



Soul Matters

**What does it mean to be
a people of CURIOSITY?**



Small Group

May 2019

What Does It Mean To Be A People of Curiosity?

UU minister, Victoria Safford, speaks of curiosity using the metaphor of perception and sight. She writes,

“To see, simply to look and to see, is an ethical act and intentional choice; to see, with open eyes, is a spiritual practice and thus a risk, for it can open you to ways of knowing the world and loving it that will lead to inevitable consequences. The awakened eye is a conscious eye, a willful eye, and brave, because to see things as they are, each in its own truth, will make you very vulnerable.”

Consequences. I’m not sure I’ve ever thought of curiosity in terms of consequences. But I think Safford’s got it right. There is a type of curiosity that is about enjoyment and adventure. It invites us to experience life as a playground. But there is another type of curiosity that leads to consequences, that changes us. This kind of curiosity is about more than enjoyment. Indeed, it’s the kind that drives us *past* enjoyment and comfort. It’s not about enriching oneself; it’s about altering oneself.

This is the type of curiosity we Unitarians Universalists have fallen in love with—one might even say, put our “faith” in.

Just think of how we talk about our dances with curiosity. We don’t just tell stories about barraging our poor Sunday School teachers with “Why?!” and “Who says?!”; We tell stories of doing it until we were kicked out of the class. We don’t just talk about being open-minded; we talk about how our open-mindedness led us to leave home and family and walk a lonelier path than we wanted. And lately, many of us have leaned into the hard work of being curious about our role in upholding institutional racism and structures of white supremacy, none of which is just about “learning interesting new things.”

The point of all these stories is that, as hard as these curious paths are, we are grateful for them. We don’t want curiosity to just be fun or interesting. We want it to make us anew.

In other words, the message of our faith is not simply “Be curious!” It’s “Be curious until there are consequences!”

It’s fine to be inquisitive for the fun of it. But at another level, we’re called to remember that curiosity is not game. Well, maybe it’s the greatest game. The one that drives us to constantly become more, for our sakes and for the sake of others.

Rev. Scott Tayler
Soul Matters Team Lead

Our Spiritual Exercises

Option A: Get Curious About Yourself

When it comes to curiosity, we often leave out ourselves. Saint Augustine captured this perfectly when he wrote, “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.”

So this month you are invited to get curious and wonder about yourself. Aim your inquisitiveness your way.

We suggest two ways to do this. Maybe do them both.

Option #1: Are you a Giver, Taker or Matcher?

Organizational psychologist, Adam Grant suggests that there are three basic relational and work styles. Explore his TED talk and the overview and quiz below to figure out which style is yours.

- TED Talk: https://www.ted.com/talks/adam_grant_are_you_a_giver_or_a_taker
- Short Overview: <https://www.michellemcquaid.com/give-take-quiz/>
- Give and Take Quiz: <https://www.adamgrant.net/give-and-take-assessment>

Option #2: Through the Eyes of a Trusted Friend

There’s no better way to get curious about yourself than with the help of an honest and trusted friend. Often, we only see ourselves clearly when looking through the perspective of someone else. This exercise invites you to get curious about how others see you. Here are your directions:

1. Think of a few questions that get at the heart of who you are. We’ve provided some examples below.
2. Then ask a friend out for coffee or invite them to take a walk and ask them how they would answer these questions about you.
3. Sit with and get curious about their answers. Mull them over. Notice how they challenge, open, affirm or redirect you.
4. Come to your Soul Matters group ready to share where this brave adventure led you.

EXAMPLE SELF-EXPLORATION QUESTIONS:

What makes me come alive?

What is my greatest strength as a parent? grandparent? son? daughter?

What scares me?

What makes me a good friend?

How happy am I?

What three adjectives describe me best?

Do I fight fair?

Am I good at saying I’m sorry?

What makes me light up with joy?

When was/am I most daring?

Do I take care of myself?

Where do you see me in 10 years?

Option B:

Get Curious About How the World Works

Seeker (<https://www.seeker.com>) is a website built for the super curious! It is organized to help you explore every aspect of our world: space, tech, earth, health, culture. Its [short videos](#) take you deep within minutes. So much to satisfy a curious mind!

So, your assignment is simple and hard at the same time:

Search through this amazing website and identify the ONE video or article you are most curious about. Figure out which one got you so interested that you couldn't help tell others about it!

Here's the important part: Come to your group ready to share not only which video or article you picked, *but also* why you think it spoke *to you personally*. What do you think is the deeper reason it drew you in, beyond "I was just curious about it." In other words, make sure to get a little curious about why you were curious.

Option C:

Get Curious About the Other Side

[Jubilee Media](#) produces some of the most provocative and important conversational videos on the internet. Their video series is called *Middle Ground*. It brings together people from opposite sides of various issues to talk, debate, get to know each other and hopefully leave a little more curious about the other side rather than just judging them. It's something we all could use a little help doing.

So you are invited to get more curious than judgmental by exploring a few of the Middle Ground videos below. Watch them all or just the ones that grab your interest.

Come to your small group ready to share how your curiosity about "the other side" changed you.

Middle Ground Videos:

- Atheists & Christians Debate:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3SjuCOPYscU&feature=em-subsub_digest
- Liberals & Conservatives Fight Labels And Stereotypes:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cbh64LX6-HY&t=238s>
- Can Trump Supporters & Immigrants See Eye To Eye?
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G0SpzIIHEaE&t=747s>
- Can Black Lives Matter & Law Enforcement See Eye To Eye?
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S6rDvbQ-mz4&t=78s>
- Millennials & Baby Boomers Seek To Understand Each Other:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D1eB--DskfI>
- Vegans & Meat Eaters Discuss The Right Diet?
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JUWk4s4_js&index=4&list=PLBVNJo7nhINQ6dTALHYggQd2zINL0WHv6
- Rich And Poor People Seek To Understand Each Other:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8xbof4rqOKw>

Option D: Get Curious About God

Rev. Kathleen McTigue, Director of the UU College of Social Justice, sets aside time each night to get curious about God. She describes it this way:

“My spiritual practice consists of this: I think back on the events of the day and ask the question, “Where was God in this day?” It’s a question that can be asked in a dozen different theological voices, and if God language fails to resonate, then we might ask merely, “Where today did I really hear the language of my life?” The question puts a sheen of attentiveness and care on even the most mundane dimensions of the day. It gives us a way to cradle the moments of the day just lived and see them again before they’re too far away.”

It’s a powerful way to see the sacred in your daily life. So, take a week and end each day by asking “Where was God in this day?” or “Where today did I really hear the language of my life?” You can simply meditate on the questions or take it to the next level by journaling about them.

Either way, come to your group ready to share how this spiritual practice altered your day. They will surely be curious to hear!

Option E: Get Curious About Our Recommended Resources

Our recommended resources are full of wisdom about what it means to be a people of and a person of curiosity. Engaging these resources and finding the one that especially speaks to you is a spiritual practice in and of itself.

So, if none of the above exercises call to you, engage the recommended resources section of this packet as your spiritual exercise for the month.

Set aside some regular times throughout a week to go through them and meditate on them until you find the *ONE* that most expands or deepens your understanding of curiosity. After you’ve found it, consider printing it out and carrying it with you or pinning it up so you can continue to reflect on it throughout the weeks leading up to your group meeting. Come to your group ready to share where the journey led you.

Your Question

As always, don't treat these questions like "homework" or try to answer every single one. Instead, make time to reflect 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 and what is it trying to get you to notice? Which one contains "your work"?

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

1. What or who has kept you curious?
2. What's something you know now about being a person of curiosity that you didn't know when you were 18 years old?
3. Has being curious ever come at a cost for you?
4. As you get older, are you more curious or less?
5. Are you regularly curious about what your body is trying to tell you?
6. Is that person who drives you crazy trying to teach you something?
7. Do you believe that every moment is a teachable moment?
8. Have you forgiven yourself for that time you willfully refused to question what you knew was untrue?
9. When it comes to you worrying about the future or being curious about it, which one wins?
10. Do you think you are worth someone being curious about?
11. Which were you taught was more important: the "expert mind" or the "beginner's mind"?
12. Have you ever opened Pandora's box?
13. What is the greatest adventure that your curiosity took you on?
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 hear it. Or maybe the question or call you need to hear is waiting in one of the quotes listed below. Consider looking there!

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 your thinking started and open you to new ways of thinking about what it means to be part of a people of CURIOSITY.

Word Roots

Curiosity stems from the Latin *curiosus*: careful, diligent, or inquisitive. This is the same root for care and careful which implies an intention in curiosity, a sense of purpose about it. As the word moved into old French and middle English it took on qualities of eager to know (often in a bad sense), solicitous, anxious, inquisitive, odd, strange.

Wise Words

Our work is not to change what you do, but to witness what you do with enough awareness, enough curiosity, enough tenderness that the lies and old decisions upon which the compulsion is based become apparent and fall away.

Geneen Roth

When we face a new situation our temptation is often to ask, “What do I like?” Do I like this new thing? Do I like these people? Do I like this set-up? Sometimes that’s a helpful question to ask. But it’s always good to ask, “What can I learn?” From this new thing, in this new life situation, on this new day—what can I learn? In this moment, like it or not, life is giving me the opportunity to learn more about the universe and about myself... Everything is a teaching, a chance to learn and practice. It’s a gift. But only if I stay open and curious. Even if it’s a rotten situation, nine times out of ten curiosity beats misery. Compassion always covers the rest.

Rev. Steve Garnaas-Holmes

Maybe answers are just resting places on the way to better questions.

Mark Causey

I have no special talent. I am just passionately curious.

Albert Einstein

Millions saw the apple fall, but only Newton asked why.

Bernard Baruch

Leonardo da Vinci was undoubtedly the most curious man who ever lived... He wouldn’t take Yes for an answer.

[Kenneth Clark](#)

I can live with doubt and uncertainty and not knowing. I think it’s much more interesting to live not knowing than to have answers that might be wrong.

Richard Feynman

We can lean into worry’s opposite – curiosity. As Rabbi Marcia Prager teaches, where worry says, “oh no, what is going to happen?” curiosity says “oh wow! I wonder what will happen!”

Rev. Kimberley Debus

The two greatest days in your life are the day you were born, and the day you find out why.

Mark Twain

[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.

Saint Augustine

It wasn't curiosity itself that killed the proverbial cat. What really got him in trouble was his inability to deal with the new situation he was in. And when it comes to learning about new environments, curiosity is key.

[Kate Berardo](#)

Everyone and everything around you is your teacher.

Ken Keye

Nothing in life is to be feared. It is only to be understood.

Marie Curie

As a child, my grandmother, an incredibly gifted, creative, if not eccentric woman, imparted me with these simple but powerful words. She said: "To be interesting, Kate, you have to be interested." Curiosity not only makes the world interesting, it makes you interesting.

[Kate Berardo](#)

I suppose without curiosity a man would be a tortoise. Very comfortable life, a tortoise has.

Agatha Christie

If you tell me that curiosity killed the cat, I say the cat died nobly.

Arnold Edinborough

To learn is to live.

Hlovate

In the mind of the beginner there are many possibilities, in the mind of the expert there are few.

Shunryu Suzuki

There's something in us that likes to be lost. There's contentment in the moment of arrival, but isn't the seeking part of the journey when we feel most alive? Nothing's better than that bend in the road when we realize *anything* could be around the corner. Who wants the feeling of "I figured it out!" when instead you can live in the state of "What could it be?!" The curious unknown is what keeps us moving, and grateful to be alive.

Rev. Scott Tayler

The Tree of Knowledge

LeeAnne McIlroy Langton

Full poem at

<http://www.ayearofbeinghere.com/2014/03/leeanne-mcilroy-langton-tree-of.html>

I noticed that most of my students
Were gazing longingly out the window...
I paused in my lecture to discover
That they were collectively noticing the unusual
fruit

Exploding on the tree just outside our window
"What kind of fruit is that?"

They wondered with more curiosity than
They had ever shown for Plato or Rousseau
And so I told them about the pomegranate...

Songs and Music

Open Your Mind

Melissa Etheridge

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=110&v=vkk23bIXuxY

Why Georgia

John Mayer

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ehggT-Xy7og>

"Am I living it right?..."

Cover by Jess Delgado:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r_Qq2VTqJxo

Upside Down

Jack Johnson

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6uVtIH2OSTA>

Cover by Becca T.G:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H8QhZ1MfgIY>

More "Curiosity Songs" are found on our May Soul Matters Spotify playlist. Click [here](#) to check them out! You can also explore the playlists from other months [here](#).

Videos

The Beauty That Curiosity Sees

Richard Feynman

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cRmbwczTC6E>

Garden of Your Mind (“It’s good to be curious!”)

Mister Rogers Remixed

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OFzXaFbxDcM&fbclid=IwAR0uoa4AupE_8LNCVW5XbjJ8yvKaAkepRbFWK10-0kMP3KeZOuluo2vsWEO

The Case for Curiosity (TED talk)

Mario Livio

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=1102&v=Z_ojyXVVFKA

A celebration of curiosity as the most human and maybe most precious “hunger” that exists.

We Need To Be Lost To Find Ourselves

Jason Silva

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1GKdGZcP1E>

A celebration of staying lost in curiosity: “We want to be the traveler *in search* of signification. When you find it, it’s over! It’s not about the answers; it’s about the better questions. It’s only when we are lost, that we are found.”

Mars Rover Curiosity

<https://vimeo.com/54130221>

“She is a personification of our wonder and curiosity as a species...”

The Joyful, Perplexing World of Puzzle Hunts - TED Talk

https://www.ted.com/talks/alex_rosenthal_the_joyful_perplexing_world_of_puzzle_hunts?utm_source=newsletter_weekly_2018-12-22&utm_campaign=newsletter_weekly&utm_medium=email&utm_content=talk_of_the_week_button#t-639688

Nothing engages our curiosity more than puzzles. Here’s a wonderful and fascinating celebrating of all they mean to us.

Which TED Talk are You?

<https://ideas.ted.com/quiz-which-ted-talk-are-you/>

Soul Matters picks a lot of TED talks for all of us to watch. But have you ever been curious about which single TED talk was perfect for *you alone*? Wait no more! Take this quick 6-question quiz and find out which great TED talk matches you best.

We’re Curious: What Will You Say to Your Mom This Mother’s Day?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vP6uoAwo-ig>

Articles

Why Are We So Curious?

Tom Stafford

<http://www.bbc.com/future/story/20120618-why-are-we-so-curious>

“We humans have a deeply curious nature, and more often than not it is about the minor tittle-tattle in our lives. Our curiosity has us doing utterly unproductive things like reading news about people we will never meet, learning topics we will never have use for, or exploring places we will never come back to... From the perspective of evolution this appears to be something of a mystery. We associate evolution with ‘survival-of-the-fittest’ traits that support the essentials of day-to-day survival and reproduction. So why did we evolve to waste so much time?...”

Curious about Pandora’s Curiosity?

<https://www.ranker.com/list/contents-of-pandoras-box/cleo-egnal>

Books

Curious: The Desire to Know and Why Your Future Depends On It

Ian Leslie

“Everyone is born curious. But only some retain the habits of exploring, learning, and discovering as they grow older. Those who do so tend to be smarter, more creative, and more successful. But at the very moment when the rewards of curiosity have never been higher, it is misunderstood and undervalued, and increasingly monopolized by the cognitive elite. A “curiosity divide” is opening up.”

[Curiosity: How Science Became Interested in Everything](#)

Philip Ball

“It seems safe to assume that the idea of being curious is alive and well in modern science... Yet there was a time when curiosity was condemned. Neither Pandora nor Eve could resist the dangerous allure of unanswered questions, and all knowledge wasn’t equal—for millennia it was believed that there were some things we should not try to know. In the late sixteenth century this attitude began to change dramatically... Philip Ball investigates how curiosity first became sanctioned—when it changed from a vice to a virtue and how it became permissible to ask any and every question about the world.”

[Good Talk: A Memoir in Conversations](#)

Mira Jacob

A love letter to curiosity: “Like many six-year-olds, Mira Jacob’s half-Jewish, half-Indian son, Z, has questions about everything. At first they are innocuous enough, but as tensions from the 2016 election spread from the media into his own family, they become much, much more complicated. Trying to answer him honestly, Mira has to think back to where she’s gotten her own answers: her most formative conversations about race, color, sexuality, and, of course, love...”

[How to Think Like Leonardo da Vinci: Seven Steps to Genius Every Day](#)

Michael J. Gelb

“Drawing on Da Vinci’s notebooks, inventions, and legendary works of art, Gelb introduces Seven Da Vincian Principles—the essential elements of genius—from *curiosità*, the insatiably curious approach to life to *connessione*, the appreciation for the interconnectedness of all things...”

An article about curiosity as Da Vinci’s core trait:
<https://gloriouscurious.wordpress.com/tag/michael-j-gelb/>

Movies

Tim’s Vermeer

https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/tims_vermeer_2014/

A documentary about a man driven by a [wild curiosity](#) to understand the artistry of Johannes Vermeer, the Dutch painter best known for “Girl with a Pearl Earring.”

Into the Wild

https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/into_the_wild

On maybe the most important journey of curiosity there is: the search for self-discovery.

Chasing Ice

https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/chasing_ice_2012

Getting curious, and serious, about climate change.

Hidden Figures

https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/hidden_figures

A long overdue telling of an exceptional combination of courage and curiosity.

Temple Grandin

https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/temple_grandin

The celebration of a curious, courageous and wonderfully “not normal” mind.

Get daily inspiration
on the monthly theme by liking our
Soul Matters Facebook inspiration Page:
<https://www.facebook.com/soulmatterssharingcircle/>

Find musical inspiration
on each theme by following our monthly
Spotify Lists:
<https://www.soulmatterssharingcircle.com/spotify-lists.html>

Find support for bringing the
monthly themes home and into your family life with
Soulful Home: A Guide for Families:
<https://www.soulmatterssharingcircle.com/soulful-home.html>



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