



# *Soul Matters*

---

## The Path of Change



**Small Group**

**November 2022**

# Welcome to The Path of Change

*I wonder, particularly in a time where everything seems urgent, what the role of pause and breath is, in this season, to help us gear up for whatever this transformational moment we find ourselves in is.*

[Rev. Jen Bailey](#)

*[We need] space to imagine a new way, and new self. Not moving or pushing but sitting and cultivating... [the goal] is to allow you space and time to reflect on your past, present, and future. To imagine a new beginning.*

*Rev. Sara LaWall*

What if pushing is only half of it?  
What if there is time to waste?  
What if rushing is what got us into this mess?  
What if catching our breath shrinks the clouds  
and expands our view?

What if space for breathing  
is what enables the seed of change to take root?  
What if pausing allows the longing to grow?  
What if it's not about taking control of life,  
but being quiet enough to hear life speak?  
What if slowing down is what allows us  
to notice we're not the only ones who long for change?

And what if catching our breath isn't about resting up,  
but the way we finally and fully feel our pain?  
What if the quiet is what enables us to notice  
how uncomfortable this life of comfort has become?  
And what if comfort has been withheld from us?  
Wouldn't that mean that rest is a revolutionary act,  
allowing us to combat a culture that works to keep us tired, and numb?

What if, in the end, it is silence that allows us to hear  
the still small voice inside  
that says,  
"We can no longer wait!"

# Our Spiritual Exercises

## Option A

### ***The Mark Made by Your Changes... in 5 pictures!***

We go through many changes in our lives. But often we fail to notice or fully appreciate the gift that those changes gave us. So this month, why not return to the various changes or unique chapters of your life and reclaim what gift, blessing or beautiful mark each period of change left you?

Here's one way to go about it:

1. Identify at least five major chapters of your life so far.
2. Find a photo of yourself to go with each chapter.
3. Then write a sentence to go with each chapter/picture that captures the gift, blessing or beautiful mark of that time. Here are three sentences we suggest using to identify the gift/mark:
  - *I became more/less...*
  - *I learned...*
  - *I left behind...*

## Option B

### **Where Were You When it Happened?**

*And from then on, things were just never the same.*

*- Howard Zinn*

It doesn't always happen, but it does happen at least once to us all: Some major historical or societal event occurs, and we never quite see the world the same as before. The external event altered us internally.

So what was it for you? What's your "things were never the same again" story?

Spend some time this month revisiting it. And don't just think about it, externalize it. Paint, journal, write a poem, find a song connected to it. If you're not feeling overly creative, push yourself to have a deep conversation about it with someone close to you. Share your "never the same story" and invite them to share theirs.

A few questions to ask yourself along the way:

- What was happening for me personally that led to the event having such an impact?
- How was your new way of looking at the world a gift? How was it a loss?
- Who do you think you would have been if it hadn't happened?

## Option C

### *The Deeper Differences*

Changing ourselves is hard. Getting clear about how it will make a difference in our lives makes it easier. And getting clear about the **many** differences makes it even easier. In other words, these deeper differences make all the difference.

This exercise invites us to get in touch with those deeper differences. It's straightforward but not easy. Here are the steps:

1. Identify a behavioral pattern or trait you want to change.
2. With change in mind, complete this sentence: "I want to become less/more \_\_\_\_\_" (*For instance: "I want to become less judgmental."*)
3. Then with your desired change in mind complete another sentence that gets at the benefit your change will make: "When I become more/less \_\_\_\_\_, I will \_\_\_\_\_." (*For instance: "When I become less judgmental, I will be more open to new ideas."*)
4. Now comes the challenging and important part: Complete that "benefit sentence" another 6-8 times. I.e. push yourself to identify numerous other benefits. Take your time with this. You may be able to do it in one setting but, more likely than not, this will be something you need to set aside and return to multiple times.

The goal of this exercise is to take you deeper and uncover *the deeper need or hunger* that is driving your desire to change.

Before you start, give this article a read: <https://hbr.org/2010/01/an-exercise-in-changing-yourself>. It is where the exercise was drawn from. It is a must read and contains a powerful story about the impact this exercise can have.

## Option D

### *Rearrange a Room... in Order to Rearrange Your Life*

What's spiritual about rearranging a room or painting your study a new color? Well, [experts](#) and [poets](#) say quite a lot actually. So this month why not give it a try and find out for yourself.

The goal is obviously not just to alter a space in your home, but to notice what gets altered and stirred up in you. Happiness? Empowerment? Courage? A sense of control? Reconnect with the past? Reconnection with yourself? Come to your group ready to share what internal change happened for you? A simple way to uncover the gift is to try to explain to someone close to you why you made the change.

## Option E

### *Let a Book Change You*

*People don't realize how a person's whole life can be changed by one book.*

- Malcolm Little

Malcolm Little is right. Books change us! Sometimes radically so. In honor of this, make time this month to dive into one of the recommended books below. Each one is on the theme of change and is explicitly inviting us to understand our world anew. Your task this month is to open yourself to that invitation. Come to your group with two paragraphs from the book that changed your perception, mind, heart or commitment the most.

- **Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge & the Teachings of Plants, Robin Wall Kimmerer**  
Review: <https://openrivers.lib.umn.edu/article/woven-ways-of-knowing/>
- **Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds, adrienne maree brown**  
<https://www.akpress.org/emergentstrategy.html>
- **Overheated: How Capitalism Broke the Planet--And How We Fight Back, Kate Aronoff**  
Related discussion: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bp11KZ91NzI>  
Related review: <https://climateandcapitalism.com/2021/05/28/four-competing-views-on-how-to-save-the-earth/>
- **An Indigenous Peoples' History Of The United States, Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz**  
<http://www.beacon.org/An-Indigenous-Peoples-History-of-the-United-States-P1164.aspx>
- **The Righteous Mind, Jonathan Haidt**  
Related TED talk: [https://www.ted.com/talks/jonathan\\_haidt\\_the\\_moral\\_roots\\_of\\_liberals\\_and\\_conservatives?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/jonathan_haidt_the_moral_roots_of_liberals_and_conservatives?language=en)
- **Being Mortal, Atul Gawande**  
Reviews: <https://www.joincake.com/blog/being-mortal-book-review/>  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/09/books/review/atul-gawande-being-mortal-review.html>

## Option F

### *Which Change 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 Belonging**.

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

- **Read through the list** 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** 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.

## Option G

### Change Over a Cup of Coffee

One of the best ways to explore our monthly themes is to talk about them with those closest to you. Yes, this is similar to what we do in our Soul Matters groups, but whereas our Soul Matters groups are focused on deepening our connection to our inner voice, this is more about deepening our relationships with family and friends. Sometimes conversations with our family and friends stay on the surface level. This is an invitation to alter that dynamic.

The conversation prompt below invites you and your discussion partner to explore change in all aspects of your life, allowing you to uncover changes you may not have noticed or underestimated.

Come to your group ready to share what surprised you about the conversation and what gift or insight it gave you.

#### **Discussion Prompt:**

Use the same fill in the blank sentence each time, filling the blank in with the list below.

***How has your relationship with \_\_\_\_\_ changed?***

Time	Family
Money	Love
Success	Self-love
Striving	God
Rest	Spiritual Practice
Friends	Intimacy
Regret	Shame
Joy	Hope
Beauty	Your Body

# 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. If you could change one thing about your past, what would it be?
2. How good was your family at changing their minds and admitting they were wrong? And how has that shaped you?
3. If you could reclaim a trait or strength from your childhood self, what would it be?
4. What do you wish your 16-year-old self would have known or felt to make the changes of your teenage years easier? What do you wish your 25-year-old self would have known to make their life changes easier?
5. Are you sure that it is too late to try?
6. It's what [many of us fear](#) the most: becoming reconciled to injustice, resigned to fear and despair, lulled into a life of apathy. Have you put in enough strategies to avoid this fate?
7. If you could easily let go of one grudge, wound or regret, what would it be?
8. Sure, "they" need to change. But how might *you* changing something about yourself enable that?
9. Would your 5th grade self still recognize you as "you"?
10. What do you wish you would have changed your mind about earlier?
11. What part of you no longer exists? How are you *truly and radically* different than your younger self?
12. Is that broken thing you keep trying to put back together keeping your life from that beautiful thing that is waiting to be built? ([Trent Shelton](#))
13. **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 change.*

### Word Roots & Definitions

In the early 13th century, the root words of change meant "to substitute one for another." By the late 13th century, the meaning was shifting to "become different, be altered." ([source](#)) This tension still exists, between replacing something and creating something new. This seems especially relevant to both personal and social transformation. Are we simply swapping out one habit/system for another, when what is truly needed is more novel and radical change?

### Wise Words

We do not grow absolutely, chronologically. We grow sometimes in one dimension, and not in another; unevenly. We grow partially. We are relative. We are mature in one realm, childish in another. The past, present, and future mingle and pull us backward, forward, or fix us in the present. We are made up of layers, cells, constellations.  
*Anais Nin*

I believe in waking up in the middle of the night and packing our bags and leaving our worst selves for our better ones.  
*Leslie Jamison*

And the day came when the risk to remain tight in a bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom.  
*Anais Nin*

The time will come  
when, with elation,  
you will greet yourself arriving  
at your own door, in your own mirror...  
[Derek Walcott](#)

You know you've changed your whole mental image about companionship and commitment when you use the pronouns "we" and "our" to describe items that were previously described by "my" and "I."  
*Jason Merchey*

Those who stand at the threshold of life always waiting for the right time to change are like the person who stands at the bank of a river waiting for the water to pass so they can cross on dry land.  
*Joseph B. Wirthlin*

The curious paradox is that when I accept myself just as I am, then I can change.  
*Carl Rogers*

Much as we may wish to make a new beginning, some part of us resists doing so as though we were making the first step toward disaster... We resist transition not because we can't accept the change, but because we can't accept letting go of that piece of ourselves that we have to give up when and because the situation has changed.  
[William Bridges](#)

Let difficulty transform you. And it will. In my experience, we just need help learning how not to run away.  
*Pema Chodron*

That broken thing you keep trying to put back together is keeping your life from that beautiful thing that is waiting to be built.  
[Trent Shelton](#)



Faced with the choice between changing one's mind and proving that there is no need to do so, almost everyone gets busy on the proof.

*John Kenneth Galbraith*

There is something dying in our society, in our culture, and there's something dying in us individually. And what is dying, I think, is the willingness to be in denial.

[Rev. Angel Kyodo Williams](#)

When we identify where our privilege intersects with somebody else's oppression, we'll find our opportunities to make real change.

[Ijeoma Oluo](#)

Once a reporter asked him, "Do you really think you are going to change the policies of this country by standing out here alone at night in front of the White House with a candle?" A.J. Muste replied softly: "Oh I don't do this to change the country. I do this so the country won't change me."

*Andrea Ayvazian*

People are practical. They want change but feel powerless, alone, do not want to be the blade of grass that sticks up above the others and is cut down. They wait for a sign from someone else who will make the first move, or the second. And at certain times in history, there are intrepid people who take the risk that if they make the first move others will follow quickly enough to prevent their being cut down. And if we understand this, we might make the first move.

*Howard Zinn*

Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced.

*James Baldwin*

## Poetry

**The Way It Is, William Stafford**

Full poem at [https://gratefulness.org/resource/the-way-it-is-william-stafford/?utm\\_source=pocket\\_mylist](https://gratefulness.org/resource/the-way-it-is-william-stafford/?utm_source=pocket_mylist)

There's a thread you follow. It goes among things that change. But it doesn't change. People wonder about what you are pursuing. You have to explain about the thread...

**For a New Beginning, John O Donahue**

Full poem at <https://aaronmonts.com/for-a-new-beginning/>

"This beginning has been quietly forming  
Waiting until you were ready to emerge..."

**I Am Afraid of Nearly Everything, Anonymous**

Full piece at <https://www.uua.org/worship/words/prayer/i-am-afraid-nearly-everything>

...most of all, I am afraid of what I might become:  
reconciled to injustice,  
resigned to fear and despair,  
lulled into a life of apathy...

**You Must Change Your Life, Richard Terrill**

<https://www.garrisonkeillor.com/radio/twa-the-writers-almanac-for-november-13-2020/>

what you always  
did don't do  
write with the wrong  
hand  
write with the left  
side of the brain...  
play the changes  
for a change...

## Music

Two different playlists for each of our monthly themes: one in Spotify and another in YouTube. They are organized as a journey of sorts, so consider listening from beginning to end and using the playlists as musical meditations.

Click [here](#) for the Spotify playlist on [The Path of Change](#).

Click [here](#) for all [Spotify playlists](#).

Click [here](#) for the YouTube playlist on [The Path of Change](#).

Click [here](#) for all the [YouTube playlists](#).

## Videos & Podcasts

**On Penguins, a Cable & How Change Happens**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S0aZOlviFds>

**How Your Personality Changes As You Age**

<https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20200313-how-your-personality-changes-as-you-age>

“Our traits are ever shifting, and by the time we’re in our 70s and 80s, we’ve undergone a significant transformation... We become more conscientious and agreeable, and less neurotic... Research has shown that we develop into more altruistic and trusting individuals. Our willpower increases and we develop a better sense of humor. Finally, the elderly have more control over their emotions. It’s arguably a winning combination...”

**Experiencing Aging and a Poem**

<https://davesikkema.wordpress.com/2013/09/14/no-going-back/>

A poem and visual meditation on aging

**U.S. Civil War**

Is the changing political landscape pushing us to the brink of civil war?

<https://munkdebates.com/podcast/u-s-civil-war>

**The End Of Capitalism Has Begun**

[https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/jul/17/postcapitalism-m-end-of-capitalism-begun?CMP=share\\_btn\\_fb&fbclid=IwAR1THrLleFa3W85tMf5Jrfs-383CmBldtlu5lo1NLIiDNX2eubQ\\_i0zWs10](https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/jul/17/postcapitalism-m-end-of-capitalism-begun?CMP=share_btn_fb&fbclid=IwAR1THrLleFa3W85tMf5Jrfs-383CmBldtlu5lo1NLIiDNX2eubQ_i0zWs10)

**Ibram X. Kendi on changing from "not racist" to antiracist**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KCxb15QgFZw>

**Is Your Carbon Footprint BS?**

What exactly is the best way to work for positive climate change?

<https://gimletmedia.com/shows/howtosaveaplanet/xjh53gn>

**Paper Straws Are Not Enough. Only “System Change” Can Halt Climate Crisis**

<https://www.democracynow.org/2022/7/21/heat-wave-europe-climate-crisis-extreme>

## Articles

**I Was Wrong**

<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2022/07/21/opinion/nyt-columnists-i-was-wrong.html>

Eight Times Opinion columnists revisit their incorrect predictions and bad advice — and reflect on why they changed their minds.

**A Shift in American Family Values Is Fueling Estrangement**

<https://www.theatlantic.com/family/archive/2021/01/why-parents-and-kids-get-estranged/617612/>

“Both parents and adult children often fail to recognize how profoundly the rules of family life have changed over the past half century...”

**The Nuclear Family Was A Mistake**

<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2020/03/the-nuclear-family-was-a-mistake/605536/>

Related podcast:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sd9d5z7idyQ&t=13s>

**The Midlife Unraveling, Brené Brown**

<https://brenebrown.com/blog/2018/05/24/the-midlife-unraveling/>

On the changes of midlife and on changing our view about what midlife is.

“Midlife is not a crisis. Midlife is an unraveling...”

**Thomas Piketty Thinks America Is Primed for Wealth Redistribution**

<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2022/04/03/magazine/thomas-piketty-interview.html>

Related video:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wpGG3\\_pBHUc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wpGG3_pBHUc)

## Books

See book recommendations above in Spiritual Exercise E

## Movies

### [Spaceship Earth](#)

On a radical experiment to prepare for future changes.

### [Sound of Metal](#)

On incomparable story of navigating unwanted change

### [A Star Is Born](#)

An elegy for the world of male dominion that's on its way out.

Related article [HERE](#)

### [Groundhog Day](#)

A cult classic and grand metaphor about how we change

Related article [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>