

Soul Matters

Healing

Small Group
November 2026

Welcome to Healing

> *Jewish teaching includes frequent reminders of the importance of a broken-open heart, as in this Hasidic tale: A disciple asks the rebbe: "Why does Torah tell us to 'place its words **upon** your hearts'? Why does it not tell us to place these holy words **in** our hearts?" The rebbe answers: "It is because, as we are, our hearts are closed, and we cannot place the holy words in our hearts. So we place them **on top** of our hearts. And there they stay until, one day, the heart breaks and the words fall in.*
>
> *- Parker J. Palmer*

Oh how we want to escape our pain.

Worry, loss, death, exhaustion, anxiety, economic instability, the unraveling of our democracy, the destruction of our planet, the ever-present trauma of racial injustice. It's all overwhelming. We want to stitch up our protective coverings as soon as we can, so our exposed and tender nerves can rest. We want the pain behind us as soon as possible.

But what if the work is to travel toward it? What if proximity to our pain, not distance from it, is the real route to healing?

This seems to be what Parker Palmer is trying to tell us. And what our faith teaches us as well.

Here's what else Palmer has to say: "When the heart is supple, it can be "broken open" into a greater capacity to hold our own and the world's pain. When we hold our suffering in a way that opens us to greater compassion, heartbreak becomes a source of healing, deepening our empathy for others who suffer and extending our ability to reach out to them."

This doesn't just reframe pain and healing; it also helps us reimagine our relationship with vulnerability. Maybe vulnerability isn't *the cause* of our pain, like some chink in our armor. Maybe, instead, it is the first and needed step toward healing our pain. Or, to put it another way, maybe vulnerability isn't so much the problem as the ticket that allows us to get on healing's train.

If this is true, then our instructions this month seem to be this:

Forget eliminating your pain; lean into it! Don't run from it as fast as you can; befriend it. Hold it in your frightened and tender hands until you realize it's more malleable than you thought. Until you realize that your strong and courageous hands can shape it. That you can take its sharp edges and mold them into pathways that connect you with other people's pain. That you can transform it from a weapon that has wounded you into a bridge that connects you to the beautiful, broken hearts of others.

When we do this, we may discover that pain can be more than a cage cutting us off from the world. It can also become a tool that makes room, carving open an entirely new space to live in. A space where we are more deeply connected to each other than we imagined possible.

This of course doesn't mean the hurt goes away. But it does mean we end up feeling larger, more whole, and more tightly held by the holy web that reminds us we are never alone.

And maybe that is the most important healing of all.

Spiritual Exercises

It's one thing to analyze a theme; it's quite another to experience it. By pulling us out of the space of *thinking* and into the space of *doing*, our spiritual exercises invite us to figure out not just what we have to say about life, but also what life has to say *to us*!

With that in mind, pick and complete the one exercise that speaks to you the most. **Come to your group ready to share why you picked the exercise you did, how it surprised you and what gift it gave you.**

Option A
The Story of Your Scar

Some people see scars, and it is wounding they remember. To me, scars are proof of the fact that there is healing.
- Linda Hogan

Scars have the strange power to remind us that our past is real.
- Cormac McCarthy

Some scars are just scars. But most contain stories. They keep us tethered to an important memory or part of ourselves that we would never want to live without. The scar from the surgery that removed the cancer not only reminds us, not only how lucky we were to survive, but that we *have* the power to survive. The faint imprint of stitches on our chin doesn't just take us back to that night we fell on the ice and dad rushed over to help; It also reminds us how much we miss him. The blemish left by a dozen busted lips stands as a monument to how much our adolescent self always wanted someone to fight; it's also a testament to all of those precious people who loved that anger out of us.

So how about you? What's the story of your scar? What memory does it help you hold on to? What important part of yourself does it keep you tethered to? What wisdom does it carry? Why would you never want to be without it? How does remembering its pain heal you over and over again?

Spend this month reflecting on it. Or, if you are so inclined, writing about it.

Honor what your scar has meant to you in the past, but also open yourself to what it wants to say to you *today*. What *new* message of comfort or challenge does it have for you?

Come to your group ready to share - or read aloud - your scar's story, along with the healing you found in revisiting that story anew.

Option B
The Places That Heal You

There are so many places that offer us healing. That tree from our childhood whose branch so faithfully held our favorite tire swing. The playground we took all three of our kids to when they were little. The porch with rocking chairs where we sat with grandma for hours on end. The ocean we still return to every summer. The art studio or wood shop we retreat to when we need to find our creative self once again. The family cabin so beautifully filled with ghosts. The list goes on.

While people definitely help heal us, places play an equally important role. They hold our memories. They help shape us. And they give us a powerful sense of belonging.

So, for this exercise, find a way to creatively honor a place - or many of the places - that have healed you. If you're an artistic type, drawing or painting them would make a beautiful tribute. For us who are normally creative, pulling together old pictures of them and making a slideshow on your computer is a great idea. Writers can write about them, or maybe even write a thank you note *to them.* If your healing place is still accessible, find a tangible way to bless it. Or maybe just go there and talk to it.

Whatever your approach, the goal is to step back and gain a new or deeper appreciation for how big of a role these places have played in your life.

To help you on your way, here are some questions chew on before you begin:

- *What exactly makes your healing place healing? What does it offer that you cannot find elsewhere?*
- *Has your healing place ever "spoken" to you? What might it be trying to say to you today?*
- *Has age impacted the kind of places you go to for healing?*
- *Are there healing places that you can now visit only in your mind and/or memory, such as a physical place that no longer exists? How does that change your experience of them?*
- *In what sense is your place "holy" or "sacred"?*

Option C
Take Pictures of What's Broken

This exercise asks you to bring special attention to your days. Put simply, ***look for things that are broken but beautiful*** and take a picture of them.

Spend some time with this. A whole week would be great. Keep a look out as you go through your regular day and/or set aside a couple of long walks completely dedicated to this task.

As you are doing this and while looking at the pictures afterward, ask yourself how these broken but beautiful things are inviting you to view your life anew. How might they be wanting you to understand "brokenness" differently? Or "beauty" differently? What message about beauty and pain do they want you to hear? What kind of healing might they be offering you?

Option D
Take Pictures of What's Trying to Become New Again

This exercise also asks you to bring special attention to your days. Its ask is a bit different: ***Look for things that are being fixed or are healing*** and take a picture of them.

Again, spend a week or so with this, being on the lookout as you go through your regular day and/or setting aside a couple of long walks completely dedicated to this task.

As you stumble upon them or while you are looking at the pictures afterward, do some deeper reflection. Asking yourself questions like:

- How might these things be asking me to think about healing differently?
- Who needs me to understand *their healing* differently?
- Does anything (or anyone) heal on their own?
- What is trying to come back to life *in my life*?
- When is it time to leave things unfixed?

Option E
Which Companion Piece Speaks to You?

Sometimes we come across a quote, song, article or movie 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 going through the Companion Pieces section below to find **the one piece** that speaks most powerfully to you. (Or "shimmers" most strongly for you.)

Come to your group ready to share the piece you picked, why it called to you and what insight, memory, or message of comfort or challenge it offered you.

Option F
Ask Them About Healing

One of the best ways to explore our monthly themes is to have conversations about them with people who are close to you. It's also a great way to deepen our relationships! Below is a list of questions to guide your conversation. Be sure to let your conversation partner know in advance that this won't be a typical conversation. *Remember to also answer the questions yourself as they are meant to support a conversation, not just a time of quizzing them.*

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

Healing Questions:

- What wound has been with you the longest?
- Loved ones who have died live on in our hearts. Who do you miss the most? How do they continue to shape you? Have they ever spoken to you?
- If you could have healed one of your parent's wounds, which would it be?
- Has your body ever led you toward healing? i.e. Has it ever shut down or caused you pain as a way of waking you up?
- What is your relationship with self-inflicted wounds?
- Have you ever swallowed your grief or hidden your pain because others were uncomfortable or unwilling to make room for it? If you could speak to that previous version of yourself, what would you say?
- What has life taught you about the difference between "being cured" and "being healed"?
- Tell me a story about being healed by a place.

Finding Your Question

This list of questions is an aid for deep reflection. How you answer them is often less important than the journey they take you on.

*So, read through the list of questions 2-3 times until **one question** sticks out for you and captures your attention, or as some faith traditions say, until one of the questions "shimmers." Or as we like to say, "Read over them until one of the questions **picks you**."*

Then reflect on that question using one or all of these questions:

- *What is going on in my life right now that makes this question so pronounced for me?*
- *What might my inner wisdom be trying to say to me through this question?*
- *How might this question be trying to wake me up or get me to realize something through this question?*
- *How might Life or my inner wisdom be trying to offer me a word of comfort or challenge through this question?*



1. Who first healed you by not trying to fix you?
2. If you could have healed one of your parent's wounds, which would it be?
3. Are old stories telling you who you are?
4. Have you been running on empty for so long that you no longer notice?
5. Are your wounds asking you to carry them differently?
6. If you were hurting and someone brought you a box full of memories from your childhood to help heal you, which memory would you reach for first?
7. Who or what taught you to feel guilty about resting when there is still so much to do?
8. Has keeping a secret finally become too painful?
9. Have you made peace with self-inflicted wounds?
10. What is the kindest thing you could do for yourself right now?
11. What if painful experiences need to be thanked before they can heal?
12. Do you need to be reminded that you *made* a mistake, not *are* a mistake?
13. What if the uncontrollable parts of life are where the holy lives?
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. Nor are they intended to be analyzed in your group. Instead, they are here to companion you on your personal journey this month, get you thinking and open you up to new ways of embodying this month's theme in your living and loving.

Wise Words

The miracle of healing can't be rushed, because as we are healing, we are re-forming, like a broken bone knitting back together. We have undoubtedly experienced a sort of battlefield healing, where there is not the safety, or the time, or the compassion to stay open, and so we become smaller and more heavily defended after a break, bound up by the scar tissue that saved our lives.
Rev. Darcey Laine

Sometimes healing begins not with fixing, but with allowing.
Sean Fargo

The attempt to escape from pain, is what creates more pain.
Gabor Maté

It's not forgetting that heals. It's remembering.
Amy Greene

Have you ever noticed how beautiful a person is after they've wept? It's as if they are made new again by the baptism of tears.
Toko-pa Turner

Rarely, if ever, are any of us healed in isolation. Healing is an act of communion.
bell hooks

When I am brave enough to see
beyond my longing to soothe,
all I want is to be with you in the dark.
To steep together in the uncomfortable ache.
To quietly meet you in the wounded place
so you know you are not alone.
Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer

First learn that healing is not the same thing as returning…
I have seen birds break their wings
trying to fly back into cages…
I have seen gardens refuse spring because they were loyal to winter.
Kocheli

We must have the stubbornness to accept our gladness in the ruthless furnace of this world.
Jack Gilbert

When you don't give people the chance to say, "I hurt," they end up saying "I hate".
Rev. Don Wheat

Healing may not be so much about getting better, as about letting go of everything that isn't you - all of the expectations, all of the beliefs - and becoming who you are.
Rachel Naomi Remen

In any moment, on any given day, I can measure my wellness by this question: Is my attention on loving, or is my attention on who isn't loving me?
Andrea Gibson

Life becomes easier when you learn to accept an apology you never got.
Robert Brault

When others mess up, we blame their character. When we mess up, we blame the context. We must grant others the same grace we grant ourselves. Until we widen our view and notice that there are circumstances wounding us both, the painful gap between us will never heal.
Rev. Scott Tayler

Rest is not what we do when the work is done. It's what lets the work be done by someone whole.
Sean Fargo

In English we say 'I'm tired.' But in poetry we say I've been holding up entire skies with hands that were only ever meant to hold flowers.
Sophia Bray

Burnout is nature's way of telling you you've been going through the motions, but your soul has departed.
Sam Keen

I find that I meet activists on a regular basis who will tell me, I'm so tired. I think that sometimes we're working so much because we know that if we slow down, then we'll have to look at how heartbroken we are about the conditions that we're in.
adrienne maree brown

You can hold yourself back from the sufferings of the world, that is something you are free to do and it accords with your nature, but perhaps this very holding back is the one suffering you could avoid.
Franz Kafka

Stay away from anything that obscures the place it is in. There are no unsacred places; there are only sacred places and desecrated places.
Wendell Berry

If we are ever again going to have a world fit and pleasant for little children, we are surely going to have to draw the line where it is not easily drawn. We are going to have to learn to give up things that we have learned (in only a few years, after all) to 'need'.
Wendell Berry

It is no measure of health to be profoundly adjusted to a sick society.
Jiddu Krishnamurti

My heart is moved by all I cannot save so much has been destroyed. I have to cast my lot with those who age after age, perversely, with no extraordinary power, reconstitute the world.
Adrienne Rich

Videos

Mary Oliver's "I Worried"
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e-FGNuWbNe8

You Don't Know What People Are Carrying
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=60boRi9zIfw

A Prayer for Healing
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=npOkXG4m8tw

What Punishments of the Gods Are Not Gifts?
https://www.instagram.com/p/DFs03uxOCsC/

My Pain is a Spider
https://www.tiktok.com/@andreagibsonpoetry/video/7261677748354284266 7

On the Grief of Missing Them
https://www.instagram.com/reels/DaGKuRuMf_D/

Healed by a Love Letter From the Dead
https://www.tiktok.com/@nbcchicago/video/7527093685339704589

All Of The Ways I've Kept Myself Alive
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FgGNElOciiU

(M)Other Nature
On healing from the divided way we see the world
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s7bC84A50Uw

There is Nothing Left to Salvage. The Only Type of Healing Available for America is to be Remade
https://www.facebook.com/reel/2040327390202624

Wendell Berry on How to Heal & Solve Big Problems
https://www.facebook.com/reel/1613113450253366

Podcasts

From Polarization to Healing
Are we becoming a country of "we and my people," not "we the people"?
https://www.newcomerpalmer.com/episodes/episode-30-the-roots-of-violence-amp-the-how-we-heal-a-conversation-with-john-paul-lederach

It's Okay Not to Be Okay
https://open.spotify.com/episode/12g5eCPU3oJyMQQQJuCQvr

I Am So Sad And Everything Is Beautiful
https://www.turningtowards.life/home/everything-is-beautiful-and-i-am-so-sad

Andrea Gibson on Befriending Mortality
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J30yBf8T9wk

Articles

Heartbreak, David Whyte
https://davidwhyte.substack.com/p/heartbreak-7fa

The Difference Between Curing And Healing, Courtney Martin
https://courtney.substack.com/p/the-difference-between-curing-and

The Sacred Pause, Tara Brach
https://www.tarabrach.com/the-sacred-pause-2/
Related talk here

Books

Faith, Hope and Carnage
Related podcast here

What It Takes to Heal, How Transforming Ourselves Can Change the World

Burnout: The Secret to Unlocking the Stress Cycle

The Reverse Centaur's Guide to Life After AI: How to Think About Artificial Intelligence—Before It's Too Late
On seeing how AI is wounding us right now!
Related podcasts here and here

Why Fish Don't Exist: A Story of Loss, Love, and the Hidden Order of Life

The Frozen River

Movies

Train Dreams

Come See Me in the Good Light

Earth, Wind & Fire: To Be Celestial vs. That's the Weight of the World

The Savages

A Real Pain

After Love

A Little Prayer

Stutz

The Bear

Music

Our thematic playlists - on Spotify and YouTube - are organized as a journey, so consider listening from beginning to end and using them as a personal musical meditation.

Click here for the **Spotify playlist** on Healing
Click here for the **YouTube playlist** on Healing

Packet Introduction Credit Note: Unless explicitly noted otherwise, the introductions of these packets are written by our Team Lead, Rev. Scott Tayler.

© 2026 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