



Soulful Home

Finding the Sacred in
Everyday Spaces

Presence
November 2024

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Opening to Presence

Thanks to Our Widening the Circle Team

We would like to thank [The Widening The Circle Team](#) for their insight and help with this packet. Their support and research run throughout this packet, from the stories to the activities. Their help putting inclusion and love at the center of our packets is, in turn a vital part of helping families also center love in their faithful everyday moments.

The Welcome Mat

Exploring the Practice of Presence

The Winter holiday season can be dizzying. Some of us are traveling, which is both a joy and a stressor. Others of us are staying home, which carries its own unique mix of gladness and disappointment. And whether we are coming or going travel-wise, those to-do lists of ours will be sure to dump its usual pile of errands and worries on us. In short, we are, or soon will be, stretched-thin and buried deep.

With all that, you might be thinking there is no way you can possibly add one more thing to your plate. But don't worry, our Soulful Home journey this month is here not to *add* another thing to your plate, but to help you to be *present* to that plate. Or to put it another way, it's here to help you be in the moment during all that you are already doing.

This is what our December theme, The Practice of Presence, is all about. And so our Soulful Home packet is here to help us all think more intentionally about what it means to be a family that practices presence, so that we don't wake up at the end of the month and realize that the holidays happened without us really having been there.

As for me, the biggest challenge will be the pressure I put on myself to go above and beyond to create a "magical" and "perfect" holiday season. The danger in that, of course, is I end up forgetting that the memories my children will carry with them come from the "smaller" and slower moments that weren't perfectly planned but lovingly enjoyed by all of us. This season, I want to remember that magic, bigness and perfection actually prevent presence rather than invite it in.

So this month, I hope you, too, remember that not everything needs to be perfect and that it is not the biggest and most expensive gift or party that matters most. Instead, I wish for you many moments in which you pause, look around at your family, and realize that the most precious gifts are the ones that are already present.

Blessed Be!!

April



At the Table

Exploring Repair Through Discussions

The At the Table section engages the theme through question-driven family discussions. The questions are designed to be used at a family gathering, most often dinner, but also during a quiet moment in the living room, before a board game night, or while driving in the car. This section strengthens the bonds within a family as members learn more about each other by asking and answering evocative questions.

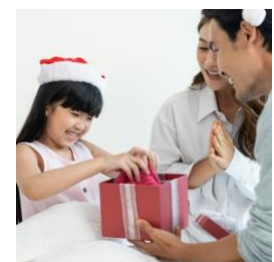
How To Go About It

The most straightforward way to do this is simply to have parents and/or caregivers read off the questions they think will resonate the most with family members and have everyone take turns answering.

Another fun way to do this is to create [a family question jar](#). To make this easier for you, we've listed all the questions below **at the end of this packet** with dotted lines you can cut along to make "question strips." You can then pull out the question jar and have family members choose a question/strip a few times each week.

Discussion Questions

1. Who has taught you the most about being present and living in the moment?
2. Do you believe in the presence of magic? If so, what does magic look like, sound like, or feel like? If you don't believe in magic, is there something you have imagined that is so wonderfully "magical" you wish it was real?
3. Besides opening presents, what is your favorite thing to be present for during the winter holidays?
4. During winter, sunlight is a lot less present than the rest of the year? What is one thing you like and one thing you don't like about this season of darker days?
5. During the holidays, we often miss and feel the presence of those who have died. Is there a family member or pet you are especially missing this holiday season? If you could say something to them, what would it be?
6. Memories fill the present moment during the winter holidays. What is your favorite winter holiday memory?
7. How do you know what makes something a good present/gift for someone else?
8. Why does giving presents & gifts to others feel good to you?
9. What is the best present/gift you ever received? What made it the best?
10. What is the best present/gift you gave to someone else?
11. What is one holiday movie that you'd love to be present every year and never get tired of watching? What makes it so special?
12. Some people think of "being present" as being still and focused. Who in your family would win a stillness contest?
13. Why is being present important?



At Play

Playing With Presence as a Family

At Play suggests games, crafts, and activities to help families experience the theme through joy and fun.

Option A: This Month's Treasure Hunt: Find the Gifts Already Given

It's easy to get wrapped up in the hustle and bustle of the winter holiday season, causing us to forget or take for granted the simple pleasures and gifts that are *already given* and *already present*. So, with that in mind, go on a treasure hunt for gifts that are already given and stop to be fully present and enjoy them.

As you help your kids make their list of "gifts already given," here are some suggestions of gifts you might point them toward and give them hints about: *Family, Holiday lights, A cup of hot cocoa or tea on a cold day/night, Snowflakes, Reading a holiday book with your family, Sitting by a fire, Roasting marshmallows over a fire, Building a snowperson (if you live in a place that snows)*

Option B: Game Night: Candy Land

The winter holidays are often filled with candy and other sweet treats, so with that in mind, find a time to gather the whole family around the table and have fun playing the classic board game Candy Land; after all, time spent together with a game you may already have is the "definition of leaning into gifts already given"!

Option C: Saran Wrap Ball Game

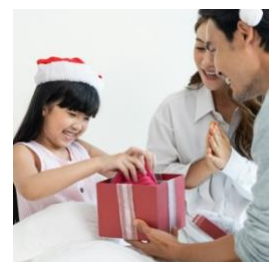
Here is a super fun game that has everyone leaving with a fun small gift. The game is simple to play: make huge ball made up of saran wrap with goodies throughout. The object is to unwrap the big clingwrap ball during your turn, in the hopes that some of those prizes fall out during that turn. To learn how to create the ball and see the game played, click this link <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7DxZxyQ6CME>. This game is also a wonderful example of the gifts that are already present, if we just put in a little work to uncover them."

Option D: Candy Canes (Holiday 'Spoons')

Here is a fast-paced and fun game to play with the whole family that definitely requires you to be fully present and focused! You'll need a deck of cards, and 3+ people circled around a pile of candy canes, one less than the number of players. Everyone takes turns pulling cards to be the first to get four of a kind (ex., four Kings). Once you do, take a candy cane as stealthily as possible. Once that happens, everyone else races to grab one of the remaining candy canes. The person who doesn't get a candy cane is eliminated. Do this until one winner remains. To see the game played check out this YouTube link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kN4BfS3Q3Wl>

Option E: Holiday Caroling

Many folks find that singing and caroling are some of the best ways to call forth the presence of the holiday spirit. So why not gather up a group of family and friends and bring back the tradition of caroling? Pick out some of your favorite holiday songs, stop by a friend, family member, or neighbor's house, and share some joy and holiday spirit.



At the Bedside and in the Book Nook

At The Bedside & In the Nook suggests books that help families engage the monthly themes with their imagination. This story-centered section honors the unique way stories enrich our sense of what's possible, expand our empathy, and build our identities.

[The Night Before New Year's](#)

by Natasha Wing (suggested for kids 6 and below)

It's the night before New Year's, and the whole family is determined to stay up until midnight! Everyone's stocked up on sparkly streamers and festive party hats, but after a night filled with card games and too many cupcakes, the little ones are getting sleepy. . . Can they make it until the clock strikes twelve?

Invitation to Connect: *Parents, ask your children if they think they could be in the moment enough to stay up all the way till midnight. What are some things they would do to help them stay away and be present for the first minute of the new year?*

[The Nutcracker in Harlem](#)

by T. E. McMorrow (suggested for kids 4-8)

This jazz-inspired reinvention of The Nutcracker is a worthy tribute to the dreamlike wonder and magic of the Christmas season. In this original retelling, set in New York City during the height of the Harlem Renaissance, one little girl finds her voice as a musician thanks to her enchanting adventures with a magical toy.

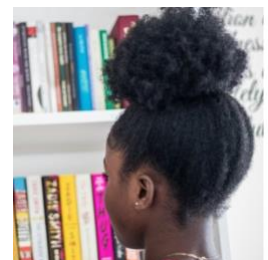
Invitation to Connect: *Ask your child about who has been present in their lives that helped them find their voice.*

[Life in the Present: A Joyful Collection of Comics About Living in the Moment](#)

by Liz Climo (suggested for youth 5-9 years old)

Dive into the humor and warm-hearted wisdom from adorable bears, otters, bunny rabbits, and hamsters (among others) who help us all to see the beauty in life's least significant occasions.

Invitation to Connect: *Ask your child what moments have brought them the most joy and why they were so special to them.*



In Front of the Screen

Watching Meaningful Movies Together

In Front of the Screen offers families ways to connect with the monthly theme and each other through movies and TV shows.

Option A

Bluey - Season 2 Episode 26 "Sleepytime" (G)

Bingo struggles to fall asleep and goes on a dream adventure with her dad, Bandit, during which Bandit reflects on the importance of enjoying the time spent with his children. The episode beautifully illustrates the idea of cherishing each moment and reminds us of the importance of being present with loved ones.

Invitation to Connect: *Talk about what they would have done if they were in the same situation.*

Option B

Kung Fu Panda (PG)

Po's journey reminds us of the value of mindfulness and being present, particularly through his training and experiences.

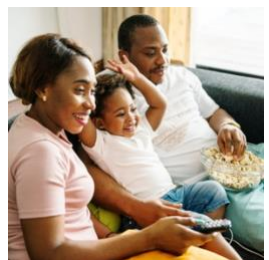
Invitation to Connect: *Parents, here's your chance to share with your kids some funny (and challenging) stories about times in your life when you found it hard to be present and fully in the moment*

Option C

Tuck Everlasting (PG, 10 year olds and up)

A 15-year-old girl learns to live in the present moment from a mysterious family living in the forest near her home.

Invitation to Connect: *Parents, use this movie as an opportunity to talk to your kids about living the present moment, and if they could live forever, would they want to or not, and why*



In the Toolbox

Strategies to Help Our Kids Navigate the Complicated Stuff

In the Toolbox offers parents resources to better understand the well-established and newly emerging challenges of being a child today. It's all about equipping parents to be better guides and companions for their kids.

Resource One

How to Bring More Peace and Presence to Family Life

Life is stressful, but the holiday season can add an extra layer to many families' lives. This article offers seven strategies families can use mindfulness to strengthen their bonds.

<https://www.mindful.org/how-to-bring-more-peace-and-presence-to-family-life/>

Resource Two

The Greatest Gift You Can Give Your Child: Presence

"One of the most important gifts a parent can give a child is [their] presence, validation, and security. When we're present with our children, it lays a path for attunement and resonance. Attunement is when the parent is aware and present to the child's inner world of thoughts, feelings, and emotions. When attuned, a state of resonance occurs where the child "feels felt." Think about any time you felt completely understood. It breeds a sense of safety, and when a person feels safe, they cultivate the ability to trust."

<https://www.mindful.org/the-greatest-gift-to-give-your-child-your-presence/>

Resource Three

Holiday Gifts: Managing Expectations With Your Kids

Three expert tips for stressing (and spending) less during the giving season.

<https://www.parentmap.com/article/holiday-gifts-managing-expectations-your-kids>

Resource Four

What To Do When My Child Acts Disappointed After Receiving A Gift From Someone

It has happened to us all at one point in time or another; someone gives our child a gift, and they don't like it, and they make it know. This article helps break down what children might be going through and how to deal with it in the moment.

<https://www.drbeurkens.com/podcast/what-to-do-when-my-child-acts-disappointed-after-receiving-a-gift-from-someone/>



On the Porch

Connecting and Sharing Stories with [Your Village](#)

On the Porch uses thoughtful questions to open space for you and your parenting partners or parent/caregiver friends to connect more deeply with each other and think more deeply about how the monthly theme has shown up in your life and can show up in a more intentional way.

How to Go About It

Bring these questions with you when the time comes to hang out with your co-parent or parenting/caregiver buddy. Treat the questions less as a quiz and more like doorways inviting you into the world of mutual storytelling and memory. Go through them all or pick a few that call to you most.

Questions

1. On a scale of 1-10, how good are you at being present and why?
2. What did you learn from your family of origin about stillness, slowing down and being present?
3. Whose absence feels most present to you during the holiday season?
4. How have you experienced being fully present *together* as parenting partners?
5. What have you learned about helping your child/children experience the presence of awe?
6. What does it mean to you to “feel the presence of the holy”? How might you explain that to your child in kid-friendly language?
7. Who taught you the most about being present and living in the moment?
8. Where or when are you most present, and why?
9. When are you most present as a parent?
10. When is it hardest to be present as a parent? What could others do to help?
11. Has age impeded or assisted your ability to be fully present and in the moment, and why?
12. Has parenting made you more or less present and connected to “the still, small voice inside”?



Alongside the Chalice

Family spiritual practices and rituals are crucial for kids, youth, and adults. While lighting a chalice at home is a beautiful family practice, it can often be the only explicit UU identity practice we bring into our homes. So our Alongside the Chalice section offers a different UU practice, observance, or ritual for families to try out each month, with the hope that a few stick and become woven into the repeated and treasured rhythms of family life.

The Practice of Presence: Make December Calendar

As December opens up before us, we are reminded to welcome in the gift of presence and the call to pay attention and live in the moment. And with holidays approaching or already on us, it is easy to be in the future-focused headspace of “in a few days I have to” or “next week is when.” Which, of course, pulls us out of the present moment and convinces us that the meaningful moment is *coming* rather than *here*.

With this challenge in mind, we invite you, as your spiritual practice this month, to take on the ritual of a December Calendar, inspired by the Advent season and Advent calendars. It’s a great way to live fully into each day and not letting them pass you by.

Here are a number of ways to go about it:

- **A Do-It-Together December Calendar**
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1JdzsivCkYNQq9PdMo7QXb5SgCYlu9mup/view>
- **A Celebrate UU & Christmas Connections Calendar**
https://www.uua.org/files/pdf/u/uu_advent_calendar_page-a-day_revised.pdf
- **A Kindness & Give It Away UU Advent Calendar**
<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/562f4d2fe4b050306ca984d2/t/583c8c1c37c5810ef26820a6/1480363037798/Adult+Advent+Calendar.pdf>
- **A UU Reverse Calendar** - Each day, add one item to take to a food pantry!
<https://www.fuodpantry.org/holiday/>

p.s. And if you looking for a simple and zero waste way to design your calendar, check out this one:
<https://www.hellobrio.com/blog/minimalist-advent-calendar-for-kids>



The Extra Mile

The Extra Mile section is for families who want to continue exploring the theme of the month through larger adventures, more complex projects, or simply through additional modalities not otherwise included in the packets. A bit more effort, but well worth it!

Star Gazing

This activity should happen on a clear night. Depending on where you live, it may be too cold for extended stargazing, but even packing up some hot cocoa or cider and driving out past the light pollution to where you can see the bands of the Milky Way will offer children and youth the opportunity to experience the mystery. You may even borrow a telescope or look from the windows of your home.

Here are some resources to guide you on your way:

- <https://tinybeans.com/look-up-tips-for-an-awesome-night-of-stargazing/>
- <https://www.amnh.org/explore/ology/astronomy/a-kids-guide-to-stargazing>
- <https://goexplore nature.com/2014/01/winter-backyard-astronomy-for-kids.html>

Learn Some Fancy Wrapping Skills

Many of us find ourselves wrapping and giving gifts during the holiday seasons, this year take some time to be even more presents as you wrap them and learn some new skills, so the wrapping is a gift all in itself!

- How to Wrap Like a Pro (in just 2 minutes!)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aow25mluGrY>
- How to Make a Fancy Bow
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jCpg744FOyc>

Holiday Cookies from Around the Globe

Who doesn't love a holiday cookie! They make wonderful gifts and special treats for family and friends. And while many of us have tried and true family recipes this year maybe expand your repertoire are try your hand at making some of these amazing holiday cookies from around the world.

<https://www.foodnetwork.com/recipes/photos/holiday-cookies-from-all-over>



Blessing of Presence

Dear fellow mitten finders,
present hidiers,
and holiday magic makers,

During these days when light is dim, my wish for you is this...

May you give yourselves permission to slow down,
and forgive yourself when speed sweeps you up again.

May you remember that perfection is an illusion, and that our children
need us to teach them that imperfection is what makes us wonderfully
human.

May you pause to dance with the snowflakes falling from the sky.

May you fill your time with those you love not with lists of all that is urgent
to do.

May laughter allow joy to leak into your days.

May you cherish simplicity, summon memory and notice what your body
needs.

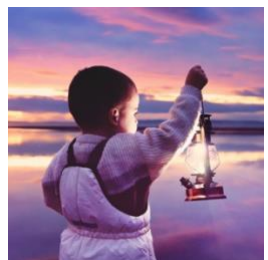
May you see your children in the glow of new light, knowing that magic
most certainly exists in this world, and it is coming from them.

May you be present to your family, in body and soul,
supporting each other and making each other whole.

And as you journey together through life's ebb and flow, may the bonds
between you grow stronger, with love ever aglow.

Blessed be,

~ **April**



Connect with more inspiration for you and your family!

Parents can Join our Facebook and Instagram pages for
daily Inspiration on our themes:

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/soulmatterssharingcircle/?ref=settings>

Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/soul_matters_circle/

Parents and youth will want to check out
our [Spotify](#) & [YouTube](#) music playlists on the monthly themes.

Credits

Soulful Home packets are prepared by

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Our Soul Matters Director of RE Resources and Family Ministry Coordinator

You are free to use any of this material verbatim in worship, newsletters
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Soul Matters

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Learn more about subscribing on our website:

<https://www.soulmatterssharingcircle.com/soulful-home.html>

Question Jar Cut-Outs

Notice that there are a few blank strips at the bottom of the list.

We invite you to write your own questions on those strips.

We also remind you that questions that evoke stories are often the most impactful.

Who has taught you the most about being present and living in the moment?

Do you believe in the presence of magic? If so, what does magic look like, sound like, or feel like? If you don't believe in magic, is there something you have imagined that is so wonderfully "magical" you wish it was real?

Besides opening presents, what is your favorite thing to be present for during the winter holidays?

During winter, sunlight is a lot less present than the rest of the year? What is one thing you like and one thing you don't like about this season of darker days?

During the holidays, we often miss and feel the presence of those who have died. Is there a family member or pet you are especially missing this holiday season? If you could say something to them, what would it be?

Memories fill the present moment during the winter holidays. What is your favorite winter holiday memory?

How do you know what makes something a good present/gift for someone else?

Why does giving presents & gifts to others feel good to you?

What is the best present/gift you ever received? What made it the best?

What is the best present/gift you gave to someone else?

What is one holiday movie that you'd love to be present every year and never get tired of watching? What makes it so special?

Some people think of "being present" as being still and focused. Who in your family would win a stillness contest?

Why is being present important?