gratitude?
- How has gratitude been part of a spiritual practice or cultural practice in your life?  
Ex: saying grace before meals, giving thanks on Thanksgiving Day, including thanks in bedtime prayers, keeping a gratitude list, the custom of sending thank-you cards.

*Silent Reflection (~2 minutes)*

*First Responses (Share in the order you feel moved)*

*Cross-Conversation (Ask questions that invite deeper reflection; Speak from personal experience, and use "I statements"; Avoid explaining or judging)*

*Final Thoughts (Share in the order you feel moved)*

## **Gratitude (5-10 minutes)**

*Share 1-2 things that have been meaningful to you from this session.*

## **Closing**

*Optional Song: "We Give Thanks" by Wendy Luella Perkins (#1010 in Teal Hymnal)*

Oh we give thanks  
For this precious day.  
For all gathered here  
And those far away.  
For this time we share,  
With love and care.  
Oh we give thanks  
For this precious day.

We Give Thanks

*Easy flow* ♩ = 60

AB sus4 D Em7

(Melody) Oh, we give thanks for this pre-cious

(Harmony) Oh, we give thanks for this pre-cious

DFF Em7 D

day, For all gath-er'd here,

day, For all gath-er'd, all gath-er'd

eds & music: Wendy Lauffa Perkins, 1966 - , © 2004 Wendy Lauffa Perkins, Susan Peck, 1960 -

We Give Thanks - 2

We Give Thanks - 2

F#m G D AC#E

and those far a - way; For this time we

here, far a - way; For this time we

share with love and care,

share with love and care,

We Give Thanks - 3

DFF Em7 AB sus4

Oh, we give thanks for this pre-cious

Oh, we give thanks for this pre-cious

day, Oh, we give

day, Oh, we give

1 AB sus4 2