

**November Monthly Theme:**  
**Being Mortal**

This is a season when life draws into itself as the landscape dies back and the sight and sound of living creatures on land and sky quiets. Like the plants and animals with whom we share this world, we too are mortal—our lives moving towards an unknown moment of death. Often we struggle to acknowledge this eventuality in our own lives or in the lives of those we love, even as the signs of aging, illness, or death are evident. How do we live with such awareness of mortality? How do we prepare for our death, for the death of those whom we love? Such questions can be difficult to discuss, yet they invite us into important [conversations](#) about our values and life purpose. Engaging in these conversations and reflections can deepen our living as well as better prepare us for our death and the deaths of those we love.

**Questions for Discussion and Discernment**

**on your own, in small groups, or informally with each other:**

- What is the blessing of being mortal?
- Would you want to stay young forever if you could?
- What are important practical considerations in facing death? Are these spiritual too?
- Why is talking about death with those we love so difficult?
- What role does fear play in our awareness of being mortal?
- When aging, what is more important—safety or independence?
- Are being mortal, aging and death things to be “fought”?
- How does being mortal affect our mundane living and everyday choices?

**Quotes and Short Readings:**

- “Spend the afternoon. You can’t take it with you.” –Annie Dillard
- “Do not go gentle into that good night/Old age should burn and rave at close of day/  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.” – Dylan Thomas

- “Death is central to my definition of religion: religion is our human response to the dual reality of being alive and having to die. We are not the animal with advanced language or tools as much as we are the religious animal. Knowing that we must die, we question what life means. The answers we arrive at may not be religious answers, but the questions death forces us to ask are, at heart, religious questions. Where did I come from? Who am I? Where am I going? What is life's purpose? What does all this mean?” -Forrest Church, Unitarian Universalist Minister
- “In the end, people don't view their life as merely the average of all its moments—which, after all, is mostly nothing much plus some sleep. For human beings, life is meaningful because it is a story. A story has a sense of a whole, and its arc is determined by the significant moments, the ones where something happens. Measurements of people's minute-by-minute levels of pleasure and pain miss this fundamental aspect of human existence. A seemingly happy life maybe empty. A seemingly difficult life may be devoted to a great cause. We have purposes larger than ourselves.” — [Atul Gawande, \*Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters in the End\*](#)
- “One of the most challenging things about modern ways of dealing with death and about modern technology is that, by failing to help our present generations grow in this way, by hiding death away, by creating greater illusions of control over the dying process, we actually become less aware, less prepared, more blind to the real condition of our living and our dying. I think our lives have become more frantic, more superficial, less real—just because we do not face our ultimate lack of control.” - Helen Lutton Cohen, UU Minister