

**“Gratitude Practice is More Than Making a Gratitude List”  
Dianne M. Daniels; UUCN, November 16, 2025**

**Sermon: “Gratitude Practice is More than Making a  
Gratitude List”  
by Rev. Dianne M. Daniels  
Remember to SLOW DOWN**

Good morning, beloveds. It is a joy to be with you again in this sacred space - to feel your energy, to see your faces, to be part of this living, breathing community, in person and online.

I would like to begin our service this morning with a poem entitled “Otherwise” by the poet Jane Kenyon.

Poem 050: Otherwise by Jane Kenyon

I got out of bed on two strong legs.  
It might have been otherwise.

I ate cereal, sweet milk, ripe, flawless peach.  
It might have been otherwise.

I took the dog uphill to the birch wood.  
All morning I did the work I love.

At noon, I lay down with my mate.  
It might have been otherwise.

We ate dinner together at a table with silver candlesticks.  
It might have been otherwise.

I slept in a bed in a room with paintings on the walls, and planned another day just like this day.  
But one day, I know, it will be otherwise.

When we talk about gratitude, we often think first of polite behavior. We recall being taught to say “please” and “thank you” as a way to show appreciation when someone hands us a gift or extends a kindness.

But as meaningful as good manners are, a deep and transformative gratitude practice is far more than remembering to say the right words. Gratitude is not just an item on our spiritual to-do list. It is not merely an idea, or a phrase, or a seasonal practice we dust off once a year in November. Gratitude, at its heart, is a way of life — a way of moving through the world with an open spirit, a curious mind, and a heart tuned toward the sacred.

And this way of life aligns beautifully with our Unitarian Universalist values — especially Love, Interdependence, Generosity, and Pluralism. These values remind us that gratitude is not just something we feel, but something we enact.

Something we embody.

Something we choose.

So today, I want us to explore what it means to commit to gratitude as a practice — something deeper, richer, and more spiritually grounding than simply making a list. I want us to remember that gratitude is a way of being fully present to the blessings and the challenges of life, to the people who support us and the communities that hold us, and to the larger web of existence that connects us all.

## **The Seven Tenets of Gratitude as a Way of Life**

The original material that inspired this sermon outlines seven key ideas — seven tenets — that help us understand gratitude not just as a fleeting feeling, but as a way of life.

As I read through these key ideas, I realized how beautifully they echo what we teach and try to live as Unitarian Universalists. They help us recognize gratitude as a spiritual grounding, a daily meditation, and yes — a powerful practice that goes beyond checking off “I wrote three things I’m grateful for today.”

Let’s go a little deeper into each one.

### **1. Gratitude Is a Positive Emotion**

We don’t choose our emotions, but we do choose how we respond to them. Positive emotions — such as joy, appreciation, and contentment — arise during brief yet meaningful moments that remind us of the beauty and possibilities in our lives.

Gratitude, in its simplest form, is an emotional reaction: something good happens, and we feel thankful.

But a gratitude practice moves us from simply **feeling** appreciation to **cultivating** it. We begin to *intentionally* create space for joy. We discipline ourselves to notice goodness even in small, fleeting moments.

This is where Love — the center of our UU Shared Values — enters the picture. Love is what invites us to open our awareness. Love is what helps us stay present long enough to recognize grace when it shows up in our lives.

A gratitude list can capture these positive emotions, yes — but a gratitude *practice* teaches us to linger with them, to savor them, to let them nourish us.

## **2. Gratitude is an Affective Trait**

Some people are simply more inclined toward gratitude than others. They may be naturally optimistic or have a positive disposition. The beautiful thing about affective traits — those that are stable and emotion-driven — is that they are not fixed.

Gratitude is a *learnable* posture. It is a spiritual muscle that strengthens with use. A gratitude **list** can help you track what you notice...but a gratitude **practice** changes what you are **able** to notice.

In our UU faith, we embrace Pluralism — the belief that we all come to spiritual truth in our own way, and that our different gifts and different temperaments enrich the whole. Some of us walk into gratitude easily, while others must work at it. *Both paths are holy*. An authentic and personal gratitude practice meets us where we are and helps us grow.

## **3. Gratitude Helps Us Savor Life and Magnify Enjoyment**

People who anchor themselves in gratitude get more out of their lives. They don't necessarily have more blessings — they simply notice and appreciate what's already present. They slow down enough to experience joy. They allow themselves to fully embrace the richness of life.

This is where Interdependence becomes visible. We savor life more when we see how connected everything is. When we recognize that the sunlight on our face, the laughter of a child, the warmth of

a cup of coffee, or the comfort of a friend's voice are not isolated moments but part of the larger blessing of being alive.

A gratitude list can **record** these joys.

A gratitude practice invites us to  **dwell** in and fully  **experience** them.

#### **4. Gratitude Is a Positive and Effective Coping Mechanism**

When life grows heavy — and it will — gratitude becomes a lamp in the darkness. It doesn't erase difficulty, but it helps us hold on to hope. Gratitude grounds us. It reminds us that even during grief, disappointment, or uncertainty, goodness still exists.

This is where the UU value of Generosity comes in — not financial generosity, but generosity of spirit. A generous spirit looks for light even in shadowed places. A generous spirit believes that healing, comfort, and connection are still possible.

A gratitude list might help us  **name** blessings in a hard season.

A gratitude practice helps us  **discover** blessings we might not have otherwise noticed.

#### **5. Gratitude Is a Mood**

We all know what it means to be “in a mood.” Gratitude can be an emotional atmosphere that surrounds us — a spiritual climate we carry with us into the world. And moods can be contagious. Gratitude radiates outward, inviting others into a space of calm, appreciation, and openness.

This is one of the gifts we give each other in community — when one of us is grounded in gratitude, we help stabilize and uplift the people around us.

This echoes our value of Interdependence again: our moods affect our neighbors, our friends, our congregations, and our families.

A gratitude list can *shift our mood* for a moment...

...but a gratitude practice *shapes the spiritual energy* we offer to others.

## **6. Gratitude Is an Indicator of Well-Being**

People who practice gratitude regularly tend to experience better physical and mental health. Better sleep, improved immunity, reduced stress and anxiety, strengthened relationships — all of these are connected to gratitude.

Is gratitude a cure-all? Of course not. But it **is** a steadying force. It is one of the ways we align ourselves with Love — the kind of Love that says, “You matter. Your life is precious. Your body deserves care. Your spirit deserves rest.”

A gratitude list might capture moments of health and healing.

A gratitude practice increases the well-being we experience over time.

## **7. Gratitude Is a Component of Transcendence**

This final key idea is my favorite.

When we practice gratitude deeply and consistently, we expand our awareness. We see ourselves more clearly and compassionately. We recognize our connection to others and to the world around us. We develop a sense of meaning that is bigger than our singular experience.

This is the essence of spiritual life — a widening of perspective.

A deepening of reflection.  
A growing sense of purpose.

Gratitude, in this sense, is transcendent. It lifts us beyond the immediate circumstances of our lives and reminds us of the sacredness woven into all things.

A gratitude list might help us **name** what's good.

A gratitude practice helps us **become** good — more grounded, more compassionate, more loving.

## **From Tenets to Practice: Six Ways to Make Gratitude Daily**

We've heard multiple ways to turn gratitude from an idea into a daily spiritual practice. Let's take those practices and expand them into a faith-filled reflection.

### **1. Keep a Gratitude Journal**

*A gratitude journal is a wonderful tool — not the whole practice, but a doorway into the practice.* Writing helps us pause long enough to name our blessings. And when we reread old entries, we see evidence of resilience, healing, and growth.

Journaling is one of the places where Love becomes visible.

Love for our own journey.

Love for the unfolding of our life story.

Love for the sacred moments we might have missed if we hadn't written them down.

*A gratitude journal is not about lists — it's about learning to pay attention.*

### **2. Meditate on Gratitude**

Meditation centers us. It helps us listen beneath the noise of our lives. When we meditate on gratitude, we give ourselves the gift of slowing down and noticing what is good, right now, in this very moment, in this breath.

This practice echoes Pluralism — we meditate in different ways, through prayer, breathing exercises, yoga, moments of quiet, even washing the dishes.

*Gratitude meditation reminds us that goodness is always available, even in ordinary moments.*

### **3. Think of Obligations as Opportunities**

This one is powerful. Reframing an *obligation* as an **opportunity** invites a shift in perspective. Instead of dreading the group project, the presentation, or the difficult conversation, we see a chance to grow — to build skills, deepen our resilience, and show up fully.

This is gratitude as a spiritual discipline.

This is gratitude as Transcendence — rising above the immediate discomfort to see the larger blessing.

### **4. Spend Time Appreciating Something Ordinary**

Ordinary life is holy.

Ordinary moments are sacred.

When we take time to appreciate a sunrise, a cup of tea, the steady hum of a refrigerator, the beauty of the natural world — we affirm our Interdependence with everything around us.

Gratitude helps us remember that nothing is truly small.

*The ordinary is often where Love shows up first.*

## **5. Fill a Gratitude Jar**

*A gratitude jar is less about the jar and more about building a habit of noticing. Writing one sentence a day may seem insignificant, but spiritual transformation rarely comes through dramatic events. It comes through the accumulation of small, intentional choices over time.*

A gratitude jar is an act of Generosity — a gift we give our future selves. A reminder that even when life feels heavy, blessings still exist. **Blessings still exist.**

## **6. Choose to Be Grateful**

Ultimately, gratitude is a choice. Not a forced cheerfulness, not a denial of pain, not the toxic positivity that tells us to “just be grateful” when we’re hurting.

*Choosing gratitude means deciding to look for the good — even when it’s hard to find.*

Choosing gratitude means letting Love lead.

Choosing gratitude means trusting Interdependence.

Choosing gratitude means practicing the Generosity of spirit.

Choosing gratitude means honoring Pluralism — letting ourselves and others be at different places on the journey, without judgment.

Gratitude as a practice is intentional. It is active. It is transformational.

## **Closing Reflection for Sermon**

Gratitude is more than making a list.

More than naming three things at the end of the day.  
More than a November ritual or a moment at the dinner table.

Gratitude is a way of seeing.  
A way of being.  
A way of loving.

It reminds us that we are connected — deeply, humbly, beautifully — to one another, to the natural world, and to the great mystery of existence.

Practiced consistently, gratitude becomes part of who we are. It strengthens our well-being, deepens our compassion, and expands our capacity for joy.

May we choose gratitude not just as an idea, but as a **way of life**.

Not just as a list, but as a **practice**.

Not just as a feeling, but as an **expression of Love** — the Love that is always at the center of who we are and who we aspire to be.

Amen. Ase. Blessed be.

## **Closing Words – As We Leave this Sacred Time – by Rev. Dianne M. Daniels**

As we leave this sacred time,  
May our hearts be a little wider and our eyes a little more open.

May we remember that gratitude is not a task,  
but a *choice* — a daily practice that grows  
Each time we pause, notice, and give thanks.

May the Love at the center of our values steady our steps.  
May Interdependence remind us that we never walk alone.  
May Generosity shape how we show up for one another.  
And may Pluralism keep us curious, humble, and open  
to the many ways gratitude reveals itself.

May we go forth ready to be surprised by grace,  
to recognize the sacred in the ordinary,  
and to let gratitude be the lamp that lights our path.

Go now in peace, in courage, and in ever-renewing hope.  
Blessed be. Amen. Ashe. Have a beautiful week ahead.