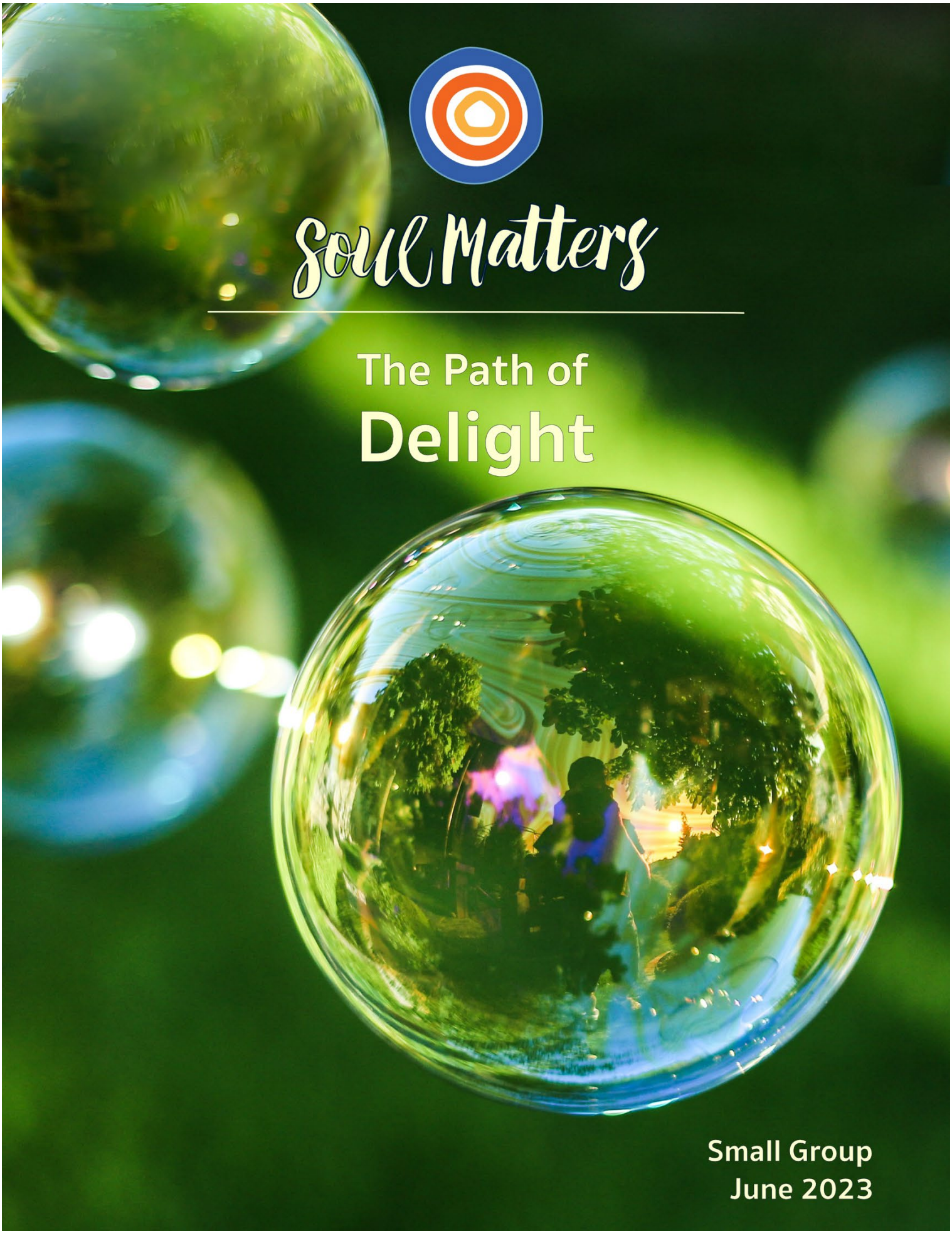

Soul Matters
The Path of
Delight
Small Group
June 2023

Welcome to the Path of Delight

Because the road
turns long and lonely sometimes,
I built this box of delight.
I picked up the lid
and into it I put…

My children laughing, together.
The look of giddy disbelief on my mother's face when that black-capped chickadee swooped in and landed next to her knee, waking her up from her Alzheimered daze.
The bitter bite of rhubarb pie smothered by a spoonful of half-melted vanilla ice cream.
That field of fireflies at the bottom of the West Virginia hills.
Roahl Dahl or Neil Gaiman's books read at bedtime.
Kick ball.
Being pulled through a snowy field on a saucer sled
tied to the bumper of my dad's Chevy Vega with tire chains wrapped around every wheel.
Deep dish pizza. The smell of a tangerine. French press.
The first bite of a perfectly made croissant, proving that decadence sometimes purifies the soul.
An artichoke, with no limits on the butter.
Mixtapes made with tunes from the eighties.
Sweatshirts worn faithfully for 20 years, their holes a reminder that to be used up is a gift.
The first fall tree to boldly burn red while its less-brave siblings stay safely green.
Stumbling on black raspberries while walking in the woods;
No, scratch that. Instead let's put in having a loved one save you some black raspberries they found in the woods.
Seeing the smile on my claustrophobic wife's face
after finally snorkeling in the waters of St. John.
That sweet, night owl quiet when worries don't seem so big or so scary.
My 6 year-old daughter writing, "I love you Mom and Dad" on our car seat, in permanent marker.
The way subway street musicians suddenly turn strangers into fellow humans.
The feeling of getting warm after being cold.
My wife's laugh, and how much I love her toes.
And the knowledge that all this will be gone,
but is not gone yet.

That's what's in my box.
I wonder what you'll put in yours.

Our Spiritual Exercises

Option A: *Your Box of Delights*

We all travel roads that turn long and lonely sometimes. So with our packet introduction as an example, write your own poem/list of delights you want to carry with you. There are no fancy rules or guidelines for this exercise. Just read the packet introduction a couple of times, then look around at your present life and revisit some memories of your past. The hard part will be keeping your delight list/poem to a single page!

Option B: *Your Book of Delights*

The poet Ross Gay challenged himself to write daily about the delight he encountered for a year. The result is his best-selling book, *The Book of Delights*. You can hear Gay interviewed about the book and his experience of writing it at https://www.npr.org/2020/03/23/820293500/encore-ross-gay-writes-the-book-of-delights. You can also listen to him read from the book at https://www.pw.org/content/ross_gays_book_of_delights. And if you want more, here's a great essay inspired by the book: https://lithub.com/delight-is-essential-on-reading-ross-gay-in-terrible-times/.

So… if Ross Gay can find and write about a delight every day for a year, we certainly can do it for a week! So, give it a try! (And, of course, part of this exercise is figuring out why exactly you - and your deepest self - *wants,* and maybe even *needs*, to give it a try!)

Option C: *Help Another Delight in the Book That Delighted You*

For many of us, there is no greater delight than a great book. Except maybe sharing that great book with someone. So for this exercise…

Give away a copy of your favorite book to a friend or stranger!

If you give it away to a friend, be sure to write a note to them or tell them why the book is special to you and what special thing about them made you want to give it to them.

If you want to give a favorite book away to a stranger, here are a few links to help you on your way:

- https://spinesinaline.wordpress.com/2020/09/18/book-hiding-how-to-and-tips/
- https://www.idealist.org/en/days/leave-a-book-on-a-bench
- https://www.barnesandnoble.com/blog/where-to-leave-books-for-strangers-to-find-them/
- https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/nov/03/emma-watson-free-copies-maya-angelou-books-on-tube-harry-potter
- https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/2020/02/14/here-are-people-behind-those-random-kind-notes-left-cafes-bookstores/

Option D: *The Delight of Writing Letters*

It's a delight that has almost disappeared: writing and receiving hand-written letters. Is it worth saving? Use this month to answer that question by writing 2-3 hand-written letters. The goal is to pay attention to what happens to you as you write, sit with, send and maybe receive back a letter. Come to your group ready to pronounce your verdict! Does writing hand-written letters provide us with a deeper delight after all?

Option E: *Revisit a Delight of Childhood*

When we were kids, our summers were often packed full of delights. So for this exercise, we invite you to revisit one of those long left behind childhood delights. The goal is not just to reconnect with that past delight, but to reconnect with your childhood self that loved that delight. Indeed, this may be the deepest delight of all: the ability to be our many selves at once. As the writer Madeleine L'Engle puts it,

> *"I am still every age that I have been. Because I was once a child, I am always a child. Because I was once a searching adolescent, given to moods and ecstasies, these are still part of me, and always will be... This does not mean that I ought to be trapped or enclosed in any of these ages...the delayed adolescent, the childish adult, but that they are in me to be drawn on… Far too many people misunderstand what *putting away childish things* means, and think that forgetting what it is like to think and feel and touch and smell and taste and see and hear like a three-year-old or a thirteen-year-old or a twenty-three-year-old means being grownup."*

So good luck, friends. It's been a while. Time for you to wake up that delightful child or teenager that still lives inside you. Here are some childhood delights to help you remember which might be your doorway back to your younger self:

- Make homemade ice cream (made with an old hand-crank bucket)
- Catch fireflies in a jar
- Slip-n-slide
- Build a sand castle
- Build something grand with Legos
- Build a model car
- Go to a drive-in movie
- Make tie-dye shirts
- Go you-pick berry picking
- Ride a Ferris wheel
- Cannonball into a pool
- Fly a kite

If you want to go deeper with this, we suggest you write a poem or journal-like entry about doing this activity when you were young **and** about who you were then.

Option F: *Ask Them About Their Delight*

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 "delight 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.

Delight Questions:

- What age has been most full of delight for you?
- What is the oddest thing you delight in?
- What summer activity delighted you most as a child?
- What word delights you when you say it?
- Has delight ever helped you survive something difficult?
- Have you faked delight in the past year?
- Do you have a story you delight in telling to others over and over again? (Maybe that you tell so much that your family rolls their eyes when you begin telling it again.) What role do you think these frequently told tales play in our lives?
- Who taught you the most about cultivating delight?

Option G*: Which Delight 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 speaks to you or illuminates your journey with delight.***

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. What do you know now about delight that you didn't know when you were younger?
2. Who taught you the most about cultivating delight?
3. How does your delight differ from your parent's delight?
4. What is the difference between joy and delight? And what two stories from your life serve as examples?
5. Do you have a story you delight in telling over and over again? *(Maybe that you tell so much that your family rolls their eyes when you begin telling it again.)* What role do you think these frequently told tales play in our lives? What role have they played for you? And what gift have they given you?
6. Whose ability to be delighted do you envy?
7. The poet Khalil Gibran claims that the earth delights in us. Have you ever experienced the world delighting in you?
8. When was the last time you told your partner that they delight you?
9. At this stage of your life, which do you long for the most: delight, joy, or happiness?
10. Has delight ever been a form of resistance for you?
11. Are delight and divinity intertwined? Is delight somehow a doorway into the holy? If so, what life experience of yours convinced you of that?

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 delight.

Word Roots & Definitions

"The word delight derives from the Latin delectare 'to charm,' which also gives us delectable."
source

Delight also shares etymological roots with delicious.
source

Delight is like the butterflies flying around and landing on the thing that is joy.
Ross Gay

Wise Words

when I'm sitting in my favorite rocking chair…
I feel so content with the way
my feet push off gently against the wooden floor…
that I just have to sigh
with the sheer delight of knowing
that everything I want
is everything I have.
Leslea Newman

When we are exhausted and harried it is almost impossible to find delight in even the most wonderful things.
Pastors in Exile

Oh do you have time
to linger
for just a little while
out of your busy
and very important day
for the goldfinches
that have gathered
in a field of thistles…
It could mean everything…
Mary Oliver

put your attention on suffering – which is constant and everywhere – and it is all you will see. joy will come, and laughter, but you will find it brief, possibly a distraction.
put your attention on joy, being connected and feeling whole, and you will find it everywhere. your heart will still break. you will know grief. but you will find it a reasonable cost for the random abundance of miracles, and the soft wild rhythms of love.
Adrienne Maree Brown

Life feeds anyone who is open to taste its food, wonder, and glee — its immediacy. We see this toward the end of many people's lives, when everything in their wasted bodies fights to stay alive, for a few more kisses or bites of ice cream, one more hour with you. Life is still flowing through them: life is them.
Anne Lamott

And forget not that the earth delights to feel your bare feet and the winds long to play with your hair.
Khalil Gibran

Lilacs on a bush are better than orchids. And dandelions and devil grass are better! Why? Because they bend you over and turn you away

from all the people and the town for a little while and get you down where you remember you got a nose again.
Ray Bradbury

I am interested in what happens to people who find the whole of life so rewarding that they are able to move through it with the same kind of delight in which a child moves through a game.
Margaret Mead

I adore hearing a person laugh so hard that they snort, or they can't catch their breath to speak, so tickled they are. I adore all of the spontaneous propriety-be-damned behaviors that delight can spark in us – moaning loudly at the taste of tiramisu, impulsively hugging a stranger, dancing in the rain. It's the magical stuff of life. The fairy dust.
Anna Tulou

You don't stop laughing when you grow old. You grow old when you stop laughing.
George Bernard Shaw

The banquet is in the first bite.
Michael Pollan

Truth is so rare that it is delightful to tell it.
Emily Dickinson

She discovered with great delight that one does not love one's children just because they are one's children but because of the friendship formed while raising them.
Gabriel Garcia Marquez

Black joy is a moment of reflection and happiness by which we are able to tell ourselves there is more to this life, there is more to this world than just pain.
Miracle Jones

[Black joy is] having the space to be able to wear my soul on the outside.
Helene

We all approach the edge of the same blackness
which for me is silent.
Knowing as much sharpens
my delight in January freesia,
hot coffee, winter sunlight…
every day won from such
darkness is a celebration.
Elaine Feinstein, from Getting Older

If we do not attend to the work of projecting delight upon the world, what are we actually doing? ...Are we saying that malevolence is the routine stuff of life, that oppression and corruption and degradation is the very matter of the world? That we greet each day with suspicion, bitterness and contempt? It seems to me that to make suffering the focus of our attention, to pay witness only to the malevolence of the world, is to be in service to the devil himself.
Nick Cave

When you are sorrowful look again in your heart, and you shall see that in truth you are weeping for that which has been your delight.
Kahlil Gibran

Love is but the discovery of ourselves in others, and the delight in the recognition.
Alexander Smith

Sometimes the delight is in the surprise, in being caught utterly off-guard. Almost always, there is a sense of being privy to a secret experience, to some secret knowledge, not necessarily in an exclusive way, but in a grateful way – I get to be here, to see this, to make this unexpected connection, to be delighted.
Anna Tulou

Praise the rain; the seagull dive
The curl of plant, the raven talk—
Praise the hurt, the house slack
The stand of trees, the dignity—
Praise the dark, the moon cradle

The sky fall, the bear sleep…
Praise the path on which we're led…
Praise beginnings; praise the end.
Praise the song and praise the singer.
Joy Harjo

We're only here for a minute. We're here for a little window. And to use that time to catch and share shards of light and laughter and grace seems to me the great story.
Brian Doyle

It doesn't mean a thing if you ain't got that swing.
Duke Ellington

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 Delight.
Click here for all Spotify playlists.
Click here for the YouTube playlist on Delight.
Click here for all the YouTube playlists.

Videos & Podcasts

Tending Joy and Practicing Delight, OnBeing podcast with Ross Gay
https://onbeing.org/programs/ross-gay-tending-joy-and-practicing-delight

Black and Jubilant: Unpacking Black Joy From the Revolutionary to the Ordinary
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SKBwJgQ-btc

Laughter: The Best Medicine - Hidden Brain
https://hiddenbrain.org/podcast/laughter-the-best-medicine/

The delight of letters M & W, street art, dance, learning a dance, explaining golf, sign language, tiny art, clever art, cleaning up after pandas, kicking the winning goal, lunch boxes, rooting for sports teams, and laughing at your own pretension

Articles

How the Black Joy Project is Helping Activists Deal
https://www.dailydot.com/irl/the-black-joy-project/

Drag Bans Aim to Kill Queer Joy
https://equallywed.com/drag-bans-aim-to-kill-queer-joy-and-reveal-deeper-dangers-for-lgbtq-people/

Wendell Berry on Delight as a Force of Resistance to Consumerism
https://www.themarginalian.org/2019/11/17/wendell-berry-hidden-wound/

Is Life's Happiness Curve Really U-Shaped?
https://www.theguardian.com/science/head-quarters/2015/jun/24/life-happiness-curve-u-shaped-ageing

Books

The Book of Delights
Ross Gay

***Gender Euphoria*: Stories of Joy from Trans, Non-Binary and Intersex Writers**
Edited by Laura Kate Dale

Movies

Summer of Soul
Marcel The Shell With Shoes On
A Man Called Otto
Little Miss Sunshine

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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