



Soul Matters

Building Belonging



**Soulful Journey
September 2025**

UNITARIAN
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Welcome to Soulful Journey: Building Belonging

Don't surrender your loneliness so quickly.
Let it cut more deep.
Let it ferment and season you
as few human or even divine ingredients can.
Something missing in my heart tonight
has made my eyes so soft
my voice so tender
my need of god
absolutely clear.

-Daniel Ladinsky, *inspired by an original piece by the Sufi poet Hafiz.*

Let loneliness cut more deep? It's an odd place to start a month on building belonging. Maybe even an insensitive place, given how many of us have suffered and suffocated under loneliness' weight. But notice how the poem turns quickly to talk of a softening, tenderness, and something missing *in the heart*. It's apparent a different kind of loneliness is being pointed to. A kind that has to do with a painful inner longing rather than the typical external-oriented sadness of not finding friends.

It brings to mind something said by the spiritual writer, [Toko-Pa Turner](#),

Our longing for community is so powerful that it can drive us to join groups, relationships, or systems of belief that give a false impression of belonging. These places of false belonging grant us conditional membership, requiring us to cut parts of ourselves off in order to fit in.

What if loneliness is a cry from one of these cut off pieces? What if the pain of loneliness is one of our buried parts pleading to belong to the rest of who we are? What if loneliness is quite often a sacred inner discomfort trying to push, pull, and prod us back to wholeness?

Opening ourselves to this other kind of loneliness seems especially important given the dominant trends in this culture of ours, where the marginalized among us are pressured to twist and shape-shift ourselves into smaller beings to be acceptable to our racist and homophobic society, and where now our whole culture is "social media-ized," pressuring all of us - in one way or another - to shave off our rough and imperfect edges and present ourselves as polished people who've got it all together.

To focus on such things is to wonder if, maybe without us fully noticing it, our whole society has become a land of lonely belonging, where no one is allowed to live without burying at least one part of themselves. Carl Jung capture this well when he wrote, "Loneliness does not come from having no people around, but from being unable to communicate the things that seem important to oneself."

Where does this leave us? Perhaps it's an invitation to understand that the work of belonging begins with developing an intimate relationship with its opposite: loneliness. And opening ourselves to the idea that loneliness may not always be just a burden, emptiness or a source of depletion, even though it can feel that way. Maybe sometimes loneliness is also a source of wisdom, arising from a caretaking part of us trying to tell us "This is not the way to live!"

Friends, this month let's listen to our loneliness more closely because it appears to be the key to the unique kind of belonging each of us needs.

-- Rev. Scott Tayler

Reflection and Journaling Questions

1. What is your favorite memory of childhood belonging? How does that moment still live in you today?
2. Do you remember the moment when you knew for certain that you no longer belonged to childhood, the moment when you knew your childhood was over and that you were now, without doubt, a grown-up? How did the uniqueness of that moment shape who you are?
3. Of all the communities you have belonged to, which is your favorite? If you could say thank you to it, what would you say?
4. What aspect of your personality do you need to do a better job of embracing and welcoming in? Your judgmental self? Your lazy self? Your vulnerable self? Your bitter self? Your easily frightened self? Your quick-to-anger self? Your jealous self? Your petty self? Your selfish self?
5. What long hoped-for life do you need to let go of in order for you to belong to the life right in front of you?
6. Has loneliness ever tried to protect you?
7. Do you know what it is like to be in a community or relationship that requires you to [remove or deny parts](#) of yourself to belong?
8. What gift did your "[chosen family](#)" give you that your family of origin didn't or couldn't?
9. What is the greatest lie that our culture tells us about belonging?
10. Some of us live in a place and others of us belong to a place. How does the place you belong to carry your stories, make room for your pain and keep you in touch with your longings?
11. Self-belonging is about self-love. So...what if [you](#) are the love of your life?
12. What failure are you glad you belong to?
13. Have you settled for belonging to people who include you when your heart longs to be surrounded by people who adore you?

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

One of the most important things you can do on this earth is to let people know they are not alone.

Shannon L. Alder

We are biologically, cognitively, physically, and spiritually wired to love, to be loved, and to belong. When those needs are not met, we don't function as we were meant to. We break. We fall apart. We numb. We ache. We hurt others. We get sick.

[Brené Brown](#)

Without community there is no liberation, only the most vulnerable and temporary armistice between an individual and her oppression.

[Audre Lorde](#)

Where you belong is where you choose to constantly choose to show up.

Karina Antonopoulos

I was so shocked to learn that the opposite of belonging is fitting in. Because fitting in is assessing a group of people and changing who you are. But true belonging never asks us to change who we are. It demands we be who we are."

[Brené Brown](#)

Locate the kind of belonging that doesn't demand your erasure.

[Cole Authur Riley](#)

Our longing for community is so powerful that it can drive us to join groups, relationships, or systems of belief that give the false impression of belonging. These places of false belonging grant us conditional membership, requiring us to cut parts of ourselves off in order to fit in.

[Toko-Pa Turner](#)

I do feel life would be easy if I was like everyone else. If I conformed to everything society wanted me to be. Yes, life would be easy. But I don't think life would be colorful.

[Kathleen Yap](#)

We belong to every part of our lives and every part of our lives belongs to us. Even the failures. The cruelty. The betrayals. The addictions. The cowardice. Until we embrace those scared and tender parts with the kindness and forgiveness we so generously give to others, we will never be whole. We will never be home.

Rev. Scott Tayler

We get to choose who belongs in our story. Blood makes you related. Love makes you family.

Jennifer Lopez

Belonging is the story that changes because you arrived.

[David Breeden](#)

In life, a person will come and go from many homes. We may leave a house, a town, a room, but that does not mean those places leave us. Once entered, we never entirely depart the homes we make for ourselves in the world. They follow us, like shadows, until we come upon them again, waiting for us in the mist.

Ari Berk

I believe every inch of America is sacred, from sea to shining sea. I believe we make it holy by who we welcome and by how we relate to each other.

Eboo Patel

It took many years of vomiting up all the filth I'd been taught about myself, and half-believed, before I was able to walk on the earth as though I had a right to be here.

James Baldwin

Here is the question we must at last confront: Is land merely a source of belongings, or is it the source of our most profound sense of belonging? We can choose.

[Robin Wall Kimmerer](#)

Belong to your place by the knowledge of the others who are your neighbors in it: the old man, sick and poor, who comes like a heron to fish in the creek.

[Wendell Berry](#)

Many of us don't have friends anymore; we have followers. We don't deeply care about each other's lives; we consume them as content. We don't have people we can be vulnerable with; we have people who view our Stories.

[Freya India](#)

Membership is down across unions, congregations, and voluntary organizations. It seems we're increasingly looking for belonging without membership... In a culture where authenticity is king, melting into membership feels like an attack on individual personhood... And mutuality isn't seen as a safety net, but a stone that might sink us both... I'd wager that this is why ephemeral connective experiences are so popular: think retreats, festivals, and conventions. We look for meaningful connections amidst the safety of temporality.

[Casper ter Kuile](#)

Home is where I want to be, but I guess I'm already there.

Talking Heads, "[This Must Be the Place](#)"

I know, you never intended to be in this world.
But you're in it all the same.
So why not get started immediately.
I mean, belonging to it.
There is so much to admire, to weep over...
Do you need a prod?
Do you need a little darkness to get you going?
Let me be as urgent as a knife, then,
and remind you of [Keats](#),
so single of purpose and thinking, for a while,
he had a lifetime.

[Mary Oliver](#)

Poetry

Everything is Waiting for You

David Whyte

Full poem at

<https://sacredpoetryworkshop.com/everything-is-waiting-for-you-by-david-whyte/>

Your great mistake is to act the drama
as if you were alone... To feel abandoned is to deny
the intimacy of your surroundings...
You must note the way the soap dish enables you,
or the window latch grants you freedom...
The stairs are your mentor of things to come...
Put down the weight of your aloneness and ease into the conversation. The kettle is singing even as it pours you a drink...
Everything is waiting for you.

In Sweet Company

Margaret Wolff

Full poem at

<https://miak.livejournal.com/516616.html>

We sit together and I tell you things,
Silent, unborn, naked things...
You do not cluck your tongue at me
Or roll your eyes...
You stay with me in the dark...
You make room in your heart for my voice...
I see my future Self in you...
In sweet company, I am home at last.

Belonging

Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer

Full poem at

<https://gratefulness.org/resource/belonging/>

Sometimes I feel it,
the green fuse that ignites us,
the wild thrum that unites us,
an inner hum that reminds us
of our shared humanity...
we belong to the grand communion...
we are the dust, the dust that hopes...
the dust that dances in the light
with all other dust...

It is all very well... *

Rod Richards

It is all very well to speak of
an interdependent web of all life
and remind us that we are all
connected. We are.
But there are times when the loneliness
Strikes so deeply that the only
Thing of which I am
Certain is that I am
a
solitary
being.
There are times when the only
piece of belonging I can feel
is
the
longing.
There are times when the interdependent web
feels like just a mess of cobwebs
in a basement
or an attic
of the abandoned house
where I live...
Times when the spirit of life and love
are just words written
in invisible ink
on a postcard to myself.
Wish you were here.
Be with me now.
Don't try and talk me out
of how I feel
with perfect theology.
Stay beside me
and carry my hope
until I am ready to
hold it
again and be
there for
you.

Meditations & Prayers

Autumn Prayer *

Tess Baumberger

Let us join together in the spirit of prayer and
meditation.
Spirit of Life, Mystic Greatness, Healing Grace,
Embracing Oneness of Creation, be with us this
day.

As we come here from the circles our everyday
lives,
may we put behind us all those thoughts and
worries
which prevent us from being truly present.
Be with us as we breathe and remember that
we are here,
to center ourselves in this place, this day, this
time.

As we ground ourselves in each other,
as we give root and trunk, branch and leaf
to this sacred work, to our shared and sharing
lives,
help us to remember that we flew freely to this
place.
May we dance joyful this day in each other's
moment,
like brilliant fall leaves in the swirl of an autumn
breeze.

Spirit of Life, Mystic Greatness, Healing Grace,
Consecrating Oneness of Creation, be with us
this day.
Amen and Blessed Be.

Not just a Refuge *

Rev. Michelle Collins

Spirit of Life,
woven into every breath, every gathering,
we come with our longing to be part of
something whole.
Not perfect, but whole.
May we remember
that belonging is not given once,
but made daily,
in the courage to reach out,
the patience to listen,

the willingness to be changed.
When we falter—
in fear, in fatigue, in forgetting—
may we begin again.
Let us be builders of circles that widen,
keepers of doors left open,
stewards of spaces where truth and tenderness
can meet.
May this community be not just a refuge,
but a growing ground
for trust, for justice, for shared joy. Amen. And
may it be so.

**Know You are Not Alone and Discover the
Way Our Voices Rise ***

Rev. Gretchen Haley

For this one moment
Know only that you are loved
That you are safe, and whole and loved
Know that you belong here
Here among us, here upon this earth
In your body
However tired, or broken
Your heart may be
Whatever fear, disappointment, anger
you carry
For this hour know you are not alone
Feel the presence of others
Surrounding you,
Breathing beside you, and with you,
Discovering together the way our voices rise,
and fall together
In harmony, in hope
Claim here a resilient freedom
The choice for love, for light, to live with joy
and gratitude and praise
as a form of resistance

Waiting to be Remembered & Reclaimed *

Rev. Scott Tayler

We come
with our joy, incurable curiosity, and hunger for
hope.
But also our broken hearts, our cracked
confidence,
our ruptured relationships, our loneliness that
lingers just beneath the surface.
And so we long
for this to be a place of repair,

a space of picking up the pieces and putting
them back together.

They say that worship is about praise,
but it's also about listening, and words -,
words that usher in the sacred,
words that that become webbing,
weaving again a path back to wisdom,
back to forgotten worth,
back to a place of peace
too often buried beneath all the striving, worry
and wounds.

As so, today, may the sounds, songs, and
speech
circling in this space
sweep you up like a stream whose currents
long to carry you home.

And may the common breath,
so sweetly shared between us,
remind us that loneliness eventually lifts
that we are tethered more tightly than it
sometimes seems,
that, together, our hearts can mend,
and our world can be woven anew.

Yes, friends, belonging is something we build.
But it's also something always there,
waiting to be remembered and reclaimed,
waiting for us
to come home.

In Gatherings *

Rev. Marta I Valentin

Full piece at:

<http://www.uua.org/worship/words/poetry/gatherings>

...we are stirred
like the leaves of the fall season
rustling around sacred trees,
tossed hither and yon
until we come to rest together,
quietly, softly...
We come to gather strength from each other.
We come to give strength to each other...
In this -circle that holds all life
may we ever work -toward
widening its boundaries
until there are none.

Prayer for the Morning *

Rev. Audette Fulbright Fulson

Full prayer at

<https://www.uua.org/worship/words/prayer/prayer-morning>

Get up, child.

Pull your bones upright

gather your skin and muscle into a patch of sun...

tired as you are:

you are not alone...

there are others weeping

and rising...

You belong to them

and they to you

and together,

we will break through...

A Prayer for Remembering Our Belonging

Rev. Cameron Trimble

Full prayer at <https://www.pilotingfaith.org/p/a-future-worth-living-into>

Sacred Presence,

Root us in belonging so deep we cannot fall alone.

Strip away the illusion of separateness...

Awaken in us a sense of kinship so wide it undoes every wall...

May we move from Me to We...as a sacred return to who we really are.

Books

[Love Is for All of Us](#): Poems of Tenderness and Belonging from the LGBTQ+ Community and Friends

[You Don't Have to Do It Alone](#): The Power of Friendship, Mark Nepo

[You Are Your Best Thing](#): Vulnerability, Shame Resilience, and the Black Experience, Tarana Burke & Brené Brown

[The Emperor of Gladness](#), [Ocean Vuong](#)

[Beartown](#), Fredrik Backman

Videos & Podcasts

Gate A4, Shihab Nye

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=narNE9NzhA>

Neighbors, Andrea Gibson

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=volA0S_C9Qw&t=263s

Because I'm from the South, Diandra Marizet

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0NzgiVyAxGs>

Afterlife, Andrea Gibson

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

On how we belong to each other after death.

How to Be Alone, Pádraig Ó Tuama

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HgZT6UJocRs>

On No Longer Belonging to Your Past and Instead Belonging to the Fullness of Who You Are

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rmByMBz83XM>

How to Create a Meaningful Sense of Coming Home

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uvvNAN56bWU>

What's Your Attachment Style?

<https://www.npr.org/2022/02/09/1079587715/whats-your-attachment-style-quiz>

You Are Not Alone in Your Loneliness - TED Talk

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gi6rMXu_veE

"Now, when someone shares that they feel sad or afraid or alone, for example, it actually makes me feel less alone, not by getting rid of any of my loneliness but by showing me that I am not alone in feeling lonely."

On Loneliness and being Separated from Elders

<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=7697682630337276>

On the Stories Being told About Immigrants not Legally Belonging

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H6a59GKthxg>

Loneliness & Capitalism

<https://www.youtube.com/shorts/mkUO8BLss6M>

Inside The Anti-Social Century

<https://bigthinkmedia.substack.com/p/inside-the-anti-social-century>

"I call it the anti-social century rather than the lonely century... [because] loneliness is... me on the couch watching TV and being like, "Man, I kind of wanna get a drink with that friend.... That's not the instinct that most people feel today. Instead, the instinct is, in many cases, to stay on the couch..."

On The Rich Not Wanting to Belong to the Same World as We Do

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fPyBdqhOYmM>
- <https://www.instagram.com/reel/DKfkEYgMIFL/>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KP6acmhwY0Q>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hNDgcjVGHIw>

Music

- [Spotify playlist](#) on Belonging
- [YouTube playlist](#) on Belonging
- "One Love" by Bob Marley
- "Love Lift Us Up Where We Belong" by Warnes & Cocker
- "That's What Friends Are For" by Dionne Warwick
- "We Are Family" by Sledge Sisters
- "All Together Now" by The Farm

Movies

- [A Real Pain](#)
- [All of us Strangers](#)
- [All We Imagine as Light](#)
- [Marcel the Shell With Shoes On](#)
- [The Last Black Man in San Francisco](#)
- [Nomadland](#)
- [Short Term 12](#)



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