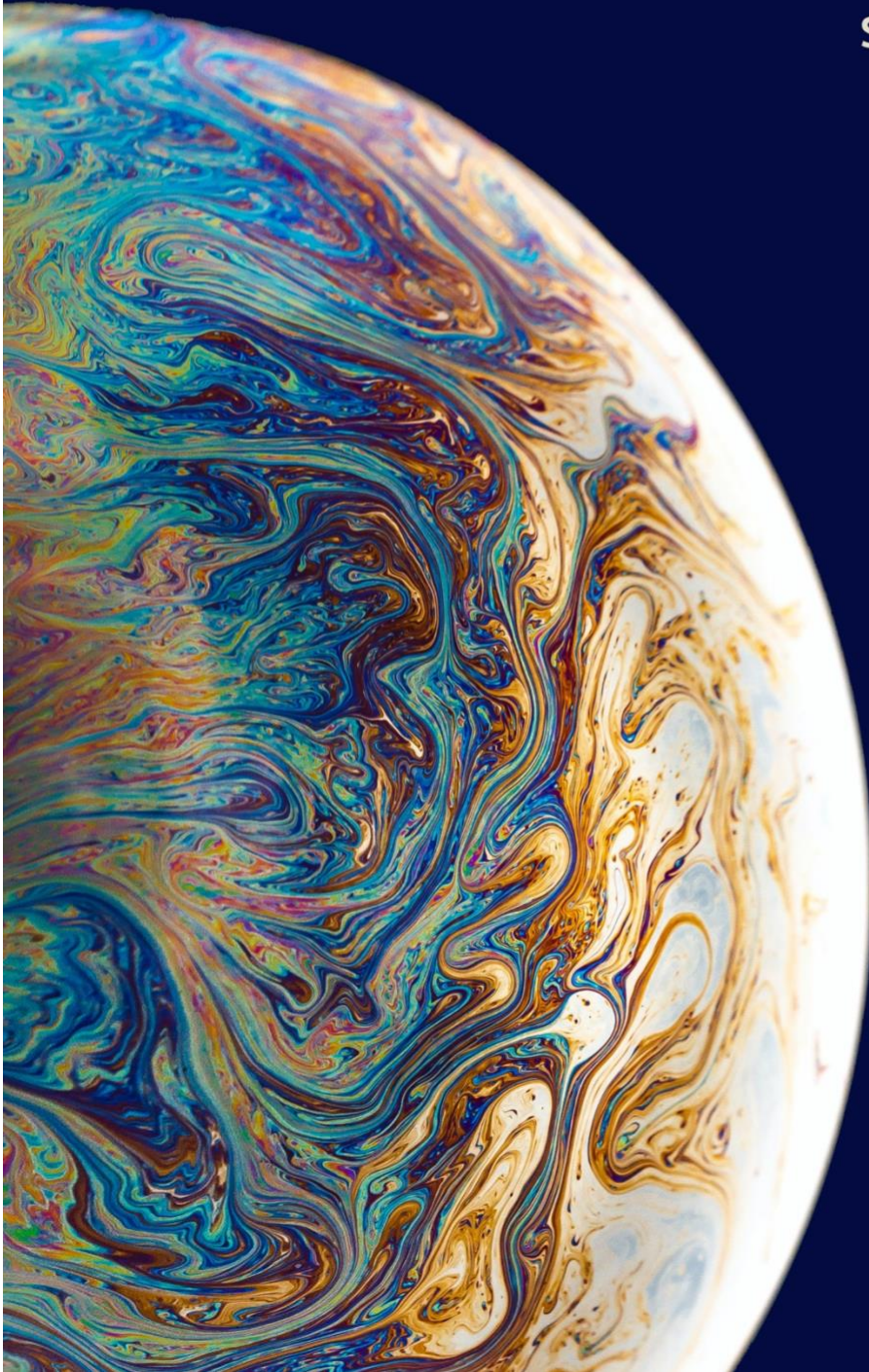


The Path of Creativity

Small Group
May 2023



Soul Matters

Welcome to the Path of Creativity

*Creativity is our ability to dream things up
and make them happen.*

— Peggy Taylor

Dreaming things up. We're all familiar with that part of the quote. Who doesn't love conjuring up new ideas and images? Who isn't impressed when someone takes pieces of *what is* and - almost magically - presents us with *what could be*?

However, the same can't be said about the second half of the quote, the part about "making those dreams happen." That side of the creativity equation gets short shrift. We celebrate the fun piece about dreaming and leave off the hard piece of making our imaginings real.

And it's not just the hard part; it's the scary part too. Maybe that's why we avoid it. Putting something new into the world takes bravery, whether that's a piece of art or the art that is you. Being creatively unique can cause the crowd to cheer and swoon, but it can also lead to being laughed at and left out. Yes, there is joy, beauty and play in creativity, but there is insecurity, loneliness and self-doubt as well. Which means that this month is not just about imagination, artistry and self-expression, but also courage.

Once that's in view, it's clear that we also need to talk about "co-creativity" this month. Something as daring as creativity is dangerous if we try to do it alone. Indeed, where did we get the silly idea that artists, innovators and originals are isolated, independent geniuses? When it comes to myths about creativity, that one tops the list. We need to remind each other that there is no such thing as "a person of creativity," only "people of creativity." For instance, new ideas come from the clash of debate. New art emerges only after inspiration from those who've gone before. Better forms of community are built on the back of those who have toiled and sacrificed long before we put ourselves on the line. Bottom line: there are no creators without companions!

It's all a way of reminding us that the secret to creative self-expression is staying connected to each other. Those sacred sources of inspiration inside us – our imagination, unique voice and inner muses – are like wild animals: They are hungry to run free but are also shy and easily scared away. They want to come out and play, but will only do so when coaxed and cared for by the inspiration and support of others.

So, in the end, maybe the most important question this month is not just "What do you want or need to create?" but also "Who are your partners?"

Our Spiritual Exercises

Option A

This Week's Portfolio

All the arts we practice are apprenticeship. The big art is our life.

- M.C. Richards

You don't have to know how to use a paintbrush or put words into poetry to be an artist. Creativity is something we do with our very living. We are all composing pieces of art with our relationships, activism, parenting and jobs. And yet we don't often think of our daily living that way. So, this month, let's think that way! And let's do it by assembling a "life art portfolio." Here are your instructions:

Set aside some time on a Saturday or Sunday to reflect on your past week *of regular events* and then make a list of the **everyday "art pieces" or "creative projects"** you have built, composed, planted or recreated *in your daily living*. Here are some examples of items that might make it onto your list (i.e. into your "regular life art portfolio"):

- *I created joy inside my child.*
- *I repainted my mood after a crappy day at work.*
- *I built a new proposal at work.*
- *I planted a seed of hope in my friend.*
- *I balanced my checkbook with the ease and grace of a ballet dancer.*

You get the idea.

You can simply reflect on the exercise/list and leave it at that. But here are some ways for you to take it deeper;

1. Make another list/portfolio a week later and compare the lists to see how they - and you - have changed.
2. After finishing the list, ask your partner, kid, friend or co-worker what they would add.
3. Invite your partner, kid, or friend to do the exercise with you.
4. Make another list of the things you want to intentionally create and bring into the world *the following* week.

Come to your group ready to share what surprised you most about doing the exercise.

Option B

Share the Piece That Means the Most

Many of us have a special piece of art which is meaningful to us beyond its beauty. Maybe it was a piece passed down from our parents or made for us by a child. Or it could be a piece you bought for yourself during a difficult time in your life or while on a life-changing trip.

This exercise invites you to share that piece of art with your group members. But here's the important part: sharing *the story* of the piece is as important as showing the piece itself. In other words, what this exercise is really about is helping you reconnect with the story of why that art piece means so much. Too often the story and meaning of such art pieces fade. We walk by the art and it blends into the wall or the counter on which it sits. It no longer "grabs us." So, in the end, this exercise is about reconnecting with the story of the piece *so that* its meaning can come alive for you again.

Option C

Which Artistic Eye is Yours?

In the videos below, various artistic types talk about how their art has led them to view life in a unique way. And how viewing it that way has offered them some kind of comfort or challenge.

So for this exercise, set aside some time (either all at once or one every morning) to watch the videos and discern which artist and which artist's worldview you resonate with the most. Which of their "artistic eyes" capture how you see life, or how **you want** to see life?

Come to your group with a quote from the video that grabbed you the most, as well as a few words about how your favorite video offered you a word of comfort or challenge.

- The Storyteller: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6qRfiWVW3yQ>
- The Painter: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=scDF8elfoNs>
- The Stitcher: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EITLA0fvx0I>
- The Folder: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Ch25z9om5w>
- The One Who Couldn't Read: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kK18ez9Sapc>
- The Tinkerer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8NA6IX6OgIY>

Option D

A Treasure Hunt at the Art Museum

Most of the time, we go to art museums in search of beauty. We're looking for works that inspire us. But, of course, there is so much more to be found and experienced in these houses of creativity. Not all artists want to inspire us or gift us with beauty. Some want to get us angry. Others want to get us in touch with suffering, that of others or our own. Still other artists want us to stop being so serious and just laugh. In other words, art museums house more treasures than appear at first glance!

So in honor of that, visit an art museum this month and turn it into a treasure hunt. We've created a list for you to use. Check off as many as you can. Here's the link to that Art Treasure Hunt Checklist:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1B7U27yu6qGH0CTg01QiXHqg8jFfKzzuzuHRxBfI99q4/edit?usp=sharing>

If you feel motivated, here are some ways for you to take it deeper;

1. Do it with a friend or family member and then compare lists over lunch.
2. Bring a journal with you and write about a few of the treasures you found. For instance, instead of just checking off the piece that made you feel angry, take the time to write about and reflect on that feeling of anger. Maybe even write a thank you letter to one or two of the pieces.
3. Return to the museum a week or two later and take another look at a handful of the "treasure" to see if those art pieces still make you feel the same way as they did when you originally viewed them.
4. If you paint or draw, pick one of the experiences on the treasure hunt list and create a piece of your own designed to elicit the experience on the list.

Option E

Ask Them About Creativity

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 "creativity 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. 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.

Creativity Questions

- What is something creative you did when you were younger that you no longer do? Why don't you still do it? Would you want to do it?
- Were you a child that colored in the lines or outside of them? Does that childhood self still have a leading role in your life?
- Has creativity ever gotten you in trouble?
- Are you as "creatively maladjusted" as you imagined you would be?
- If your life was a song or movie, which song or movie would you be?
- Which artistic metaphor best describes what life feels like to you right now? a blank canvas? a 1000-piece puzzle? a detective novel? a garden? a writer's block? a work in progress? Something else?
- Has creativity ever healed or saved you?

Option F

Which Creativity 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 creativity.**

We encourage you to use the same discernment practice with these 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!

A note about self-care: *Often these questions take us to a vulnerable space. It is OKAY to ignore the questions that may be triggering – or lean in if that feels safe.*

1. Has creativity ever gotten you in trouble?
2. Has creativity ever healed or saved you?
3. Were you a child that colored in the lines or outside of them? Does that childhood self still have a leading role in your life?
4. Aren't you hungry to color outside the lines? Hasn't your life stayed safely "inside the lines" long enough?
5. Ralph Waldo Emerson said that two things prevent most of us from creative living: fear of public opinion and undue reverence for one's own consistency. Might either of those be true of you?
6. If your life was a [song](#) or [movie](#), which song or movie would you be?
7. Are you as "[creatively maladjusted](#)" as you imagined you would be?
8. If you were told you could magically recreate one aspect of your life, what part would you pick?
9. Has anyone ever reacted to your creativity as a threat?
10. Could that restless or sour feeling in your gut be [your unused creativity](#)?
11. Does your muse act more like a fairy offering you sweet gifts or a wasp trying to sting you into action?
12. Which artistic metaphor best describes what life feels like to you right now? a blank canvas? a 1000-piece puzzle? a detective novel? a garden? a writer's block? a work in progress? Something else?
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 creativity.

Word Roots & Definitions

“Prior to the mid-19th century and the Darwinian revolution, the words “creative” and “creativity” were not used at all, and “creation” was associated with the divine. [But then] Darwin showed that nature could be creative, without appealing to a divine creator.” - [source](#)

Wise Words

All the arts we practice are apprenticeship. The big art is our life.

M.C. Richards

Normality is a paved road: It's comfortable to walk, but no flowers grow on it.

Vincent Van Gogh

Remember that you are an artist, regardless of how constantly the world will try to drive it out of you or how a "real job" will try to bury the part of you. Whether it's with food, or building robots, you will know your medium the instant you realize how in love you are with what it brings out of you.

[Shane Koyczan](#)

The world is before you, and you need not take it, or leave it, as it was when you came in.

James Baldwin

The two terrors that discourage creativity and creative living are fear of public opinion and undue reverence for one's own consistency.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

A bird doesn't sing because it has an answer, it sings because it has a song.

Maya Angelou

I invented this rule for myself to be applied to every decision I might have to make in the future. I would sort out all the arguments and see which belonged to fear and which to creativeness, and other things being equal, I would make the decision which had the larger number of creative reasons on its side. I think it must be a rule something like this that makes jonquils and crocuses come pushing through cold mud.

Katharine Butler Hathaway

The universe buries strange jewels deep within us all, and then stands back to see if we can find them. The hunt to uncover those jewels—that's creative living. The courage to go on that hunt in the first place—that's what separates a mundane existence from a more enchanted one.

[Elizabeth Gilbert](#)

The most regretful people on earth are those who felt the call to creative work, who felt their own creative power restive and uprising, and gave to it neither power nor time.

[Mary Oliver](#)

Every act of creation is first of all an act of destruction.

Pablo Picasso

My anger can be a force for good. My anger can be creative and imaginative, seeing a better world that doesn't yet exist. It can fuel a righteous movement toward justice and freedom.

Austin Channing Brown

Before there is a breakthrough, there has to be a block. It's only after we stop searching that the answer might arrive.

[Flash Rosenberg](#)

We are ourselves creations. We are meant to continue creativity by being creative ourselves. This is the God-force extending itself through us. Creativity is God's gift to us. Using creativity is our gift back to God.

[Julia Cameron](#)

We design our world, while our world acts back on us [and designs us](#).

[Anne-Marie Willis](#)

Human salvation lies in the hands of the creatively maladjusted.

[Martin Luther King, Jr.](#)

The war of an artist with [their] society is a lover's war, and [they] do, at [their] best, what lovers do, which is to reveal the beloved to [themselves] and, with that revelation, to make freedom real.

[James Baldwin](#)

All the prophets were artists. To organize like Ghandi did against the British empire – marching to the sea and so forth, filling jails – that is an art form. [As is] to organize the anger of groups of people.

[Matthew Fox](#)

We live at a time when humans believe themselves fabulously capable of creation, but they do not know what to create.

[Jose Ortega Y Gasset](#)

The world always seems brighter when you've just made something that wasn't there before.

[Neil Gaiman](#)

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 [Creativity](#).

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

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

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

Videos & Podcasts

Life Lessons From An Artist: Commencement Speech by Neil Gaiman

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ikAb-NYkseI>

Related article:

<https://www.themarginalian.org/2012/05/22/neil-gaiman-commencement-address/>

Related book:

<https://www.neilgaiman.com/works/Books/Art+Matters/>

Where do you get your ideas from? - Neil Gaiman

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-C48jAkVlIO>

Your Elusive Creative Genius - TED Talk

https://www.ted.com/talks/elizabeth_gilbert_on_genius?referrer=playlist-where_do_ideas_come_from

Elizabeth Gilbert muses on the impossible things we expect from artists and geniuses -- and shares the radical idea that, instead of the rare person "being" a genius, all of us "have" a genius.

David Bowie's advice to artists... and all of us!

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

The Surprising Habits of Original Thinkers - TED Talk

https://www.ted.com/talks/adam_grant_the_surprising_habits_of_original_thinkers

Can Art Amend History?

https://www.ted.com/talks/titus_kaphar_can_art_amend_history?language=en

5 Black Artists You Should Know

<https://sparketh.com/black-history-month-5-artists-you-should-know/>

Dwelling

A podcast exploring the creative rethinking going on right now about how we think of home.

<https://audioboom.com/posts/8247070-welcome-to-dwelling>

Creative Differences - Hidden Brain

<https://hiddenbrain.org/podcast/creative-differences/>

An exploration of the links between diversity, conflict, and creativity, built around the question, "What happens when we connect with people whose view of the world is very different from our own?"

On the Beauty of The Museum of Bad Art

<https://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/podcast-the-museum-of-bad-art>

The MOBA's website:

<https://museumofbadart.org/collections/>

For The Fun of It...

[Blob Opera](#), [Paint with Music](#), [3D Pottery](#), and [Making Your Own Street Art](#)

Street art that transforms...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y6XQ2GFow9g>

Maybe the most creative apartment you've ever seen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eYHE7UIVpTs>

Maybe the most creative gym you've ever seen.

<https://psyche.co/films/a-gym-built-of-soviet-era-scrap-is-a-creative-community-hub-in-kyiv-2019>

Maybe the most creative (and healing) dance you've ever seen.

https://vimeo.com/259539583?embedded=true&source=vimeo_logo&owner=28010126

Faith Ringgold's art of fearlessness, joy and freedom

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IZ-VvOep2D8>

Gordon Park's courageous and empathetic photography taken to awaken America

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0lDm6PAfKw&t=11s>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dcVOltrZX6U>

Articles

The End of the Lone Genius

<https://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/20/opinion/sunday/the-end-of-genius.html>

Messy Desks Encourage Creative Thinking!

<https://www.utne.com/mind-and-body/creative-thinking-zm0z14mazwil/>

Creativity and the Brains of Older People

<https://thepost.org.za/good-news-about-the-brain-of-an-elderly-person/>

Social Media Short-cuts Creative Boredom!

<https://phys.org/news/2022-12-social-media-users-reaping-creative.html>

Books

Big Magic: Creative Living Beyond Fear

Elizabeth Gilbert

Inspired: Understanding Creativity: A Journey

Through Art, Science, and the Soul

Matt Richtel

Wreck This Journal

Keri Smith

Affinities: On Art and Fascination

Brian Dillon

Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow

Gabrielle Zevin

Movies & TV

Get Back

Tar

Amadeus

Maudie

Fight The Power: How Hip Hop Changed the World

Cinema Paradiso

Tickling Giants

Exit Through the Gift Shop

Good Night Oppy

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](#).

Packet Introduction Credit Note: Unless explicitly noted otherwise, the introductions of these packets are written by our Team Lead, Rev. Scott Tayler. Rev. Scott gives permission for his pieces to be used in any way that is helpful, including in newsletters, worship and in online service/recordings.



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