

Acceptance: My Journey
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A lot of our Touchstones material for this month focus on our 3rd UU Principle. There is also a contrast made between acceptance and simply tolerating a person or situation. I think we could all agree that we would like to be accepted in this community rather than simply tolerated. Mitch talked about tolerance—teaching it in our schools. Can tolerance lead to acceptance? I think it's a place to start. Acceptance requires a deep connection--to know an individual, rather than make a judgment based on superficial things, to then dismiss them and not get to know that person.

A little about our third UU Principle. Our 3rd principle reads: Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations. I use this excerpt from Elinor Mondale's sermon, *Acceptance and Spiritual Growth*: “You can't have support of spiritual growth without full acceptance of another's worth and human dignity: and you will not fully accept another person until you invest your energies toward that person's spiritual growth.” That could be why we love discussion so much. We listen to each other, re-form our own beliefs, perhaps accept something we had not embraced before. I believe it requires that we have respect for each other. We are all just searchers and questioners.

Much of my talk is of my own struggle toward achieving acceptance and what I learned that changed me. My thoughts on accepting others have evolved from, among other things, learning that not everyone was raised in a safe environment. Some were not even provided food and shelter, much less encouragement to brush and floss, get a good education, obey laws and work hard. If that was the case, they probably didn't have role models on how to treat others or be in a relationship. Not everyone had the same advantages I did—some more, some less. Acceptance of another's behavior can occur on the spot if I am in a good frame of mind. I may encounter someone being a bit crabby and realize that they might not have had those same advantages, or they may be hurting, or are having a bad day. So, I might respond with kindness and not take their demeanor personally. In other cases and closer to home, I revert to wishing to change a person or wishing that a situation were not so. Then working on acceptance is ongoing and I may never be finished.

As I learn to accept, I learn what is my job: taking care of myself, changing my own behavior. I also learn what is not my job: doing for another what he or she is

capable of doing themselves. Acceptance isn't passive-- it actually puts me in the driver's seat. I'm not waiting for someone else to chance, so I can be happy. When I accept another person, I am not trying to change them. When I accept a situation or even a person's past behavior, I am not resentful. When I accept myself, I forgive myself for words and actions I wish I hadn't said or done. And remember only to the extent that I do not repeat them. I have compassion for others because I have learned to be compassionate toward myself.

I did have to unlearn some things I had been taught as a child, like: "A job worth doing is worth doing right"; "Practice makes perfect" or "Don't just stand there, do something". Instead I learned that: "Good enough is good enough", I don't need to be perfect, and that there is a time when action is not called for.

Bruce mentioned in discussion that no one sets out in a relationship to change another. Well, I learned years into my marriage that I had had a need to be needed, which led to wanting to take care of my spouse, and then to change him. It took even longer to see that my trying to change him, meant that I did not accept him, nor respect him. Today, I know that I'm darn lucky.

Change happens slowly and usually only after I have lived with a difficult or painful situation for a time. From my 12 step work, I learned that first I experience awareness, then acceptance, and finally take action. For me, I spend more time coming to acceptance than the other two aspects of change. To quote Carl Rogers: "The curious paradox is that when I accept myself just as I am, then I can change."

The work to accept a situation is required whenever major changes occur. When my husband was caring for his mother, I felt I didn't get enough of his time or attention. I wanted my life back as it was before Maxine moved to Sheridan. I focused on what I had lost rather than my current reality. I held on to that until I heard in a video on caregiving, that what was, is gone and that what the future holds, could be better than the past I wanted back. It's hard to admit I was resentful. Holding onto a thing, a vision of the future, and expectation, a resentment, a regret; leaves me unable to receive. What we resist persists.

Suzanne Zoglio, Ph D, author and life coach addresses this so well.

"Many realities that come our way are difficult to accept...some more than others. Yet until we do so, we stay stuck in the muck of yesterday's pain and disappointment. There is no moving on until we accept where we are. While we're going through life as if nothing really happened, licking our undeserved wounds, or railing in anger at the injustices meted out, we are blinded to the opportunities

for healing, love, and change. It is only after we accept our new reality that we can see all the good sitting right next to that which pains us so.”

In general, I accept that my life experiences were necessary for my growth and have lead me to where I am today. I need to be honest with myself and it is very humbling to accept the consequences of my words and actions. This fellowship and my work in a 12 step program help me become a better version of myself and help me know my purpose in this life. Accepting the behavior of another or their choices means I’m not judging them. Accepting that each of us is on his or her own path with their own lessons to learn.

Some related lessons that I feel help me to be more accepting: 1) Not everyone needs to think, feel or even communicate like I do. Another: Gratitude for the blessings in my life, and sometimes those are advantages that I didn't have to work for. The greatest lessons have come from the most difficult or painful times. The last one I'll mention is that I am right where I am supposed to be.

I will close with the Rev. Victoria Ingram in her sermon, A Principled Life: The Third UU Principle. “...When we are in a group of people where we know we are seen as worthy and are accepted, we are more likely to allow ourselves to change and be changed. And that's one of the reasons we go to church.”