



Soulful Home

Finding the Sacred In
Our Everyday Spaces

February 2021
Beloved Community

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The Welcome Mat

What Does it Mean to be a Family of Beloved Community

What do you know about the Beloved Community? What does your child know? I'll admit that what I thought I knew about the Beloved Community, and what I'd shared with my children, turned out to be woefully under-nuanced for the tasks of our times, and I've gratefully anticipated this theme's opportunity to bolster--and complicate--my understanding.

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. deepened and broadened the meaning of the term Beloved Community to refer to "a global vision, in which all people can share in the wealth of the earth." (thekingcenter.org) It is a vision where the inevitability of human conflict is recognized, but a pervasive commitment to and skillfulness with nonviolence means that no conflict would lead to inequality, discrimination, or harm.

This month, we'll explore ideas and skills we need to live and love our way into the Beloved Community, learning how we can hone those skills and personalize those ideas, and considering how we can support one another in sustaining our commitment to manifesting the Beloved Community in our lifetimes. (Not uncoincidentally, our theme for next month is commitment, so many of our ideas will bridge the season from our last month of winter on into spring.)

Each month, we design the packets to be very mix-and-match friendly so that families can use them in the wide variety of contexts in which we all live. But this month, we encourage all of our Soulful Home families to begin by watching the first minute and a half of [this video](#), taken from Martin Luther King, Jr.'s 1957 "Birth of a New Nation" speech, which describes the Beloved Community. And then, check out the [six principles of nonviolence](#). This will allow us to have a shared context for beginning our learning, play, and memory-making this month.

Yours in faith that better days are ahead,

Teresa, on behalf of the Soul Matters team



At the Table

Exploring Beloved Community Through Discussions

At the Table questions explore the monthly theme through a discussion for all ages. They are designed for a family gathering - maybe during a Friday night meal, a quiet moment in the living room or before a board game night.

Introducing the Activity

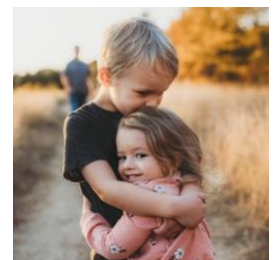
Family members who are readers can alternate who reads the questions. Those who are not readers are invited to share their own impromptu questions. Discussion partners might answer as thoughts come to them or take turns in a circle.

Discussion Questions

1. What keeps you together as a family, when you're not very happy with one another?
2. We belong to and depend on many different communities, all of which offer us friendship, love and security. How many different communities do your family members belong to? Have some fun adding them all up!
3. What do you have in common with your dentist? Your mail carrier? Your school or city bus driver? Your bank teller?
4. What's one way you make life easier for someone in your family?
5. Who in the family seems to like disagreement, and who doesn't?
6. What is the secret to getting along?
7. What's the difference between an opponent, and an enemy? How do those two words feel different?
8. Have you ever made friends with someone whom you previously thought of as an enemy? What changed that allowed that to happen?
9. What is something in your life that feels unfair? How do you handle that?
10. How does conflict feel in your body?
11. Have you ever "turned the other cheek," or "been the bigger person" in a fight or disagreement? How did that feel?
12. What's the best advice anyone has given you about getting along with others?

Return to the Discussion Throughout the Week

Thoughts develop with time. Find opportunities to bring up particularly compelling questions again during the month, maybe on walks, rides home, when tucking your child in to bed, etc. If thoughts grew or changed, notice together how we are all evolving beings, opening ourselves to new truths and understandings as we live our lives and connect with others.



Around the Neighborhood

Around the Neighborhood activities engage families with their surroundings through the lens of the theme. It's about perceiving our well-known world in new ways. As you safely move around your neighborhood during this time of Covid, these suggestions help you transform your everyday backs-and-forths into a family adventure!

People Watching the Beloved in the Community

One important part of the Beloved Community is that people willingly come together with others whom they perceive to be different from themselves. A challenge with that is that many of us get used to being around people who are mostly like us, who shop the same places we shop, do the same things we do, and often, more or less look like us.

To remind ourselves of the diversity all around us, we're going to go people-watching. We'll need to find a place that is going to offer us a wide array of folks to see. During Covid, that will most likely be an outside place, such as a public park. Choose a day with nice weather when more people are likely to be out and about.

As you people-watch, normalize and wonder together about differences you see.

1. See if you can find a person whose dog looks a little bit like them.
2. Listen for someone speaking a language other than English and other than your native tongue. Can you identify which language it is?
3. Look for someone who seems to stand out. What makes them look out of place?*
4. Look for someone who fits in. What about them makes them seem to belong?*
5. What feelings do people seem to be experiencing? Look for four or five different emotions in people's faces and the ways they carry themselves.
6. Find someone laughing out loud.
7. Find someone who's really into their music.
8. Find someone on wheels.
9. Does anyone look unwell, or really sleepy? What might be going on there?
10. Who is doing something that looks really interesting?

* Parents may want to return to these ideas later, to ask open-ended questions that challenge stereotypes and cultural homogenization. For this activity, let your child simply notice what they notice; this is good information to unpack together!



From the Mailbox

Our mailboxes connect us to the wide world outside our Soulful Homes. Sometimes, these connections ask things of us (a donation letter or flyer encouraging us to vote), sometimes these connections offer things to us (a letter from a friend or a special delivery), and often, they do both. This section applies this metaphor to today's call for families to engage in the work of dismantling white supremacy culture. There are so many brave, inspiring and wise leaders "sending" us messages of hope and "delivering" us ideas about what we can do to fight racism. So each month, this section will contain two "notes" from these leaders in anti-racism and its related fields. Every family will relate to them differently. Engage them in whatever way connects with your family best.

Beloved Community is...

The Fair Housing Justice Center made a video with many voices sharing what the Beloved Community is, using their own words. Watch this video together as a family. Afterward, talk about which words most resonated with each of you. We've pulled a few powerful quotes below that you might use to prompt conversation.

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCm4vHROaPm_syaXTZK08Gag

"The Beloved Community is...

...people who make me comfortable, people who make me uncomfortable, people I don't know, and people I'm very, very familiar with...and we are united by this divine call."

...the opportunity to be truly free in a society that respects, hears, and understands its citizenry."

...dignity and protection for all."

...everyone has a stake in each other's wellbeing."

...all of us together in the spirit of justice, in the spirit of love, in the spirit of humanity, in the spirit of oneness working to uplift communities that have been oppressed..."

Invitation: Spend time considering the many perspectives offered. What challenges you? What inspires you? The Fair Housing Justice Center is one organization founded on the principles of the Beloved Community. There are more! To learn more about endeavors inspired by the concept of the Beloved Community, [join The King Center's email list](#) (bottom of the page) so you can plug into this organization's ongoing educational and outreach work, or support it with [a donation](#).



Land and Food for All: Soulfire Farm

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was very clear that equalizing distribution of our nation’s resources—including food and land--was key to the manifestation of the Beloved Community. And though a common historical narrative has pitted King’s philosophy against his contemporary, Malcolm X’s (who was assassinated this month in 1965), X believed that “all revolution is based on land.” It is in this spirit that we share the invitation below.

[Soulfire Farm](#), located in upstate New York, is “an Afro-Indigenous centered community farm committed to uprooting racism and seeding sovereignty in the food system.” Their website has a wealth of [resources](#), and they also regularly offer food-justice and anti-racism training for individuals and groups, as well as farm-immersion training for BIPOC folks.

Invitation: Spend some time on the Soul Fire website, and then choose a way to support their work. Buy their book or a hand-made herbal salve. Sign up for the newsletter. Take the anti-racism training. [Volunteer](#) to make and send art cards for them to use to thank donors. And use their [list of Black-led farming organizations](#) to find a farm near you where you might also offer support.



At Play

Playing Games with Beloved Community

At Play activities and questions are a way to joyfully, playfully, and imaginatively experience the theme.

Option A: Beloved Community-Inspired Word Scramble

[The King Center](#) in Atlanta identified five concepts at the foundation of the Beloved Community, and they are **respect, dignity, honesty, kindness, and humility**.^{*} What powerful words! And none easy or simple to live into. So we're going to playfully get these words into our environment so we can spend the month with them, considering how we might invite them more fully into our lives.

For this At Play activity, write each of these words in big, blocky letters on a thicker piece of paper or light cardboard, giving yourself a little more space than usual between each letter. Use a different color marker for each word.

Next, cut out each letter separately. Then, if you have older children, trim the edges around your individual letters so it's not obvious that two pieces go next to one another. Younger children who are early readers may appreciate you leaving the pieces' edges as they are cut; this is a little hint on how to put the letters back together.

Choose a big, flat surface to work on the word scrambles together. For younger kids, offer one word at a time. For older kids, you might dump all the letters out, and let them figure out that same-color letters go together. Make conversation with your child as the words emerge--Why do you think kindness is important? What does humility mean? I recognize the word dignity from our UU principles; have you heard it before? Can you give an example of respect?

With some masking tape loops or the like, tape the words up somewhere everyone in the family can see them for the month.

^{*}Note that we use these same five words as anchors for this month's blessing. You might consider using these two elements together, playing the word scramble game during the day, using the blessing at your mealtime that evening.



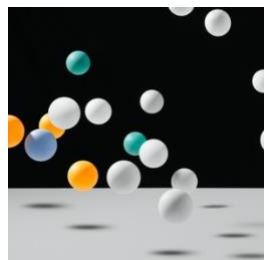
Option B: Bouncing into the Beloved Community

For this game, you will need a shoebox or similar box, 8-10 ping pong balls, and a Sharpie marker.

Decorate or cover the shoe box if you like, or keep it simple--undecorated is fine. Cut a large heart roughly in the middle of your shoe box lid so that when you set the shoebox on end, the heart is up-and-down, and in the middle to upper $\frac{1}{3}$ of the lid (facing you). Above the heart, write "Beloved Community." This is your target.

Next, draw all different faces on the ping pong balls. Maybe you want to portray different emotions. Maybe you want to use Sharpie markers in a rainbow of colors. Or maybe you want to write different names on the balls. These are your people.

Set the shoe box up on its end at the far end of a table. Sitting opposite the box, your task is to bounce the ping pong balls into the open heart. Your goal is to get everyone into the beloved community! Work together as a family, or set up a challenge to see who can do it the fastest.



On the Message Board

A Monthly Reminder

The On the Message Board section lifts up a theme-related mantra, graphic, quote, or gesture for your family to carry with them throughout the month. Think of these “family sayings” or “family signs” as tools for the journey, reminders that help us refocus and steady ourselves and our kids as we navigate through life’s challenges and opportunities.

February’s Message: What love can I bring to this moment?

The call of the Beloved Community to respond to hate with nonviolence and to seek to make friends of enemies can feel seriously unrealistic, if not sometimes unsafe. Those feelings are real. And, as we know, feelings aren’t fixed states of being, they are signposts, giving us information about where we are in the moment, and where we might want to go in the near future.

This month’s mantra challenges us to let difficult and strong emotions pass through our psyches, and either despite them or in light of them, ask ourselves: *What love can I bring to this moment?*

There will be no right answer to this question. Each challenging situation is going to be different. The win is going to be the pause and the asking of the question, the refocusing of one’s precious energy on *love*--self-love, love for another, or maybe love for the Holy that unites us all

Here, we are talking both about a very small action, and a magnificent one. On the face of it, we are simply [“going high”](#) rather than getting bent out of shape when confronted with insult and injury. But what this really means is that in refusing to allow ourselves to be dragged into spiritual resentment or despair, we are demonstrating to others--and ourselves--that another world is possible, and it begins with the decision we make in the very next moment.

Here’s a simple example: a friend drops a casually classist comment on you, and keeps talking as if it nothing happened. You, internally, feeling triggered: pause... *What love can I bring to this moment?* One choice might be to tell your friend, “Ouch! That comment hurt. Can I tell you why?” Another choice might be, “I love you, (friend), so I need to tell you that you did harm by what you just said.” Yet another, “I don’t think I would have phrased it like that, but I think you’re saying you don’t understand _____ about working-class culture.” Or, maybe the most loving thing you could do for your friend and yourself would be to let the moment pass, making a mental note to come back to the words later, when you’ve had time to think.

Without the pause and reframing of *What love can I bring to this moment?*, many of us--myself (Teresa) included--would definitely struggle to make a connected, clear-headed decision in the above situation. So often, we react out of old patterns, either outwardly, inwardly, or both. In order for us to keep building the beloved community, we have to learn and relearn how to drop into heart center before responding, until the day that such responses become second nature for us.



At the Bedside

At The Bedside activities engage the theme through storytelling. This takes place during the dreamy, almost otherworldly hour or so before children or youth drift off to sleep. Through stories and the questions and realizations that they prompt, we come to understand the nature of and our own place in the cosmos. But also, these selections invite you to remember, shape, and share stories from your own past, using thoughtful narratives to help your child weave the tale of who they are and whose they are.

The Blind Mice and the Elephant

The story of the blind mice and the elephant--sometimes told as the blind men and the elephant, and sometimes dealing instead with six people who may or may not be sighted, but in any case come across an elephant in the dark--dates back to the first century India. The story is beloved by and retold in many faiths--Hindu, Buddhist, Jainism, Sufism, and Unitarian Universalism! Like all good stories, it touches on many themes. We'll read the story together with a focus on the power of the community to discover broader truths about our shared neighbors and surroundings.

Here's a video version of the story: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FQcAb07dLoE>

Things to think about together after reading or watching:

Red mouse was brave, and volunteered to go exploring first. Who in your community is usually the first one to speak up, or offer, or volunteer? We need people like that in the beloved community.

White mouse was a little reticent, and went last, but then was able to bring the other ideas together into a whole. Who do you know who is good at listening to other people's ideas? We need people like that in the beloved community.

At the end, all the mice were able to agree on the truth of the elephant, even though they had all been so sure about their own parts earlier. Who do you know who is often willing to change their mind when they discover a newer, more powerful truth? We need people like that in the beloved community.

What else did the mice do that was helpful? What do you think will happen next?

The day of or the day after you read and listen to the bedtime story, buy or make an elephant puzzle, and do it together. [Here's one](#), [here's one](#), [here's one](#), and [here's one](#), all under \$20. And [here's one](#) that is fair trade and \$37. Finally, [here's](#) a short tutorial for making your own puzzle with a picture, some cardboard, scissors, and glue.



On the Porch

Raising a Child of Beloved Community Together

On the Porch supports sharing realizations, challenges and hopes around the theme with other supportive adults. Perhaps this happens on a literal porch or front stoop, but it could happen wherever parents and their circle of support gather and talk (online or in person) over the soulful parts of parenthood. The “A Sip of Something New” section invites you and your discussion partner to take in a new idea shared by someone else. The “Spiritual Snacks” section stimulates personal storytelling and the sharing of your own wisdom and experience.

A Sip of Something New

You have two sips of something new this month, so plan two occasions to connect with your trusted friend, partner, or co-parent:

The first sip is a prayer by Megan Foley and Theresa Soto. It’s called, “All of Us Need All of Us to Make It.”

<https://www.uua.org/worship/words/litany/all-us-need-all-us-make-it>

With your conversation partner, take turns reading the passage out loud. Before the refrain--*All of us need all of us to make it*--pause and make eye contact, saying those words together: *All of us need all of us to make it.*

Sustained eye contact and choral speech may seem hokey under the circumstance, but we encourage you to give it a try. Interpersonally, those actions can be very moving and powerful, especially between and among people who are very close and don’t always make opportunities to relate to one another in new and different ways. But in terms of our theme, what we are doing together is acknowledging that we can’t manifest the Beloved Community alone. We have no choice but to move forward with all of humanity, no matter how dissimilar we are in ideology. King reminded us that the oppressed *and* the oppressor both need to be healed. So in practicing this connection with our loved ones, we are practicing the mighty task of embodying love and healing for others.

The second Sip is a cartoon by Toronto-based teacher and artist Chris Grady, whose comic is called Lunarbaboon (www.lunarbaboon.com). Show your conversation partner the cartoon below. What does it say to you? In what ways do you encourage one another, even when the struggles weigh heavily? How do you stay connected?

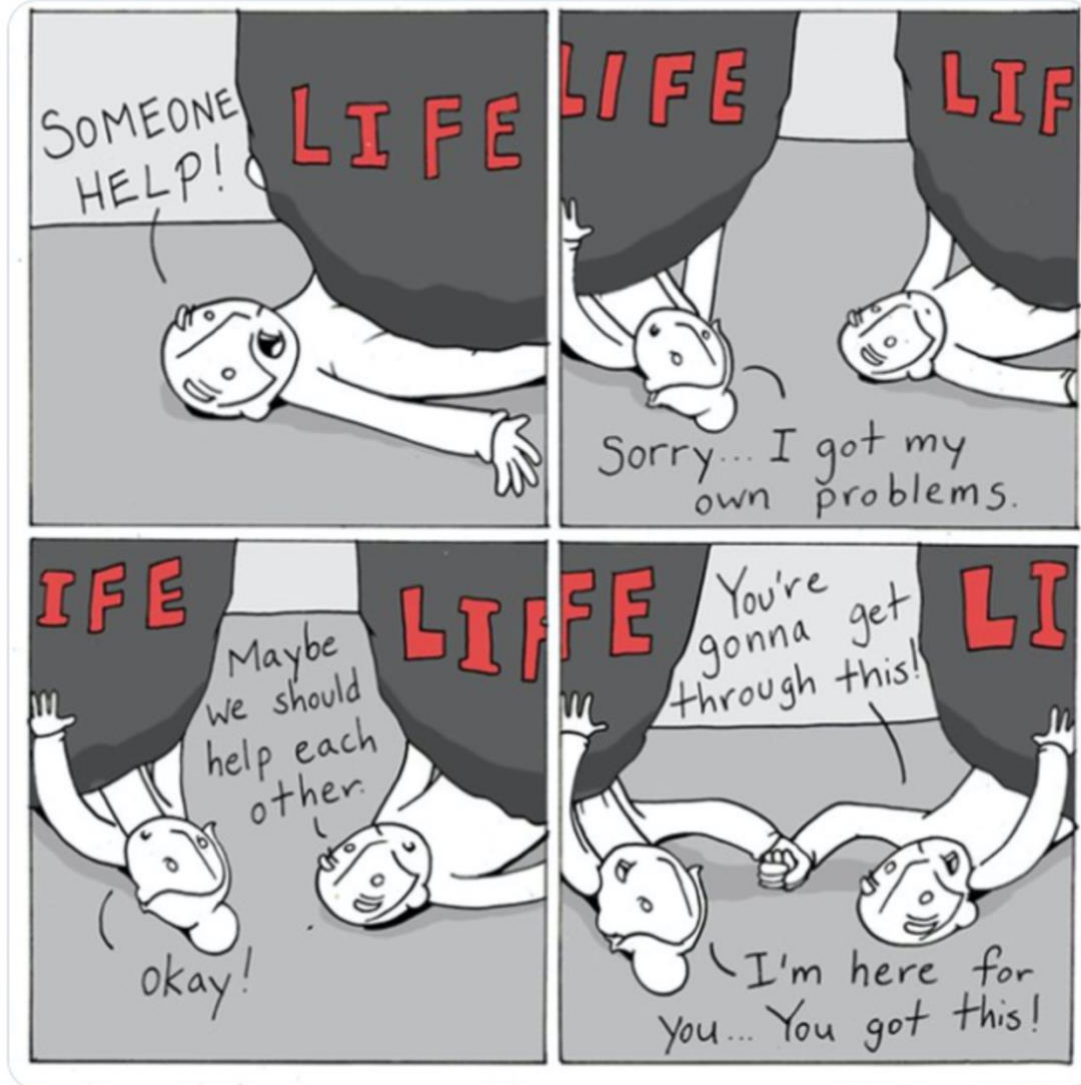




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Spiritual Snacks to Share

Bring these questions with you when the time comes to hang out with your co-parent or buddies. Don't treat the questions as a list to go through one by one. Instead pick the one or two that speak to you the most. Treat the questions less as a quiz and more like doorways inviting you into the world of storytelling and memory.

Questions

1. When your chosen beloved community feels not so beloved, how do you move through those thoughts and feelings?
2. Do you and your trusted companion or parenting partner see eye-to-eye about parenting toward the Beloved Community? If so, try sharing the stories of how you arrived at each of your differing views. Often we discover that even when we don't agree with each other's conclusions, we find areas of agreement or understanding in the life experiences that led to those conclusions.
3. What do you hope your child contributes to the Beloved Community? What do you hope they gain from it?
4. How do you think the work for Beloved Community will be different for your child's/children's generation than it is for your generation?
5. How far does your philosophical commitment to nonviolence go? Where do you think (or know from experience) that line is?
6. Who is easiest for you to welcome into "your" places, and who challenges you the most?
7. The Catholic monastic, Henri Nouwen wrote, "Community is the place where the person you least want to live with always lives." Where is the challenge in this quote for you?
8. What group have you belonged to in your life that felt closest to the beloved community? What made it so?
9. What person, historical or known to you, do you most admire for their inclusivity and commitment to equity?



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. The Extra Mile suggestions often surpass what is considered an “everyday moment” in a family, and may involve more preparation, planning, or time to accomplish. A bit more effort, but well worth it!

Singing Our Way to the Beloved Community

The transformative power of music in the struggle for social justice cannot be overstated. For a worried and weary people gathered nonviolently to make their voices heard, group singing can be nothing short of transcendent, buoying the spirits of the singers and catalyzing those who are watching and listening.

Note that we are not talking about chants here. A gift of chants is that they are short, easy to learn on the spot, and easy to customize. Songs have to be practiced together for their greatest power to manifest, but they are worth the effort; Civil Rights veteran Bruce Hartman described it thusly: “In terms of political and moral effectiveness, group singing is to group chanting, as an elephant is to a mouse.” (crmvvet.org)

For this extra mile activity learn, as a family, one or two meaningful protest songs. Linked below is a list the Association for Unitarian Universalist Music Ministries has put together to help you get started, but you’ll want to choose songs that resonate with your family. Adults, give these songs a listen first before sharing with younger children, to be sure the messages are developmentally appropriate for the ages in your family.

<https://www.auumm.org/page/marches>

For a bonus 200 yard finish to your Extra Mile activity, teach these songs to friends, extended family members, co-congregants, or others. You’ll be developing a critical mass to carry mighty music along to the next protest or rally.



Blessing of Beloved Community*

May we grant one another *dignity*, even in disagreement, even in disappointment, even in disgrace, for dignity builds the beloved community.

May we be *honest* with ourselves and with one another, for hard truths, new truths, and shared truths build the beloved community.

May we relate to one another with *respect* for the stories, customs, wishes, rights, and feelings that make us who we are, for this regard builds the beloved community.

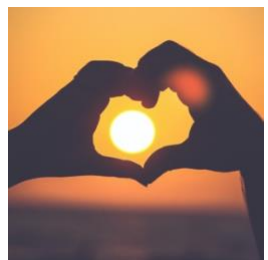
May we grow *kindness* in our hearts, even and especially when we feel mean or resentful, for loving compassion builds the beloved community.

May we practice *humility*, shedding ego and moving humbly in the Light of the Holy that inhabits all, for this quiet strength builds the beloved community.

In our diversity of thought, personality, approach, background, body, upbringing, experience, and every other expression of life-force among humanity, may we hold one another in our commitment to create the future we need and want together--the dream manifest, the beloved community.



*This blessing is built around the concepts (italicized) that The King Center has identified as at the center of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s vision of the Beloved Community, and which are used in their K-12 teaching materials to help make the Beloved Community more actionable for students. May they do the same for all of us!



Connect with more Inspiration for your family, and for you!

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 music playlists on the monthly themes.
One playlist is one [Spotify](#) and another on our [YouTube](#) channel

Credits

Soulful Home packets are prepared by
Teresa Honey Youngblood,
Our Soul Matters [Family Ministry Coordinator](#)

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