



Soul Matters

Cultivating Compassion



**Soulful Journey
October 2025**

UNITARIAN
UNIVERSALIST
CHURCH OF
JACKSON



Welcome to Soulful Journey: Cultivating Compassion

It's tempting to think of this month's theme as one of our lighter, more pleasant ones. After all, compassion sounds...well, nice. It conjures warm feelings and tender thoughts. Images come to mind of people telling each other they are holding them in their hearts. It would seem to be all about emotional connection and empathetic *feeling*.

But then along comes a quote like this:

"Compassion hurts. When you feel connected to everything, you also feel responsible for everything. And you cannot turn away. Your destiny is bound with the destinies of others." - [Andrew Boyd](#)

Or this:

"True compassion is to engage in the suffering of others."
- [The Charter for Compassion](#)

Both remind us that compassion is not just niceness and thoughtful feelings. It's about something deeper: an impulse that drives us to *action*.

Indeed, that may be compassion's defining characteristic; it is distinguished by *doing*. To feel the pain of another, empathy has that covered. But compassion takes it a step further. It urges us *to do* something about that pain.

In other words, compassion calls us to change things! It's not just about comforting others; it's about our comfort getting disturbed. It's about connecting with another's pain and struggle so deeply that we can't rest until they rest. When we feel compassion - real compassion - we don't just *understand* another's pain, we want it to stop. And then we do what's needed to make it stop.

And if that's the case, then maybe compassion's question for us this month isn't what we first imagined. Instead of asking us, "How deeply are you able to feel?" maybe it's asking, "What are you prepared to do?"

Reflection and Journaling Questions

1. Has compassion ever helped you find your way home?
2. When were you offered compassion in an unexpected or unique way?
3. What's your first memory of being compassionate with yourself?
4. Who is to thank for the way compassion "naturally" arises in you?
5. Where did your unkind and self-critical inner voice come from? Or maybe the better question is, *whose* unkind and self-critical voice taught your brain how to talk?
6. What do you need to do to [stay tender and compassionate](#) in the face of our consistently cruel political culture that wants you to go numb?
7. Which of these [self-diminishing cultural lies](#) do you struggle with the most, maybe without even realizing it:
 - (a) I am what I have.
 - (b) I am what I do.
 - (c) I am what other people say or think about me
 - (d) I am nothing more than my worst moment?
8. Is it possible that your self-improvement efforts have subtly become acts of [self-aggression](#)?
9. How would your feelings about and actions with that "[difficult person](#)" in your life change if you somehow discovered they were [doing the best they can](#) or that their aggravating behavior is not a character defect but [a wound that runs deep](#)?
10. In a world that needs so much compassion, many of us feel tangled up in and worn down by compassion fatigue. How might that struggle be eased if you [more regularly asked yourself](#): What's mine to do? What's *not* mine to do? What's mine to say? What's *not* mine to say? What's mine to care about? What's *not* mine to care about?
11. Is it time to stop beating yourself up for [that poor decision you made long ago](#)? Is it time to remind yourself that you made the best decision you could have with the information and skills you had at the time?
12. What if [your busy and important life](#) is the true enemy of your compassion?

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 this month's theme in your living and loving.

Wise Words

There is a hierarchy of responses when we encounter suffering. Pity says, "I see your pain." Sympathy says "I understand your pain." Empathy says, "I feel your pain." Compassion says "I am with you in your pain and I will help."
[Rabbi Esther Adler](#)

We were all broken from the same nameless heart, and every living thing wakes with a piece of that original heart aching its way into blossom. This is why we know each other below our strangeness, why when we fall, we lift each other, or when in pain, we hold each other, why when sudden with joy, we dance together. Life is the many pieces of that great heart loving itself back together.
Mark Nepo

True compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar; it understands that an edifice that produces beggars needs restructuring.
Martin Luther King Jr.

Compassion is not a relationship between the healer and the wounded. It's a relationship between equals. Only when we know our own darkness well can we be present with the darkness of others. Compassion becomes real when we recognize our shared humanity.
[Pema Chödrön](#)

Hurt people, hurt people... but, they help them too.
[Iain Corbett](#)

We are being conditioned to shut down. The barrage of cruelty, confusion, spectacle, and spin... wears on our capacity to feel... That is the danger of this moment—not just political collapse or climate unraveling or the erosion of public trust—but the numbing of our souls...
[Rev. Cameron Trimble](#)

Self-compassion isn't about escaping your darkness but learning to love yourself there.
Jennifer Healey

Having compassion for yourself means that you honor and accept your humanness.
[Kristen Neff](#)

If your compassion does not include yourself, it is incomplete.
[Jack Kornfield](#)

Hold yourself as a mother holds her beloved child.
The Buddha

She doesn't want to wear short sleeves, she says, because they will show her "old woman arms." Sometimes worry is just another word for wanting to be loved just as we are...
[Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer](#)

Compassion is not foolish. It doesn't just go along with what others want so they don't feel bad. There is a yes in compassion, and there is also a no, said with the same courage of heart... Buddhists call this the fierce sword of compassion. It is the powerful no of leaving a destructive family, the agonizing no of allowing an addict to experience the consequences of his acts.
[Jack Kornfield](#)

You are not required to set yourself on fire to keep others warm.
Unknown

When you avoid conflict to make peace with other people, you start a war within.
[Cheryl Richardson](#)

Those who do the most growing in this life are those who offer the most compassion to the parts of themselves that have not yet grown.
[Andrea Gibson](#)

We must admit—compassion is not always easy. Still, we choose it. Not because the world is kind, but because we can be.
[David Breeden](#)

Have compassion for everyone you meet,
even if they don't want it. What seems conceit,
bad manners, or cynicism is always a sign
of things no ears have heard, no eyes have
seen.

You do not know what wars are going on
down there where the spirit meets the bone.

Miller Williams & sung by *Lucinda Williams*

Stripped of violent reaction, anger is the purest
form of care, the internal living flame of anger
always illuminates what we belong to, what we
wish to protect and what we are willing to
hazard ourselves for.

David Whyte

Shoulders

Naomi Shihab Nye

Text: <https://poets.org/poem/shoulders>

Spoken:

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

Poetry

Even This Is Enough *

(On self-compassion)

Rev. Vanessa Southern

Full piece at

<https://www.uua.org/worship/words/prayer/even-enough>

The world won't stop spinning on her axis if you
don't rise to all occasions today.
Love won't cease to flow in your direction...
Rest, if you must, then, like the swimmer lying
on her back who floats...

Gentleness in Living *

Rev. Richard S. Gilbert

Full piece at

<https://www.uua.org/worship/words/meditation/gentleness-living>

Who of us can look inside another and know
what is there
Of hope and hurt, or promise and pain?...
Our lives are like fragile eggs.
They crack and the substance escapes.
Handle with care!
Handle with exceedingly tender care...

Self-Compassion

James Crews

Full poem at

<https://www.guideforconscioushealing.com/wild-words-poetry-blog/self-compassion>

My friend and I snickered the first time
we heard the meditation teacher, a grown man,
call himself honey, with a hand placed
over his heart to illustrate how we too
might become more gentle with ourselves
and our runaway minds. It's been years
since we sat with legs twisted on cushions,
holding back our laughter, but today
I found myself crouched on the floor again,
not meditating exactly, just agreeing
to be still, saying honey to myself each time
I thought about my husband splayed
on the couch with aching joints and fever...

Breathing Compassion

Steve Garnaas-Holmes

Full piece at

<https://unfoldinglight.net/2022/06/19/breathing-compassion/>

Breathe in love.
It is love, all this that surrounds you...
holds you, contains you, fills you perfectly...
It is given, breathed into you...
from divine lungs
that breathe everything...
Breathe it in deeply, this love.
Let it fill you,
enliven you,
change you.
And breathe out.

Meditations & Prayers

Tending

Rev. Dr. David Breeden

Spirit of compassion,
named or nameless,
within and among us,
teach us to tend,
tend to ourselves
and to each other.

May we tend to tenderness
as patiently as seeds in spring.

May our hearts be soft enough
to feel another's ache,
strong enough
to hold that ache with grace.

When we fail,
may we begin again,
gently,
with compassion
for ourselves.

May this be our hope and vow:
to practice love
until it takes root.

Prayer for Cultivating Compassion for Oneself *

Rev. Michelle Collins, Soul Matters Worship Researcher

Source of Love, we come carrying the weight of our own harsh verdicts, guilty, insufficient, forever falling short of some impossible standard. We who would never speak to a friend the way we speak to ourselves in the dark hours before dawn.

There is a tenderness we save for others that we ration from our own souls. A forgiveness we grant freely to strangers while our own mistakes echo endlessly in memory's courtroom. We have learned to be generous with everyone but the person in the mirror.

Teach us the revolutionary act of self-befriending. When shame whispers its familiar poison, may we remember: we are not our worst moments. We are not the sum of our regrets. We are beloved, imperfect, gloriously human—worthy of the same gentle mercy we yearn to give the world.

May we learn that loving ourselves is not vanity but necessity—the deep well from which all other love must flow.

Prayer for Cultivating Compassion When It Feels Difficult *

Rev. Michelle Collins, Soul Matters Worship Researcher

Spirit of Community, we name the truth: there are people who make love feel impossible, who

push every button we didn't know we had, who seem almost designed to test the very limits of our humanity.

Our hearts contract around these relationships like fists, protecting old wounds that never quite healed. We itemize their faults, build cases for our justified anger, forget that they too were once children who needed tenderness.

Grant us eyes to see past the armor to the wounds beneath. Help us recognize that cruelty is often just pain that has nowhere else to go, that the hardest people to love are frequently those who most desperately need it.

This does not mean accepting harm or abandoning boundaries. But may we find the fierce grace to hold both protection and compassion, remembering that even the most difficult souls are traveling their own mysterious journey toward healing.

When love feels impossible, help us choose dignity anyway. When understanding fails, let kindness remain.

Prayer for Cultivating Compassion for the World *

Rev. Michelle Collins, Soul Matters Worship Researcher

Ground of Being, we witness a world on fire, literally and metaphorically. Headlines scream of cruelty and division. Children go hungry while others feast. The earth herself groans under the weight of our carelessness and our selfishness. Some days the suffering feels too vast, the darkness too deep. We are tempted to close our hearts rather than let them break again and again. To choose cynicism over hope, numbness over feeling, despair over the vulnerable act of caring.

Yet here we gather, proof that love persists. In every city, on every continent, hearts like ours beat with stubborn compassion. Strangers comfort strangers. Neighbors feed neighbors. People choose justice when injustice would be easier.

Remind us that we are part of something larger than our individual capacity to heal. That every

act of kindness creates ripples we'll never see.
That the light of compassion, however small our
flame, joins with countless others to push back
the darkness.

May we trust that love is stronger than fear, that
justice is more powerful than oppression, that
ordinary people choosing extraordinary
kindness can and will transform this world.

Midrash on Psalm 23 *

Tess Baumberger

Oh Protector, you who guide me,
you provide everything my spirit needs.
You help me rest my weariness
in green places of the earth.
You bring me to shining waters
which replenish my spirit.
You show me the way of justice
for the sake of the suffering.

Even when this path seems dangerous,
and death canyons all around me,
I am not afraid because you walk with me,

your courage and your strength
reassure me, my heart walks at ease.

You shower me with abundance,
challenging me to share it
even with those who may wish to harm me.

Your faith in me helps me trust
myself, others, this world of mystery.
The vessel of my being cannot possibly
hold your grace and my gratitude.

I trust that goodness and compassion
will permeate my every day,
and I will live within your loving presence
for all eternity.

Guided Visualization: Desert's Tenderness *

*Rev. Michelle Collins, Soul Matters Worship
Researcher*

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1XaFBludlo9NjqAxwZzOs1AP4pEG5X0gatyHtadeROqQ/edit?usp=sharing>

Imagine yourself as a tiny seed that has just
cracked open in the desert.
Feel the harsh sun beating down on your tender

shoot.

The ground beneath you is hard, unforgiving.
But notice... there is shade where you are.
A mature creosote (KREE-uh-sote) bush stands
nearby, her branches reaching over you.
Feel the blessed coolness of her shadow...

A Prayer For Those Who Are Losing Our Shit Right Now

Rev. Nadia Bolz-Weber

Full prayer at <https://thecorners.substack.com/p/a-prayer-for-those-who-are-losing>

Dear God,

Please forgive me for how I acted when that
Amazon truck was blocking my driveway the
other day.

In your endless compassion you know my rage
was really about every form of fear I am trying
to keep at bay right now – how it all sort of
broke through my exhausted defenses because
I was coming home from the gym and was
really hungry...

When I see others not being the best version of
themselves, guide me to compassion for them,
that in doing so I might also have compassion
for myself.

You know how fragile we are...

And when, O God, I inevitably try to control
everything and everyone in my life, please have
mercy upon me – for you know that what I am
really doing is responding to how powerless I
feel over every single thing in the news cycle
every single day...

Books

[The Emperor of Gladness](#) ([interview](#))

by Ocean Vuong

[Trauma Stewardship: An Everyday Guide to
Caring for Self While Caring for Others](#)

by Connie Burk and Laura van Dernoot Lipsky

[Self-Compassion: The Proven Power of
Being Kind to Yourself](#)

by Kristin Neff

Fierce Self-Compassion: [How to Harness Kindness to Speak Up, Claim Your Power, and Thrive](#)

by Kristin Neff

Videos & Podcasts

Small Kindnesses, Danusha Laméris

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=klfbqElrf7Y&list=RDklfbqElrf7Y&start_radio=1

Short Film: The Wait

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

On Quiet as the Doorway to Compassion

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OkHypImEY84>

Please Call Me By My True Names, [Thich Nhat Hanh](#)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sl5LK3SzkCM>

Bryan Stevenson on The Gift of Shared Brokenness

<https://www.instagram.com/reel/DLSQsbKhQc6/>

Compassion Fatigue: The Cost of Vicarious Trauma

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zsaorjlo1Yc>

How To Keep Caring Amid Endless Crises

<https://slate.com/podcasts/how-to/2024/01/how-to-keep-caring-amid-endless-crises>

Being Kind to Yourself, Hidden Brain interview with Dr. Kristin Neff

<https://hiddenbrain.org/podcast/being-kind-to-yourself/>

It Is Entirely Possible For A Black Girl To Be Loved

A beautiful example of claiming self-compassion for yourself.

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

Why Compassion is the Ultimate Life Hack

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

The Five Levels of Compassion, Dr Gabor Maté

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

The Urgent Need for Compassion, The Man Enough Podcast

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tq3C9R8HNUQ>

The Heart of Compassion, Cynthia Bourgeault

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dl8qaVRiK5U>

On how compassion arises out of oneness and refusing to see ourselves as the helpers and others as the “helpees.”

What Love Is, Andrea Gibson

<https://andreamgibson.substack.com/p/what-love-is>

On when compassion is hard.

Music

- [Spotify playlist](#) on Cultivating Compassion
- [YouTube playlist](#) on Cultivating Compassion
- “You’ve Got a Friend” by Carole King
- “Better People” by India.Arie
- “All You Need is Love” by The Beatles
- “I’ll Stand by You” by The Pretenders
- “True Colors” by Cyndi Lauper

Movies

- [The Farewell](#)
- [All We Imagine As Light](#)
- [Roma](#)
- [Daughters](#)
- [Hard Truths](#)
- [Night Comes On](#)
- [Billy & Molly: An Otter Love Story](#)
- [My Octopus Teacher](#)
- [Won't You Be My Neighbor?](#)



Soul Matters

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