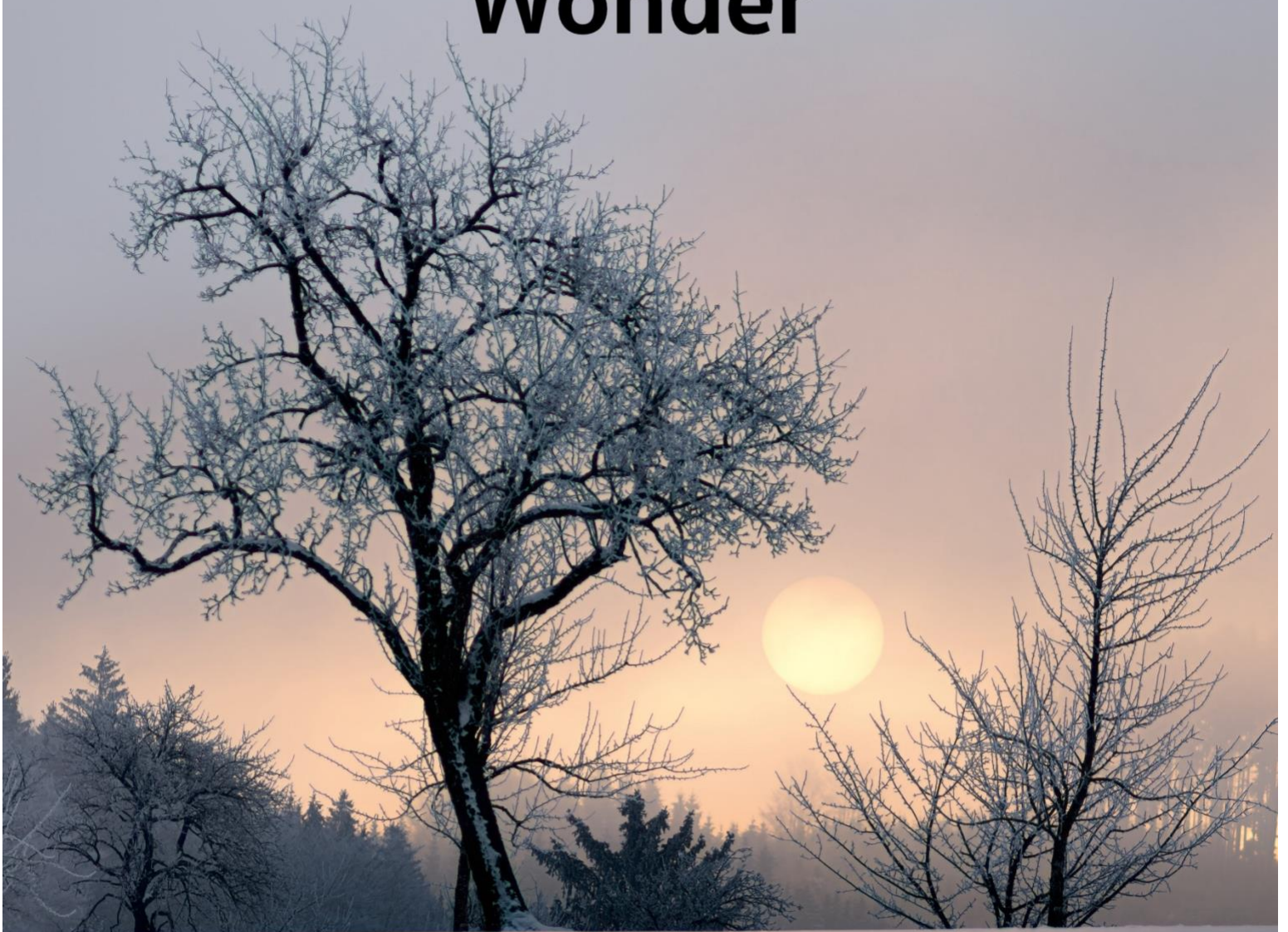




Soul Matters

The Path of **Wonder**



Small Group

December 2022

Welcome to the Path of Wonder

This seems to me the main problem... How can we contrive to be at once astonished at the world and yet at home in it?... How can this world give us at once the fascination of a strange town and the comfort and honor of being our own town?

- G.K. Chesterton

The path of wonder seems well worn. It's a journey that brings us down to size. Just think of those pictures which reveal that our galaxy is just one of billions more. Or think of when you've stared into the empty darkness of a midnight sky or an endless ocean. Such images remind us that the universe is more vast than we can imagine. They leave us with a sense of wonder that overwhelms. In the face of such an incomprehensible abyss, one can't help but feel humbled and small.

But religion never wants us to stop there. Hold on it says. Just stand at the abyss a bit longer. Lean in a little bit more. And when you do, you'll realize that this path doesn't end with a deep darkness that doesn't care. No, if we remain there in witness long enough, a new message emerges. You look into the vast mystery and surprisingly, it stares back, as if to say, "Welcome home."

As astronomers tell us, contemplation of the vast universe doesn't make them feel smaller; it makes them realize the larger story of which they are a part. We are stardust, as they say. From the vastness we came and to it we will return. In other words, the path of wonder is not so much about feeling small; it's about feeling connected.

And not just connected to the stars, but also to each other. Wonder, and its cousin awe, reduces us *in order* to make room for something more than our *self-centered* needs, wants and worries. With our narcissism shrunk down to a reasonable size, it becomes possible to notice that we are *not* the only ones up there on the stage. It's in this way that looking up into the cosmos allows us to look across at each other. Which is, of course, a huge gift, because while being center stage and center of the universe can feel powerful, it's also a very lonely place to be.

So friends, don't just look up at the stars this month. Let's make sure that our looking *up* leads to us looking *across*. And as we do, may we - like our friend G.K. Chesterton - not simply be astonished at the universe, but also feel at home in it.

Our Spiritual Exercises

Option A

Make an Ode to an Ordinary Moment

Ordinary wonder. We miss it all the time. “The mundane,” is what we call it. We’ve grown numb to the marvels that make up the daily rhythms of our lives.

This exercise invites us to take a new look at the ordinary, to put on a new pair of glasses through which to view it. Glasses that help us notice how completely wonderful the commonplace is.

Step One: Get in the right state of mind.

Start by reflecting on this quote by Rachel Carson:

“One way to open your eyes is to ask yourself, ‘What if I had never seen this before? What if I knew I would never see it again?’”

Step Two: Meditate

With Carson’s quote in your mind, make time to watch and meditate on the below video. Consider watching it twice. As you watch, pay attention to which 2-3 images from the video strike you most. Ask yourself, “Which image is ‘shimmering’ for me? Which image has a particularly strong emotional gravitational pull?”

The Wonder of Ordinary Moments

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

Step Three: Write (or create) something to honor one of the ordinary wonders in your life.

Based on your engagement with the video, identifying one ordinary moment or thing in your life that feels wondrous to you. Then write a bit about why and how that is true. Think of your piece as an ode to the ordinary. It can be long or short. Straight-forward or involved. And if writing isn’t your thing, consider creating something to honor your ordinary wonder. Take a picture of it, or multiple pictures from multiple perspectives. If sound is connected to your wonderful thing, record it. If you like to draw or paint, do that. The point is to find some way to capture it tangibly, with words, images or sounds.

P.S. Some of us will find ourselves rebelling against the instructions to pick just one object or moment. If so, great! Go ahead and find a way to capture the pile of ordinary wonders in your life.

Option B

Take an Awe Walk

An “awe walk” is a stroll in which you intentionally shift your attention outward instead of inward. So, instead of thinking about your to-do list or worrying about a conflict with your co-worker, you contemplate the world around you.

There is no one right way to do this. Your walk can be in a familiar place or somewhere brand new. It can happen in nature or in the middle of a city. It can be about seeking out a stunning mountain view

or just strolling by your neighbors' flower beds. Do it once or do it daily for a week. Keep it general or structure the walk by focusing on sounds, then colors, then the new, then the curious.

Journal after your walk is over or process it with a friend over a cup of coffee.

The point is not to seek out the extra-ordinary but to notice the ordinary in a new way. It's about cultivating a particular type of mindfulness that allows us to pay attention to the things right in front of our noses that we usually overlook or take for granted.

Here are some resources to help you on your way.

- Turn Your Daily Walk Into an Awe Walk and Boost Your Mental Health
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cB-4FDRVbSk>
- An Awe Walk How To
https://ggia.berkeley.edu/practice/awe_walk
- Awe Walks: How To Start
<https://www.diygenius.com/awe-walks/>
- The Benefits of Awe Walks
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/bryanrobinson/2020/10/31/awe-walks-reduce-workday-stress-and-boost-your-emotional-well-being/?sh=64c38ff3375c>
- Finding Happiness Through Awe Walks
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-nVx6SriWPM&t=117s>

Option C

Connect with the Wonder of the Stars

When it comes to contemplating wonder, star-gazing tops the list. For scientists and mystics alike, it's one of the primary ways we humans sort out our mysterious place in the universe and the mystery of who we are. As we connect with the wider universe, we connect more deeply with ourselves. This exercise invites you to lean into this wondrous connection between the stars above and deep meaning within.

The instructions are simple:

- Wait for a clear night sky.
- Find a place away from light pollution where you can see the stars.
- Lie down on the ground or sit in a portable chair and lean back.
- Pull out your phone and play this reflection and/or music playlist to guide your reflection:
 - We Are Stardust: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OEbeRES6D-M>
 - Stargazing Playlist:
<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/5rrW8k0fsLN2nz9VmyKQME?si=4daa535558cc4581>
- Optional: Download [the app "planets"](#) and use it to locate star constellations
- Sit in silence
- Return home and journal or find a time to talk with a friend about what happened for - and to - you under the stars

Option D

Collect Awe Stories

One way to get more wonder into our lives is to borrow it from others. That's right, turns out we can feel wonder and awe when we listen to others [share](#) their stories of it.

So this month, make it your mission to **collect at least five stories of awe**. And yes, we encourage you to refer to "awe," that close cousin of wonder. The word "awe" often more easily conjures up striking memories for people.

Who should you approach? Anyone is fair game! Life partners. Parents. Siblings. Children. Neighbors. Co-workers. Even strangers! Take them out for coffee or just ask if they have 5 minutes. Sure, you'll be nervous. It's an odd thing to ask people about. But trust us, everybody's got a great awe story, and everybody is secretly dying to share it!

Before you come to your group, spend a bit of time comparing and contrasting the stories you've collected. Which of those similarities or key differences spoke to you. How did you connect with the stories you heard? Where was the gift, message or challenge for you in those stories?

Option E

Take A Daily Dose of Online Wonder

We most often talk about the giant, single-moment spiritual transformations that awe ignites in us. For instance, witnessing a solar eclipse, after which our entire view of God and ourselves was transformed.

These once-in-a-lifetime infusions of wonder are great, but most of us wouldn't mind a little daily shot of wonder too. Every single day we get stuck in our heads. Every afternoon we feel more numb than we'd like. And every evening it's hard to put our petty, self-centered worries into wider perspective. In the midst of all this, who doesn't long for a bit of daily wonder to wake us up?!

So this month, let's give ourselves the gift of a *daily* dose of wonder. Think of it as taking a regular "Awe Break." Every day, put everything down for just a few minutes and let wonder soak in.

To make it easy for you, we've put together 31 online doses of wonder. One wonder-filled YouTube video for each of the 31 days of December. It's a lot like those advent calendars some of us had as kids. We'd peel back the cardboard door, discover some magical new gift and our entire day would be transformed.

Here's the link to the YouTube playlist that contains all 31 of the videos:

https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLvXOKgOQVYP7kGFJOQQHnr-0nCJWSf_eC

If you're having a particularly hard day, feel free to cheat and watch a couple of them. The goal is to see if these daily doses really change your days. We bet they do!

Option F

Which Wonder 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 Wonder.***

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.

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 was your first experience of wonder? Your first moment of awe?
2. What childhood book served as a doorway into wonder for you? How does its imprint on you remain?
3. Has age impeded or assisted your experience of wonder?
4. How has the *location* of wonder changed for you over time? Has it shifted from the stars to the woods? From the birth of planets to the birth of your child? From the physical feats your body allowed to the storied wrinkles of your hand?
5. At this stage of your life, do you prefer [child-like wonder](#) or [adult-like wonder](#)?
6. Is it possible to love someone without being – in some way – in awe of them?
7. Could it be that your challenge isn't noticing wonder, but savoring it? What strategy or habit might you take on to make sure wonder lingers?
8. If you were to list your top 10 values/priorities, where would "experiencing wonder" be on the list?
9. When was the last time you stood in wonder at your life partner?
10. Can you imagine someone standing in wonder at you?
11. If you were to make one change to your daily routine to let a bit more wonder in, what would it be?
12. They say the three main impediments to wonder are worry, accomplishment and judgment. When any of those three take center stage, wonder leaves the room. Is this in any way true for you?
13. What would make your holidays more wonder-filled?
14. **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 wonder.

Word Roots & Definitions

From [Old English](#) “wundor,” meaning miracle, marvel, horror, monster.

Wise Words

People go abroad to wonder at the heights of mountains, at the huge waves of the sea, at the long courses of the rivers, at the vast compass of the ocean, at the circular motions of the stars, and they pass by themselves without wondering.

St. Augustine

We are the miracle of force and matter making itself over into imagination and will. Incredible. The Life Force experimenting with forms. You for one. Me for another. The Universe has shouted itself alive. We are one of the shouts.

Ray Bradbury

There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle.

Albert Einstein

When it's over, I want to say: all my life
I was a bride married to amazement.
I was the bridegroom, taking the world into my arms...
I don't want to end up simply having visited this world.

[Mary Oliver](#)

The more I wonder, the more I love.

Alice Walker

Joy is the gift of love. Grief is the price of love. Anger protects that which is loved. And when we think we have reached our limit, wonder is the act that returns us to love.

Valerie Kaur

Forfeit your sense of awe, let your conceit diminish your ability to revere, and the universe becomes a marketplace for you.

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel

When our heart wins the battle against our fear, wonder is ahead.

Paulo Coelho

we have to become more worthy
of our own skins

we have lost the miraculous gaze
we only give it to the newborn

[adrienne maree brown](#)

You bring yourself before the sacred...

You stand at the edge of mystery,

at the edge of the deep...

Meanwhile, the armful of worries you brought
to the edge of mystery
have fluttered to your feet.

[Rev. Angela Herrera](#)

One way to open your eyes [to wonder] is to ask yourself, "What if I had never seen this before? What if I knew I would never see it again?"

Rachel Carson

Were the sun to rise but once a year, we would all cry out...How glorious! Our hymns would rise up, our thanks would ascend. O God...Give us new eyes... and vision to see the world anew.

A Jewish Prayer Book

The other world is this world rightly seen.

Nisargadatta Maharaj

Wonder is, among other things, an act of deep attention.

Caspar Henderson

Let me keep my mind on what matters,
which is my work,
which is mostly standing still and learning to be astonished.

[*Mary Oliver*](#)

Years end ways
I dug and dug
Deeper into the earth
Looking for blue heaven
Choking always
On piles of dust rising
Then once
At midnight
I slipped
And fell into the sky
Rev. David Breeden

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 [Wonder](#).

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

Click [here](#) for the YouTube playlist on [Wonder](#).

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

Special playlist for this month:

"[For Stargazing](#)" - on [Spotify](#)

Videos & Podcasts

Collective Wayfinding Through Mystery - On Being Video

<https://onbeing.org/the-summer-of-the-pause-issue-3/>

Wonderment: On the wonder of connection with people, animals and this precious life

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_C3NpYvVH9Y&list=RDCMUcCpPUszZ4-7yzZNgAAYwJjg&index=5

The Wonder of Ordinary Moments

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

We are Stardust Harvesting Starlight

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OEbeRES6D-M>

Reality is Gorgeous, Alan Watts

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9nsjAOchF7M>

On Wonder, Alan Watts (0:00-4:20)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i58MF3knB2c&list=RDLVi58MF3knB2c&start_radio=1&rv=i58MF3knB2c&t=326

The Wonder of the Webb Telescope:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bv6k7WiNHyl>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lf4EDcjMtmw>
- <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/whats-the-james-webb-telescope-searching-for/id1554578197?i=1000570561108>
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_m52YqRxolY

Space - Radio Lab

<https://radiolab.org/episodes/91520-space>

How we experience awe - and why it matters, Beau Lotto and Cirque du Soleil

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=17D5SrgBE6g&list=RDLV1o2XkcftsMQ&index=4>

Articles

How to experience more wow

<https://psyche.co/guides/how-to-fill-your-life-with-more-awe-every-single-day>

Overcoming Racism to Recolor the Outdoors

<https://sites.tufts.edu/earthstewards/2020/07/07/overcoming-racism-to-recolor-the-outdoors/>

Books

World of Wonders: In Praise of Fireflies, Whale Sharks, and Other Astonishments

Aimee Nezhukumatathil

Interview with author:

https://www.pw.org/content/world_of_wonders_an_interview_with_aimee_nezhukumatathil

Walking in Wonder: Eternal Wisdom for a Modern World

John O'Donohue

Movies

[In & Of Itself](#)

[Gravity](#)

[Pan's Labyrinth](#)

[Free Solo](#)

[My Octopus Teacher](#)

Related podcast [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](#).



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