



# *Soul Matters*

---

## The Path of Love



Small Group

February 2023

# Welcome to the Path of Love

The path of love.  
It began from the beginning,  
for most of us.  
Came in the form of family.  
A bloodline that brought us into being,  
and at its best, allowed us to bloom.  
Then sent us on our way with courage,  
and a reminder tucked into the pocket  
of our heart  
which read, "You can always return,  
no matter what."

Its shape then shifted, showing up as friends  
who helped us feel seen  
and sung our song back to us  
when we could not hear it  
with our ears alone.

Then somewhere along the way  
we stumbled on it again  
in the soft touch and sweet stare  
of sweethearts.  
Through them, love taught us to trust  
and helped us discover that who we are  
does not end at the barrier of our own skin.

To our surprise, love then expanded  
into the fragile gift we call community.  
This web of beings bathed us in belonging,  
expanded our sense of home,  
and called us to see the needs of others  
as our own.

And when our family and friends,  
lovers and comrades  
let us down and broke us to bits,  
it was love that put us back together.  
Knowing that none of us fully mend,  
love also said, It's ok limp.  
I will remain beside you just the same.

That's when we first heard the strange whisper.  
In the heartbreak.  
Arising from somewhere deeper  
than the things we can touch.  
It announced itself  
as a love that will not let us go,  
even in our fear, even in our failure,  
even when we are lonely or lost.

And when that comforting love  
seemed the perfect end to the path,  
the gift we could rest within  
and keep as our very own,  
this band of religious heretics  
showed up in our lives and told us to share it.  
Born from a strange God  
who loved and saved all,  
they now rally around a sacred assignment  
of making that larger love real, here on earth.  
They talk of that love that will not let us go,  
but they also ask,  
"Is our loving large enough?"  
They ask that of us over and over again.

And in that asking, we learned that love  
can also be demanding,  
often leading to the opposite of comfort.  
And tough. We learned that It is that too.  
Or needs to be.  
Not something mean,  
but something that persists.  
Something within that can be beat down,  
but gets back up again.  
A love that calls us to never let go,  
of it.

# Our Spiritual Exercises

## Option A Drop Love Into Your Day

Green Renaissance is the creative project of a couple from South Africa. Their goal is to inspire change and help people reconsider where meaning in their lives comes from. You will fall in love with their work. Especially their video projects on love.

So here's your work: Drop one of their "love films" into your life every day for a week.

To make that easy for you, we've curated a playlist of their videos, on YouTube Videos [here](#) and also down below as a list.

You can keep it simple by just disciplining yourself to watch one a day and let that impact as you will. Another option is to use one or all of these strategies:

- Watch/listen with the pause button and a pen handy. Keep an eye/ear out for the line that strikes you the deepest. Hit pause and write it down. Then take a few minutes after to reflect on why you think your inner wisdom wanted you to pay attention to that line. Ask yourself, "How is my inner wisdom trying to offer me a word of comfort or challenge through this line? This video?"
- After watching the video, take a moment to reflect on what you want to promise yourself because of the impact the video had on you.
- As you watch/listen, ask yourself, "Where do I see myself in the video?"

### **The Playlist** (Also on YouTube videos - [click here](#))

- The Three-Legged Dog that Saved My Life: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t\\_9aBhWXRIY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t_9aBhWXRIY)
- LOVE, MUMMY" - Families Are Complicated: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=miLs1AfMrIY>
- DON'T LIVE IN FEAR - follow your heart: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S1YpzxY9hv0>
- BE WHO YOU ARE - Stop Judging Yourself: <https://youtu.be/FYkSqR4gpKY>
- The Secret To A Happy Marriage: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IfgiiEmyYt0&t=54s>
- To create is a way of loving: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IMgP76vRTd8>
- WE ARE ALL CONNECTED: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qCVnWIYUt8o>
- DO WHAT YOU LOVE: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sekzkcHJm0&t=281s>

## Option B What's Your Metaphor?

In writing about love, many have turned to [metaphors](#) to tell the tale. The list is long: Love is an ocean, a pearl, a burning flame, a battlefield, a beggar, a disease, a rose, a fine wine, a slippery slope, an archer, an outlaw, a fever, a jewel, even an [exploding cigar](#)!

There's something important in this effort. Love, as we know, is elusive. Every version of it has a complexity that can't be captured with precise and concrete language. We turn to metaphors because, just like love, they aren't easily pinned down. They tell a story more than offer a definition. They evoke a feeling rather than attempt to satisfy our logical mind. And so, in that elusiveness and expansiveness, they actually get closer to the truth. *Our* truth actually.



So, here's your assignment: ***spend the month finding your favorite metaphor for love!***

Don't rush it. Noodle on it a number of times before settling on the one. You, of course, need to start by figuring out what "favorite" means to you. And, from there, how it might capture your unique experience with love.

**Extra Credit:** *The thoughts of others always help us clarify our own. So we encourage you to ask your family, friends and co-workers about their favorite metaphor before you settle on your own.*

Come to your group ready to not only share your journey but also what surprised you along the way!

## Option C

### Loving Your Whole Self

*Self-care (and self-love) is never a selfish act — it is simply good stewardship of the only gift I have, the gift I was put on earth to offer others. Anytime we can listen to our true self and give it the care it requires, we do so not only for ourselves, but for the many others whose lives we touch.*

- Parker Palmer

We are told "Love yourself!" But which part? There is our spiritual self, our physical self, our emotional self, our relational self, just to name a few. This needs to be taken into account. We are multidimensional beings with the need for a multidimensional understanding of self-love.

So, to help us engage that work, we've created this schema with ideas for how to care and love your various selves throughout the month. **Your work is to do some act of self-love and self-care for each aspect of yourself.** Our suggestions are there only to stimulate your imagination. Only you know what it means to truly love and care for that part of you. You've got the whole month to do it, but why wait to get started?!

**The catch:** You must find one thing to do *for each category listed!*

**The second catch:** *Figure out which of your many selves needs the most self-care and self-love.*

Come to your group ready to share your biggest learning and your biggest surprise.

Here's the "Love Your Whole Self List": [https://docs.google.com/document/d/1BxmZvoZYLspKDEuSJH8TJE-L\\_phKrfTfcnVv\\_ZKmEWw/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1BxmZvoZYLspKDEuSJH8TJE-L_phKrfTfcnVv_ZKmEWw/edit?usp=sharing)

## Option D

### A Love Letter to the Underappreciated

Cats, friends, lovers, books, movies. They get our love all the time. We go on and on about our affection for them in a whole host of ways. But what about the underappreciated loves? Those favorite things in our lives that we fail to mention as often because love for them is less widely shared. This month write a love letter to one of those!

Here are some suggestions: Your favorite... letter of the alphabet, article of clothing, comfort food, time of day, season, or even your favorite condiment! Or what about your first car, first baseball glove, or first guitar?

Here's our suggestions about what to include in the letter: All the ways you love them, your memory of how they first came into your life, how your life would be without them in it, how they changed you for the better, what they taught you. And it's not just about how you loved/ love them; it's also about naming and acknowledging how they loved/love you back.

Yes, it may sound like a silly exercise, but we guarantee you that it will take you [deeper](#) than you think!

## Option E

### A Few Love Letters... to Strangers

It was an effort born from empathy and loneliness. Hannah Brencher, new to New York City, found herself led to writing letters to strangers. At first, she secretly wrote them to people in her mind and left them tucked away for strangers to find. Then, using the internet, she invited anyone to ask her for a love letter. Requests flooded in. It's now an organization called [More Love Letters](https://www.moreloveletters.com).

With this story as our inspiration, you're invited this month to write at least 5 letters to a person you've never met. You will have to imagine them, their story and what they need to hear. Then place those letters in some place where eventually a stranger will find them. We encourage you to write this on the front of the envelope; "A love letter for a stranger, maybe even you. If you discover it's not actually for you, pass it on to someone who needs it."

It's as simple - and challenging - as that!

Here's the background:

- The Origin Story: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VopcuymgUCA>
- TED Talk: [https://www.ted.com/talks/hannah\\_brencher\\_love\\_letters\\_to\\_strangers?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/hannah_brencher_love_letters_to_strangers?language=en)
- The Website: <https://www.moreloveletters.com/get-involved-1>

## Option F

### Ask Them About Love

One of the best ways to explore our monthly themes is to bring them into the conversations you have with those closest to you. It's a powerful way to deepen our conversations and our relationships.

Below is a list of "love questions" to help you on your way.

Come to your group ready to share what surprised you about the conversation(s) and what gift or insight it gave you. And as always, keep a lookout for how your inner voice is trying to send you a word of comfort or challenge through these conversions with others.

#### Love Questions:

1. What did love mean to you as a child?
2. How have you changed your mind about love?
3. How has love changed as you've gotten older? Is it softer? Quieter? Larger? Tougher? Smaller? Sneakier? More central?
4. Whose love has companioned you the longest?
5. When did love scare you the most?
6. When did love invite you to play?
7. What most helped put you back together after love broke you to bits?
8. What is society's biggest misunderstanding about love?
9. It's [been argued](#) that "If we really want to love we must learn how to forgive." Does that ring true for you?
10. What promise might love be wanting you to make?
11. What do you know of "a love that will not let us go"?
12. What has been your greatest act of love?

## Option G

### Which Love Quote Calls to You?

Sometimes we read a quote and it perfectly captures what's going on for us right now. Or allows us to view our current circumstances in a new light. With this in mind, spend some time this month reading through the quotes in the Companion Pieces section below to ***find the one that best illuminates your journey with love.***

We encourage you to use the same discernment practice with the list of quotes as you do with the packet's list of questions:

- **Read through the list of quotes** a few times, noting which ones “shimmer” (i.e. call to you or have an emotional gravitational pull for you). It often helps to circle or star these quotes that stand out.
- With each reading, **narrow your focus** in on those that stick out, until you finally **settle on the one quote** that pulls at you the most.
- Then make space to **reflect** on the gift, challenge or insight your chosen quote is offering you.
- Some of us may want to **go further** and capture your reflections with journaling or creative expression.

Come to your group ready to share your quote and the journey it took you on.

# Your Question

*Don't treat these questions like "homework" or try to answer every one. Instead, make time to meditate on the list and then pick the one question that speaks to you most. The goal is to figure out which question is "yours." Which question captures the call of your inner voice? Which one contains "your work"? And what is that question trying to get you to notice or acknowledge?*

*Often it helps to read the list to a friend or loved one and ask them which question they think is the question you need to wrestle with!*

1. What did love mean to you as a child?
2. How have you changed *your mind* about love?
3. How has love changed as you've gotten older? Is it softer? Quieter? Larger? Tougher? Smaller? Sneakier? More central? More painful?
4. Whose love has companioned you the longest?
5. Has love ever made you smarter?
6. Some say the opposite of love is not hate but [indifference](#). Others say its opposite is [fear](#). What do you say?
7. Are you using your busyness to shield you from your heartbreak?
8. Is it time to let someone know that your heart is broken?
9. Is it time to offer "tough love"?
10. Is it time to offer "sacrificial love"?
11. Is someone trying to offer you love but you don't notice it?
12. Are you turning your back on love?
13. Are you sacrificing too much in the name of love?
14. What might it mean to regularly ask, "What would love do here?"
15. Is love ever separate from the feeling of home?
16. **What's your question?** Your question may not be listed above. As always, if the above questions don't include what life is asking from you, spend the month listening to your days to find it.

# Companion Pieces

## Recommended Resources for Personal Exploration & Reflection

The following resources are not required reading. We will not analyze these pieces in our group. Instead they are here to companion you on your journey this month, get you thinking and open you up to new ways of imagining the path of love.

### Word Roots & Definitions

“While the word "love" initially meant "find pleasing," it later took on associations with "praise," "trust" and "belief." Thus, the etymology and experience of love resemble each other quite closely. As far as we can tell, both are first about pleasure, later about admiration but finally about trust.” ([source](#))

“Passion comes from the Latin word 'pati,' which means 'to suffer.' Your life's work is less about following a passion and more about your willingness to suffer along the way." [In other words,] having a passion doesn't mean you enjoy every aspect of it. It means that the painful moments are "worth it" because you value the reward above the pain.” ([source](#))

11 Words That Come From “Love”:  
<https://www.mentalfloss.com/article/61620/11-words-you-might-not-realize-come-love>

### Wise Words

Love is the quality of attention we pay to things  
*J.D. McClatchy*

Love is what we are born with. Fear is what we learn. The spiritual journey is the unlearning of fear and prejudices and the acceptance of love back in our hearts.  
*Marianne Williamson*

We have not come into this exquisite world  
To hold ourselves hostage from love.  
Run my dear,  
From anything  
That may not strengthen  
Your precious, budding wings.  
[Hafiz](#)

To love a person is to learn the song  
That is in their heart,  
And to sing it to them  
When they have forgotten.  
*Arne Garborg*

Love can change a person the way a parent can  
change a baby—awkwardly, and often with a great  
deal of mess.  
[Lemony Snicket](#)

The only obsession everyone wants: ‘love.’ People  
think that in falling in love they make themselves  
whole? The Platonic union of souls? I think  
otherwise. I think you’re whole before you begin.  
And the love fractures you. You’re whole, and then  
you’re cracked open.  
*Philip Roth*

Your task is not to seek for Love, but merely to seek  
and find all the barriers within yourself that you  
have built against it.  
*Rumi*



If we really want to love we must learn how to forgive.

*Mother Teresa*

If you judge people, you have no time to love them.

*Mother Teresa*

When we understand love as the will to nurture our own and another's spiritual growth, it becomes clear that we cannot claim to love if we are hurtful and abusive. Love and abuse cannot coexist.

[Bell Hooks](#)

Never forget that justice is what love looks like in public.

*Cornel West*

Love takes off the masks that we fear we cannot live without and know we cannot live within. I use the word 'love' here not merely in the personal sense but as a state of being, or a state of grace—not in the infantile American sense of being made happy but in the tough and universal sense of quest and daring and growth.

*James Baldwin*

Never love anyone who treats you like you're ordinary.

*Oscar Wilde*

We accept the love we think we deserve.

*Stephen Chbosky*

I love you, not only for what you are, but for what I am when I am with you.

*Roy Croft*

Loving you is like being 10 years old again, scaling a tree with my eyes bright and skyward, wanting only to get higher and higher, without a thought of how I would get back down.

*Lang Leav*

Find those who tell you Do not be afraid, yet stay close enough to tremble with you. This is a love.

[Cole Arthur Riley](#)

There are days I drop words of comfort [and love] on myself like falling leaves and remember that it is enough to be taken care of by myself.

*Brian Andreas*

How you love yourself is how you teach others to love you.

[Rupi Kaur](#)

Loving only ourselves is escapism; loving only our opponents is self-loathing; loving only others is ineffective. All three practices together make love revolutionary, and revolutionary love can only be practiced in community.

[Valarie Kaur](#)

God is Love

*1 John 4:8, The Bible*

Perhaps everything terrible is, in its deepest being, something that needs our love.

*Rainer Maria Rilke*

love life...

Even when you have no stomach for it

and everything you've held dear

crumbles like burnt paper in your hands...

when grief weights you down like your own flesh...

Then you hold life like a face

between your palms...

and you say, yes, I will take you

I will love you, again.

[Ellen Bass](#)

I hope that one day you will have the experience of doing something you do not understand for someone you love.

[Jonathan Safran Foer](#)

Love is the ultimate outlaw.

It just won't adhere to any rules.

The most any of us can do is to sign on as its accomplice.

[Tom Robbins](#)

Choosing love invites us to trust our inner knowing. To act upon it. Even when it isn't rational. Even when you don't know what it means. I invite us to stop discounting our inner knowing. Breathe. Trust it as the voice of Love.

[emilie boggis](#)

How could I have known that over and over  
you would crack the sky like lightning,  
illuminating all my fears, my weaknesses, my sins.  
Massive the burden this flesh  
must learn to bear, like mules of love.

*Ellen Bass, [For My Daughter on Her Twenty-First Birthday](#)*

Even after all this time,  
the sun never says to the earth,  
"You owe me."  
Look what happens with a love like that.  
It lights the whole sky.

*Hafiz*

Know that love is a vulnerability but not a  
weakness. Love is the volunteer in you that raises  
its hand and steps forward without needing to be  
rewarded. Love is a currency that functions in  
reverse, because the only way to be wealthy with it  
is to give more of it away.

[Shane Koyczan](#)

When they ask what you do for a living, say, I Love.

*Jaiya John*

## **Movies & TV**

[Call Me By Your Name](#)  
[If Beale Street Could Talk](#)  
[Once](#)  
[The Shape of Water](#)  
[What They Had](#)  
[Fleishman Is in Trouble](#)

## **Music**

*\*Special this month! \**

In addition to our regular playlist on the theme, we've created two other playlists on love: one of romantic love and another on the journey of a broken heart.

As always, each playlist is available on Spotify and YouTube music. And they are all organized as a journey, so consider listening from beginning to end and using them as musical meditations.

### **On Love (regular playlist)**

- Spotify playlist [here](#)
- YouTube playlist [here](#)

### **Let Me Count the Ways (for sweethearts)**

- Spotify playlist [here](#)
- YouTube playlist [here](#)

### **For a Broken Heart**

- Spotify playlist [here](#)
- YouTube playlist [here](#)

## **Videos & Podcasts**

### **Why Romantics are Ruining Love**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R2v8TywXjLA>

### **How Does Love Affect The Brain?**

<https://www.npr.org/2019/11/22/780960553/helen-fisher-how-does-love-affect-the-brain>

### **A Queer Vision of Love and Marriage**

[https://www.ted.com/talks/tiq\\_milan\\_and\\_kim\\_katrin\\_milan\\_a\\_queer\\_vision\\_of\\_love\\_and\\_marriage?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/tiq_milan_and_kim_katrin_milan_a_queer_vision_of_love_and_marriage?language=en)

### **It Is Entirely Possible For A Black Girl To Be Loved, Ashley M. Jones**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wy\\_XyUpIazU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wy_XyUpIazU)

### **How to Learn My Love Language**

On sign language, spoken language & how love shows us what is possible

<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/05/podcasts/modern-love-sign-language.html>

### When Love Arrives - spoken poetry

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cPG6nJRJeWQ&t=16s>

### Exit Strategy

<https://www.thisamericanlife.org/779/ends-of-the-earth/act-one-9>

A beautiful story of Alzheimers and letting go as a final act of love.

### The Empathic Civilization, an animated talk

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l7AWnfFRc7g>

On the challenges and necessity of extending love to all of humanity.

### Free Hugs

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hN8CKwdosjE>

Why don't we all hand out love more freely?!

## Books

### Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close

*Jonathan Safran Foer*

On [love](#) and grief

### All About Love: New Visions

*bell hooks*

Related essay [here](#)

### Tomorrow, and Tomorrow, and Tomorrow

*Gabrielle Zevin*

"Meditation on... the ways in which platonic love can be deeper and more rewarding—especially in the context of a creative partnership—than romance." - The New Yorker

### The Year of Magical Thinking

*Joan Didion*

On love and loss

Related essay [here](#)

## More Monthly Inspiration from Soul Matters!

### Our Facebook Inspiration Page:

<https://www.facebook.com/soulmatterssharingcircle/>

### Our Instagram Page:

Find us as "soul\_matters\_circle"

### Music Playlists:

Click [here](#) for links to the [Spotify playlists](#) for each month.

Click [here](#) to check out the [YouTube playlists](#).



© 2022-23 Soul Matters ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

**Packets are for use only by member congregations of the Soul Matters Sharing Circle.**

Learn how to join at

<https://www.soulmatterssharingcircle.com>