

## Everyday Grace

BY MATT ALSPAUGH, MINISTER, UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST  
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Grace is one of those words whose meaning has been dif-  
fused by so many strands of religious tradition that it is hard to use  
without confusion. Grace joins other terms like faith, evil, salvation  
words which themselves have been twisted  
into knots and overloaded with multiple meanings.



# Quest

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Approaching grace, my seminary texts offer up variants like common grace and  
special grace, free grace and cheap grace, irresistible and habitual grace, and a  
good selection of more obscure variations that keep the theologians busy.

I like the fourth century theologian Augustine's confession about grace; he asks,  
"What is grace?—I know until you ask me; when you ask me, I do not know."  
That's a bit more like it. At least a bit more like where I'm at with grace.

But this word can have meaning for us Unitarian Universalists. The great mid-  
century modern Christian theologian Paul Tillich wrote, "Grace does not mean  
that we suddenly believe that God exists, or that Jesus is the Savior, or that the  
Bible contains the truth... To believe that something is, is almost contrary to the  
meaning of grace."

To Tillich, grace is active, something that addresses us directly. "Grace strikes us  
when we are in great pain and restlessness. It strikes us when we walk through the  
dark valley of a meaningless and empty life."

Grace offers the possibility of sudden transformation—an awakening, not unlike  
what Zen Buddhists might seek through a practice of considering koans, those par-  
adoxical anecdotes or riddles that can lead one to enlightenment.

Islamic mystics, particularly Sufis, understood this kind of transformation, too.  
Thirteenth century Persian poet Jalaluddin Rumi, here translated by Coleman  
Barks, tells us:

*This is how a human being can change:  
There's a worm addicted to eating grape leaves  
Suddenly he wakes up,  
call it grace, whatever, something  
wakes him and he's no longer  
a worm  
  
He's the entire vineyard  
and the orchard, too,  
the fruit, the trunks  
a growing wisdom and joy  
that doesn't need to  
devour.*

As spiritual seekers, we may long to experience the grace that can offer such mas-  
sive transformation. But grace may also come in small ways. Grace may appear in those  
small gifts, surprises, moments of good fortune that happen to us and around us if we  
only pay attention. Grace may come to us in the everyday through events  
called synchronicity, which is another of those terms whose original meaning is hard  
to discern.

I've heard many people talk about synchronicity in their lives, and I've always  
understood them to be talking about some kind of divine intervention by God or

I do not at all  
understand the  
mystery of grace—  
only that it meets us  
where we are but does  
not leave us where it  
found us.

—Anne Lamott

A monthly for religious liberals

### THINKING ABOUT GRACE

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the universe, an intervention that lines up life events so they go click, click, click, like the tumblers in a safe's lock.

It's a lovely concept, and I don't want to quibble with them, since most of the time the synchronous events they talk about are joyful ones. Someone loses their job, and suddenly gets an out-of-the-blue offer for a better one. A chance encounter in the grocery store leads to a friendship or a relationship. Drop a greenback in the Salvation Army bucket and an unexpected insurance refund check appears in the mailbox.

But synchronicity has a deeper and more interesting meaning. Carl Jung invented the term to describe events that happen at the same time, not because they necessarily have a related cause, but rather because they have related meaning.

Jung first used "synchronicity" to describe a coincidental event that happened to him as he was working with a psychotherapy patient. This patient was particularly resistant to Jung's invitation to explore her unconscious, but she had had a dream in which a golden scarab beetle appeared. Just as she was describing the dream, a real beetle banged against the inside of his cabinet window. Jung caught it, and discovered it was a golden scarab

beetle, unusual for that locale and season. He showed it to the patient, and the event helped her break through and make progress in therapy. Jung concluded that events are synchronous because we see them that way; we connect them together and thereby find greater meaning, as he was able to do with his patient.

I find this approach to synchronicity much more satisfying than my earlier understanding. It's not the universe—or God—running around behind my back making things happen with spooky simultaneity. Rather, it's how I perceive and connect the events that

happen around me, and then come to a greater understanding of the universe by noticing their synchronicity.

In his classic book, *The Road Less Traveled*, M. Scott Peck describes grace as "a powerful force that exists outside human consciousness and nurtures the spiritual growth of human beings." Indeed, this spiritual development is part of our purpose in the universe. We are eyes and ears and rational intelligences of the universe, and we are becoming a spiritual intelligence in the universe. We are the universe coming to understand itself.

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*On a day when the  
wind is perfect,  
the sail just needs to  
open  
and the love starts.  
Today is such  
a day.*

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But what of the highest aspect of our evolution, the part that drives us to grow and develop as spiritual beings? Peck gives this creative spiritual drive a name: Love. He says,

*It is through love that we elevate ourselves. And it is through love for others that we assist others to elevate themselves. Love, the extension of the self, is the very act of evolution. It is evolution in progress. The evolutionary force, present in all of life, manifests itself in [humankind] as human love. Among humanity love is the miraculous force that defies the natural law of entropy.*

This love is a gift of the universe, or of whomever or whatever created the universe and its laws and conditions. It is nurtured through grace and difficult to put into words. Of all those who understand and try to describe this love, I find Sufi Muslim mystics, in

loose translation by Western poets, to be most clear and vivid and true.

The fourteenth century Persian poet Shams-du-din Mohammad Hafiz, here translated by Daniel Ladinsky, offers this:

*We have not come here to take  
prisoners,  
But to surrender ever more deeply To  
freedom and joy.  
We have not come into this exquisite  
world  
To hold ourselves hostage from  
love...  
We have a duty to befriend  
Those aspects of obedience  
That stand outside of our house  
And shout to our reason  
"O please, O please,  
Come out and play."  
For we have not come here to take  
prisoners  
Or to confine our wondrous spir-  
its,  
But to experience ever and ever  
more deeply  
Our divine courage, freedom and  
Light!*

Could not grace, source of that nurturing love, be calling to us, "O please, come out and play"? Could not grace, breaking in on and transforming us, carry us away in abandon to freedom and joy?

Rumi tells us:

*On a day  
when the wind is perfect,  
the sail just needs to open and the  
world is full of beauty...  
On a day when the wind is perfect,  
the sail just needs to open  
and the love starts.  
Today is such  
a day.*

Grace breaks through. Grace fills the open sail, and brings transforming love. Grace is not so amazing. Grace is not so rare. Grace is everyday. Today is such a day. □



## Adventures in Grace

BY BARBARA STEVENS,  
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My mother tells how when I was in grade school I wanted to take dance lessons, so she enrolled me in ballet. Although I approached the activity with forceful energy and my typical incorrigible enthusiasm, I lacked grace. In fact, it became so clear I was not meant to be a dancer that she eventually took me out of the class.

If grace is a quality of elegance, of effortless beauty and charm of movement, I don't have it. My husband suggests I might have developed grace had I stayed in the class. My mother, and perhaps the teacher, thought otherwise.

I don't remember caring. I had enough to do: playing kickball with the neighbors, roaming through the woods, picking blackberries, exploring the swamp, climbing trees, writing, reading, playing the piano, and learning from my grandfather how to cook.

I may not have been graceful myself, but my childhood was full of grace.

Not that it was perfect. I had my share of loneliness, death, uncertainty, anger. I was abused, betrayed, and confused. More than some, less than others.

I survived my childhood in part because of a kind of grace I did have: a delight in the overflowing gifts of life. This kind of grace doesn't keep us from experiencing pain or even evil, but it comforts us in the face of our suffering. Some days, I was more reflective than busy. I would sit in a tree and think about the universe, or spend half an hour staring at a nest of ants. At ten, I started writing poetry that expressed the anxiety of a broken home and of an older brother whose paranoia was starting to show.

And still, there was grace, coming at me from all directions. My friends'

mothers, for example, would watch me while my own mother worked, teaching me some of the social skills she lacked. Whenever I thought life was too hard for me, a friend would appear, or a teacher, or an unexpected interaction with a stranger would give me hope and renewed energy to tackle life.

Helen Keller said, "Life is either a daring adventure, or nothing. Security does not exist in nature, nor do the children of men as a whole experience it."

Life is meant to be lived, and if our lives are adventures, where better to seek grace than in dark cubbies and corners and inhospitable regions of the world? Grace in the face of a head-on collision; grace in losing a job; grace in moments of panic or rage. Grace also in the sight of a star, the nuzzle of a cat, the birth of a child, the love of a spouse, the kindness of strangers, the comfort of friends. Life hits us hard, yet if we let it, grace softens our landing.

To benefit from grace, however, we must let it in.

If we are active in addictions, or caught up in fears about time or money or relationships, or if we are overwhelmed at work, we may miss the pieces of grace that touch our lives: a co-worker's smile, the warm kiss of the wind, a bit of food, a place to sleep, a friend who calls to see if we're okay.

It's not that we deserve a reprieve, or have earned something good to happen to us. That's the cool thing about grace. We can't earn it; we already deserve it. We all get it, though some may seem to be blessed with more grace than others. Like God's love (which they say falls equally onto you, me *and* the people we despise), grace touches all of us, wantonly, randomly.

I imagine grace is like A.A. Milne's Tigger, bouncing around with a fairy godmother's wand, blessing this, tapping that, spinning, singing, dancing in an ungainly way and laughing.

Grace surprises us with a sudden peace, a sigh, a longing to reach out and a friend who will reach back.

Grace reminds us that no matter how clumsy we are, no matter how sick we feel, how ugly our home, how angry our family—life is ultimately sacred, clean, and holy. Grace reminds us that serendipity happens. So...listen, watch, let go. Grace will come when you're not expecting it. But sometimes it comes like a whisper, so you have to pay attention.

Helen Keller also said, "The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched. They must be felt with the heart." Grace is what we feel with the heart.

So keep your heart open. Oh, I get anxious, annoyed, scared, weary of being alive. But if I breathe and open up, grace always shows her face. It may not happen right away, but it happens soon enough to keep me going.

As you read these words and as you make your way through rain, storm and sunshine, may you too be blessed by grace. □

### There are many ways to experience the idea of divine "grace."

Whether you understand it to flow to humanity through Christ or Buddha, or whether you just see it in the act of loving one another, we know it is a sense of grace that softens the hard edges of life. Many experience a sense of grace in reading the *Quest Monthly* or in connecting to others through CLF's Facebook groups or classes. Please help us continue being a vehicle that softens the hard edges of life and make your gift of \$100 (or what you can) by visiting [www.clfu.org](http://www.clfu.org) or by calling 1-800-231-3027. □

## Grace-Full Moments

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Sometimes they just happen: grace-full moments; gifts from something beyond myself. I began to understand grace and experience more grace-full moments once I moved *away* from the vision of an interceding God and *toward* a view of the sacred with the divine flowing through and around all of us at all times.

For instance, there was what I now refer to as "Turtle Week." This was a time when I was feeling overwhelmed and everywhere I went, I kept seeing turtles—an animal of such spiritual significance to me that my friend embroidered one on my clerical stole.

Turtles were on the path I was walking—okay, that was really not terribly unusual. But turtles the size of a bas-

ketball crossing a highway—that was a lot more uncommon.

As the week went on, I became more and more anxious: I was trying to pack for a move about which I was both excited and nervous; I was shuttling the kids to activities; I was taking care of a dying pet, a cat I had gotten when I was in college. I was constantly running from this to that, with never a moment of downtime. Never a moment to stop and just be. And these turtles kept appearing! I would notice them, wonder about them for a minute, and then move on.

Until a very large turtle—about a basketball and a half—suddenly appeared in the center of the road as I was driving in the middle of a subdivision

where I had never seen a turtle before!

I could have swerved around it, but I suddenly remembered that in my life

turtles are reminders to pause, to take a break in all the craziness. And so I stopped right there in the middle of the road.

I got out of the car and stopped traffic for a few minutes as the turtle crossed safely to the other side and crawled into the grass. As I watched the creature wander off, I realized that turtles are also reminders that wherever I go, I take my home with me - a reminder that all will be well.

When I got back in the car, I felt better: less stressed, less overwhelmed. And more connected to the spirit of life and love, the mystery and wonder of the universe. I had experienced what I now understand as a grace-full moment. □

## Amalzinog

race

BY KAT , WER  
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Almost every Wednesday morning at my Lutheran school, we sang this song. No one taught us what the words meant, but over time I figured out that grace was somehow connected to a mysterious thing called the Holy Spirit, or, as I was first taught, the Holy Ghost. As a child, the word "ghost" only meant one thing to me: a being without a body that was hell-bent on possessing mine. And indeed, that's what the Holy Spirit seemed to do. I was told that without the Holy Spirit entering you, you could not be saved.

*Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost but now am found, was blind but now I see.*

Surrounded by the joyful singing of my fellow students and teachers, I mouthed the words with trepidation,

the sweet sound, did not see what the others saw.

feeling that I alone could not hear

to be afraid. It can describe a state of awe. And I have felt awe. There have

*'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved.  
How precious did that grace appear the hour I first believed.*

What is this thing that would make you suddenly fearful, and at the same time feel such relief from fear that you would become as immensely grateful as the words express? It was clear that I had never experienced grace; the Holy Spirit had not entered me.

Eventually, I walked away from Christianity and these things became mere ideas from someone else's belief system. But lately, the Holy Spirit has been on my mind again. *Spirit of Life, come unto me*, we sing every week at my Unitarian Universalist congregation. We're actually inviting a spirit to come possess us!

I can't help but notice similarities between the perplexing Holy Spirit of my youth and this comforting Spirit of Life. Somewhere along the line I

learned that fear doesn't always mean

been times when my perspective suddenly shifts. I am gently yet irresistibly put in my place as just one tiny speck in a universe of specks. Surprisingly, rather than causing feelings of despair, it's comforting and liberating. (*Roots hold me close; wings set me free.*) Because at the same time I realize that all our specks are interconnected. We are not alone and our salvation depends on each other.

At moments when I really know this—not just intellectually—I feel the holy Spirit of Life course within me. And I know that there is no need to invite the spirit in. She is always there as that divine spark within each and between all of us. Connecting us. Moving us towards each other.

I've had this realization several times now, and yet each time still gasp with amazement. That sudden awareness of the divine within, that connection to the divine all around, and the knowledge that the two are one and the same—that is amazing grace. □



# A Quarter-

# Way

# Home

BY AKE ORRILL ,  
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You've heard of a half-way house? Well, this was a quarter-way. For those who no longer needed a locked facility. But only just barely. The quarter-way residents had not been in jail. They'd been where you go when someone decides your brain might bring you harm. But all that was behind them. They'd completed the programs. Had their meds re-adjusted. Now, they were free. Or a quarter- way free.

One resident smoked on the stoop, trying not to remember. Another had nearly completed a doctorate in math at somewhere prestigious before it all came unraveled. But that was years ago. Now, he held court in the kitchen, his lap stacked with newspapers, haranguing the staff in imperious tones. Then there was a woman I'm going to call Gina.

Nothing about Gina could not be called big. A hairdo that spread out in every direction. A winter coat sewn with a giant in mind. And a voice with claws that could find you there down at the end of the hall. You know how some people's complaints are poetic? Well, Gina's poured out like sludge from the back of a cement-mixing truck that can never turn off and will never run out. A hospital was only two blocks away. That was the place Gina went to shoplift.

As for me, I worked there only a month, maybe two. I left with the idea that I could do better. By that point, through the years, I had worked for too long in two other group homes. At the previous homes, I had worked with teenagers. With a teenager, you can make yourself think there is hope. But at the quarter-way, the residents were

in their forties, their fifties. The question of whether to hope was long settled by now.

But it is in the nature of hope to flicker up just at the moment it seems to be gone. After escaping from Egypt, and passing through the Red Sea, the people of God are out in the wilderness, years from the Promised Land. It says that they murmur, but that's putting it gently. They are starving. They're lost.

What they do is freak out. Which is when, in the story, the manna appears. Is it dew? Or hoarfrost? A filigree of honey-sweet flakes that you eat at first light, before the sun burns it off. You don't store up manna. You don't save it for later. The next day, scripture says, it will stink, crawl with worms. So, it's food for right now. Just enough to go staggering on toward the dream.

You know the hospital two blocks away? In the cafeteria, you'd see families draped over lunch-tables, on break from the rooms where their loved ones were already failing. If you were hungry, you could get a tray, load it down with whatever, then take it to the lady at the front so she could ring you up. You've been somewhere like that. You know how it all goes. The point being, this is not what Gina did.

Baskets of bread-rolls were set out to go with your soup or your salad. Gina would head straight for them and fill her winter-coat pockets, six or seven bread-rolls in each. Then she would just leave.

It's been so long now that I just can't say why, but I know we were not to discuss her shoplifting with her. It was a directive. So, when she came home, crowing like her pockets had diamonds, not bread rolls, we all kind of shrugged and averted our eyes.

The night the supervisor heard second-hand I was planning to quit, he called the house phone. Right there in the living room, with an audience of staff and residents both. Maybe he was upset because now he'd have to find

somebody for a job that nobody would want. But what he focused on, in a voice loud enough that it bled through

the receiver and out into the room, was you just don't waltz in and out of people's lives. Especially the residents, who had been abandoned again and again. If anyone was going to get better, if anyone was ever going to be happy or stable, it was going to take trust, and hanging in there, and patience, and faith. He went on for some time. Wanted to know exactly what kind of person I was. As if there was an answer.

Here's what I can say. Two weeks before, Gina slams through the door, just like always, coat bulging with bread. But on this day, instead of pushing past me, she stops. Digs a roll from her pocket, holds it out. The shift is over. I'm clocked out. In my wired-shut heart, I've already resigned. But I take what she offers. Without speaking, we eat. I do not feel, in that moment, the presence of God. But I see we are lost and that she is my sister. Which is food for right now. Just enough to go staggering on toward the dream. □

## Executive Director to Retire

No one has ever had more inspiration or fun at their job than I've had over my almost-fifteen years with CLF. My colleagues on the staff are downright fabulous—so caring and committed, so daring, so willing to experiment and fail forward.

Connecting with so many of you has warmed my heart over these years. This diverse congregation brings the saving UU message to thousands all over the planet! As I retire on August 31<sup>st</sup>, please know how proud I am of the work we've done and how excited I am about the blessings you will continue to bring to the world.

—Lorraine Dennis



## From Your Minister

BY MEG RILEY  
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CHURCH OF THE  
LARGER FELLOWSHIP

In "The Lanyard," one of my favorite poems by Billy Collins, he describes making a plastic lanyard to give his mother. He details all of the gifts she has given him—the breath of life itself, flesh, bones, meals, a home, while he describes the clunky red and white plastic lanyard that he made at camp to give to her. He finishes the poem by saying that, as a boy, he was sure that the lanyard "would be enough to make us even." (If you have internet access, you can watch Collins read this piece at <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/poetryeverywhere/collins.html>)

The poem makes us laugh. And it shows, using one concrete example, just how completely the decks are stacked against us when it comes to giving back or doing "enough" to thank the universe for all that we are given. What could possibly suffice as adequate exchange for mountains, oceans, sunsets, the Northern lights? Or, for that matter, the almost unbearable sweetness of just one puppy or one human baby?

We have done nothing to deserve these gifts, and there is nothing we can do to earn them. I think of receiving unearned blessings as one way to describe grace. And the only whole-hearted response to such blessings is infinite gratitude. Whether our lives are blissful or miserable right now, support is coming to us from places we don't even know about.

One year I engaged in a Buddhist meditation practice in which, every evening, I considered who and what had sustained me that day, and jotted down notes about it. I found it to be a reflection on infinity.

For instance, I might think about my child's school. There were the teachers. There were the universities that trained the teachers, with all of their aspects. There were the families and communities that sustained the school, with all of their aspects. There were the taxpayers who sustained the school financially. There were elected officials who made choices about how to pay attention to the needs of children. There were the people who took care of the building, who built the school, and who made the materials to build the school. There were the children themselves. And on and on and on.

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### I think of receiving unearned blessings as one way to describe grace.

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Digging into any of these aspects of just one elementary school could elicit a full page of writing, and I would barely have scratched the surface. And that school, of course, was just one part of my complicated life! My daily support comes from an infinite number of places.

I engaged in that meditation practice during "That Awful Year" for us, school-wise. Most kids have one—the year they look back on throughout their lives as The Worst. I turned to this particular practice to sustain me during that time because I could feel myself getting bitter and closed-hearted. Meditating on all that sustained me made me see that, no matter how negative the daily experience might be, it was still impossible to name, much less write down, all of the sustenance and support which came to me every day.

Now, clearly, some of us are given much more daily support than others; we have privileges conferred on us that others do not. These should never be confused with grace. But, in fact, they often are. It is my experience that in the areas where I have more privilege,

I am likely to begin to believe that I have earned, and actually deserve, all that is given to me. I begin to believe that the lanyards I've made entitle me to not just view the mountains and oceans, but to put a wall around them and claim them as my own.

But no one who has truly experienced even a moment of pure grace would believe that walling it off from others is possible or desirable. In fact, to do so is to make it abundantly clear that what you've experienced is not grace. Grace by its very nature cannot be owned. Trying to own it is the surest possible way to lose it.

In Toni Morrison's book *Beloved*, a slave woman who has suffered one of the most horrific lives which human beings can confer on each other tells her community that "the only grace they could have was the grace they could imagine." That if they could not see it, they would not have it. Morrison continues:

*"Here, in this here place, we flesh; flesh that weeps, laughs; flesh that dances on bare feet in grass. Love it. Love it hard. Yonder they do not love your flesh. They despise it... No more do they love the skin on your back. Yonder they flay it. And O my people they do not love your hands. Those they only use, tie, bind, chop off and leave empty. Love your hands! Love them. Raise them up and kiss them. Touch others with them, pat them together, stroke them on your face 'cause they don't love that either. You got to love it, you!"*

We can't earn a state of grace, and nothing we can do will reliably cause us to experience it. We can't own it. No lanyard or anything else we create will be enough to make us even. But "You got to love it, you!" is good advice for all of us who seek to know grace. Whatever our circumstances today, there is grace to be remembered, grace to be imagined and grace to be received. □

## REsources for Living

BY LYNN UNGAR, MINISTER FOR  
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What do you think of when you hear the word grace? Maybe a dancer who moves with elegance and ease, the picture of smooth and graceful motion. Or maybe someone who knows just the right thing to say in any given situation with any person, the picture of social grace. Or maybe grace is a kind of forgiveness, a little extra wiggle room, like when you get a grace period to turn in your homework or to pay a bill.

It could be that you have a Christian understanding of grace as the unending generosity of God in our lives, the presence of love and forgiveness whatever our sins might be. You could think of grace as unearned good fortune, or as the miracle that lifts our hearts even in the midst of hard times. And you wouldn't be wrong if you thought any and all of these things. Grace, it turns out, is a pretty big word for only five letters. Which makes it a bit surprising that we also use the word grace to describe a little prayer or blessing that we say before a meal. Maybe you have a table grace that you use in your own family. As my daughter was growing up, every evening before dinner we would sing: "Thank you for this food, this food, this glorious, glorious food...and the animals, and the vegetables, and the minerals that made it possible." We were clear that the cook was one of the animals that made it possible. We never really said who we were thanking for the food and the animals and the vegetables and the minerals. It didn't matter. The point was that we paused for just a moment to say "Thank you." Grace and gratitude, it turns out, are pretty closely related. You can see it in the Spanish and Italian words for thank you, *gracias* and *grazie*. Somehow, being grateful fills us with

grace. Being grateful reminds us that so much of what we have in life is unearned, the

product of a generous planet and generous

people across the generations who have made possible so much of what we have and who we are.

Being grateful allows us to move through the world with a bit more grace, as we acknowledge the kindness of others, and as we remember that even in the hard times we can still find places of joy. Being grateful gives us the opportunity to really appreciate the grace periods when we're given another chance.

And yes, it's good to practice gratitude as many times a day as possible. But the fact is that whether we're talking about homework, exercise or gratitude, we do better at remembering to do something important when we have a time set aside to attend to it. Before dinner turns out to be a really good time to gather your family together to practice a bit of gratitude. Saying grace doesn't have to be complicated or time-consuming. In fact, it's probably better to think of a table grace as something small enough that you can say (or sing) it before your food starts to get cold.



Maybe each person can share something good about their day or something they're grateful for. Maybe you can take turns having each member of the family say a few words of thanks. Maybe, like my family, you want to have words that you say every evening, a ritual that grounds you in the familiar. Maybe someone in your family wants to come up with words you'll say before dinner or maybe you'd rather use something that's already out there in the world.

Maybe your family gives thanks to God. (When I was a teen our UU youth group used to chant before meals: "Rub-a-dub-dub, thanks for the grub. Yaaaaay, God!") Maybe God is not a part of your family's theology, and you want to thank the beings who made your meal possible. Maybe you just want to sit in grateful silence for a moment after you light a candle. Grace, as they say, abounds, and there is no right or wrong way to bring grace to a meal.

"We are lucky. We are lucky to be. We are lucky to be here. We are lucky to be here together."

I encountered one of my favorite table graces when I had dinner with a woman and daughter whom I had just met. As they did every evening before dinner we took hands and said: "We are lucky. We are lucky to be. We are lucky to be here. We are lucky to be here together." Then we squeezed each other's hands and smiled and started passing the food. It was simple, quick and full of grace.

Grace happens when we sit down together. Grace happens when we remember that we are blessed by so much that we didn't create, starting with the fact of our own lives. Grace happens when we appreciate all that surrounds us, the unique beauty the world around us at any given moment. Grace happens when we take each other's hands in love, when we look in one another's eyes and remember that we are, in fact, so lucky to be here together. □







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## Bestowers of Grace

BY KAREN JOHNSON GUSTAFSON, INTERIM MINISTER, MICHAEL SERVETUS  
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It was my good fortune to grow up in the midst of human graciousness. I am reminded of my father, whose practice when visiting Mexico was to patronize street vendors and bargain *up*. "How much do you want for that jewelry?" he would say. "Twenty pesos" they might say. "Oh, no," my dad would respond, "Not enough. I'll give you twenty-five." It was not that he was a rich man, but rather that he was so grateful for what he had that he could not help but offer it up to others in surprising ways.

Gratitude is the wellspring of human grace. To know that we are blessed is to know that we have grace to offer. We become bestowers of grace. We do this when we give without regard to what we will receive in return (sometimes not so much as a thank-you). We are bestowers of grace when we do not count the cost, when we see another's openness and guide them gently to what they are able to receive. We are bestowers of grace whenever we engage in "senseless acts of kindness and random acts of beauty."

May we find ourselves open to the life around us. May we humbly rejoice and give thanks for the infinite possibilities to receive the grace of the world and to bestow it upon others. □



