



# Soulful Home

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Finding the Sacred in  
Our Everyday Spaces

December 2018 - Mystery

# The Welcome Mat

## What does it Mean to be a Family of Mystery?

*This month, we play, learn, think, and talk together about being parents and families of mystery.*

*As parents, on any given morning, the greatest mystery we wake up to may be along the lines of: “Who took my phone charger?” or “Why aren’t the dishes done?” But there are also those moments of asking: “Exactly who IS this young person eating breakfast beside me? Who are they now, and who are they becoming?”*

*The irony is that, as parents, we may be closer than most to mystery since our days and nights are spent with these curious young souls for whom the whole, wide world is still new. And yet, in our efforts to get all the things done that it takes to raise this human being or two or five, we sometimes miss the great relief, restoration and sheer delight of dwelling in the unknown and embracing mystery.*

*So consider the activities for this month to be not just for your children but also for you. Let our suggested hide and seek game take you back to the wonder and mystery of your own childhood. Let the stargazing activity restore your perspective and your sense of wonder. And as you join your children in creating mesmerizing mindfulness jars or sussing out the criteria for the perfect cookie, may you remember what a great gift it is to explore this wondrous world with these marvelous and mysterious children of ours.*

**Alexis & Teresa,**

Soul Matters Family Ministry Midwives

On behalf of the entire [Soul Matters Team](#)



# At the Table

## Connecting Through Mysterious Discussions

*The At the Table section explores 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.

### Questions

- Who has taught you the most about “living with and loving the mystery”? (Older children and adults may have more to say on this topic than young children. This is a way to share the names of important people in your life and your experiences with them).
- What is something you believe in, even though some people might think it’s silly?
- What are some of your favorite stories people have told to explain mysterious things, like how earth was created? Or why we dream? What can we learn from those stories?
- What “facts” do you think are more mysterious than people say they are?
- What do you think about when you are really quiet and close your eyes? Some people say they hear a mysterious “inner voice”? Do you?
- Do you believe in 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 wonderful you wish it was real?
- When you watch magic tricks, do you want to learn how they are done? Why or why not?
- What other questions about mystery do you have? Parents and children are invited to create their own. You may even have a way to record questions family members think of during the week about mystery that can be discussed over meal time.

### Ways to Return to the Discussion throughout the Week

Thoughts develop with time. So are there questions that you would answer differently than you did at first? Are there things you want to add to your initial thoughts? Did someone say something that made you think your own new thought? Did your family discussion lead to similar discussions with friends?



# Around the Neighborhood

## A Treasure Hunt for Mystery

*Around the Neighborhood activities engage families with their surroundings through the lens of the theme. It's about exploring the connections between place and the theme. Throughout the month, we ask families to keep their eyes open for what might seem like everyday sightings, but which can be perceived in new ways through the lens of the monthly theme. Trips to the grocery store, walks and drives make for excellent spaces to conduct these treasure hunts.*

### The Activity

Turn your car ride or walk around the neighborhood in to a treasure hunt by finding the mysterious items on this list:

1. A giant question mark (Hint: Billboards are a great place to look)
2. A hole in the ground (What could be below?)
3. A night-flying creature (What might be mysterious to us--nighttime, the dark--is not mysterious to all the earth's creature.)
4. Something that looks out of place or like it doesn't belong (How did it get there?)
5. Somebody answering another person's question (We help one another in knowing and understanding.)
6. A never-before-seen food (Is this a food you'd be willing to try?)
7. An intriguing, but unknown to you, tree (Who do you know who might be able to help you learn the tree's name?)
8. An insect in an unexpected place (What is it and why is it there?)
9. A shop you haven't been in (What do they sell? Who owns it?)
10. Neighbors you don't know (Maybe introduce yourselves)
11. Add your own treasure hunt items to the list!

### Reflection

Sometimes looking at familiar things in new ways makes us think new thoughts. If some items on the list were hard to find, you may have needed to go off of your usual routes, into new and different parts of your community, to complete your list. Let these monthly treasure hunts challenge your patterns and assumptions about your place and usual surroundings. At the month's end, share what have you learned about your community and neighborhood.



# At Play

## Playing Games with Mystery

*At Play activities and questions are a way to joyfully, playfully, and imaginatively experience the theme. We offer a brief framework to introduce the activity and another to reflect upon it, so that the insights learned in play can stay with us throughout the month and beyond.*

### Option A: Hide and Seek

#### Priming the Pump

Begin by reading [the title story](#) from the UU story collection, [Hide and Seek with God](#) by Mary Ann Moore. The story is available free through Google Books online at [this link](#), or you can purchase [the whole book](#).

#### What to Say Before

“Do you remember how we’re talking about mystery this month in church? Sometimes, a mystery can be something that’s partially hidden from us, that we don’t fully know or can’t completely see. Even when we don’t know everything about a mystery, we do know some things that might help us. We’re going to play hide and seek in the house/at the park, but before we do, let’s think together about good hiding spots that might be out there, such as behind a tree or under a slide. So even though we won’t know where the hidden person is, we can use our good brains to give us some places to start looking. Are you ready?”

#### How to Play

There are different ways to play hide and seek. Traditionally, each member of the group hides while one person counts, and then that one person tries to find everyone in the group. But sometimes one person can hide and everyone else looks for them, such as in the story, “Hide and Seek with God.” There is also a variation called Sardines, where one person hides, and everyone else looks for them, but as each one finds the hidden person, they hide with them, packing themselves in like sardines, until the last person looking finds all the players in the one spot.

#### Final Thoughts: What to Say After

“Sometimes, mysteries can seem so huge and overwhelming that we don’t even know where to begin in understanding them. In our game, we began not knowing where anyone was hiding, but by using what we did know, such as where some of the good spots were, we could begin to create knowns out of unknowns. We can make our way through complex or intimidating situations using what we can perceive and what we can next find out.”



## **Option B: 20 Questions**

### **How to Play**

One person thinks of a person, place, or animal. The other participants have 20 questions they can use to determine what the person is thinking.

### **Connection to Theme**

After everyone has a chance to be the person who thinks of the person, place, or animal, talk about the experience of how asking questions can be helpful. What did it feel like during the first few questions? Were you confused? A little nervous? Unsure if you would ever be able to guess the answer? How did you feel as you asked more questions? How did you decide what questions to ask? How can asking questions be helpful when we are in confusing and/or difficult situations?

### **Ways to Return to the Games throughout the Week**

Identify and use a mantra related to the games, such as “I do not know everything, but I know some things.” or “Asking questions helps me find my way.” or “New things are waiting to be discovered.”

Mantras such as these are helpful phrases that can be practiced until they become a natural part of our self-talk. When our self-talk is positive, life-affirming *and memorable*, we are able to navigate difficult circumstances while staying rooted in our values.

During the games, we didn’t always know where people were hiding or what people were thinking. Family mantras can keep us searching and remind us that questions always lead to the discovery of treasures and widen our world.



# At the Bedside

## Inviting the Stars Inside

*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.*

### Set-up

Surprise your child with a room full of stars!

While your child is not around, cut out a couple of dozen paper stars, or purchase glow-in-the-dark plastic stars. Just before bedtime, hang the stars from the ceiling or tape them to the walls in your child's bedroom. The discovery of the now-transformed sleeping space can be your catalyst for introducing the second part of the activity.

### Introducing the Activity

Share the story of [UU astronomer, Celia Payne](#) with your child.

Read the story of astronomer Celia Payne. After reading it, consider sharing stories from your own life about:

- finding your purpose (and how discovering one's purpose in life can feel like a mystery)
- working against prejudice (sometimes we don't always know how things will work out, but we trust in the possibility (mystery) that our actions will make a difference))
- marveling at something wonderful and mysterious

Celia Payne's work took place in the dark night. But she wasn't scared. She was excited! She knew the darkness was rich, beautiful, and even comforting. She wanted to learn more about the mysteries of space.

Are you scared of the dark? What are you afraid of? What are some wonderful things about the dark? [Hint: nighttime animals such as raccoons and bats, who aren't usually seen during the day, are active. Nighttime rest gives us energy for big adventures the following day. The stars, moon, and planets are all visible in the nighttime sky.]

**Note:** Use this as an opportunity to challenge the paradigm that light is good and dark is bad. This lays the groundwork for future discussions around the connection between racism and the language we use.



# At the Kitchen Sink

## Raising a Child of Mystery Together

*At the Kitchen Sink supports sharing realizations, challenges, and hopes around the theme with other adults. It connects parents with their co-parents, with their close circle of supporters, or both. Perhaps this happens as the dinner dishes are washed and dried, or perhaps this is where parents and their circle of support, cup of tea or coffee in hand, talk over the soulful parts of parenthood. At the Kitchen Sink has two parts: the High, Low, and Tomorrow ritual (explained below), and the Kitchen Sink questions. The questions, for the most part, remain the same month to month; what will change is the theme, and thus, the content of your discussions.*

### High, Low, and Tomorrow

When you and your partner - or trusted someone if you're a single parent - get together at day's end, alternate sharing the following:

- **Your High:** What was the best thing that happened today?
- **Your Low:** What hurt or challenged you the most?
- **Your Tomorrow:** What are you most looking forward to in the near future?

Once the paradigm is known to all, anyone can start the conversation with, "What's your high, low, and tomorrow?"

Taking a moment to clarify and share our highs, lows, and hopes can be a catharsis and energizer at the same time; we give voice to difficult feelings and disappointments, asking a partner or friend to bear our burdens with us for a short while, but we also speak aloud that which brings us joy or satisfaction, reminding ourselves where it is we want to spend more of our energy.

As single parents, we can also ask these questions of ourselves at the end of a day, as a type of meditation that grounds us in gratitude and focuses us as we turn to tomorrow.

### Kitchen Sink Questions

- Of all the activities or discussions in this packet you tried this month, which ones went particularly well? What had the most meaning for you? Which one do you think will have the most lasting impact?
- What parenting challenges did you face this month? How did the packet's activities or theme influence how you experienced and dealt with those challenges? Did thinking of yourself as a family of mystery guide or help you in any way?
- What was your greatest insight about what it means to be a family/parent/child of mystery?
- What activity from the packet might you want to make a regular, annual or on-going ritual?
- You made a number of memories this month as you explored mystery with your children. What was your favorite and why?





# The Extra Mile

## Making Time for Bigger Mystery Adventures

*The Extra Mile section is for families who want to continue exploring the theme of the month through larger adventures, broader experiences, 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!*

### Extra Mile #1: Learning to “Let the Mystery Be”

#### Priming the Pump

The song below brings up big questions to big mysteries, such as what happens after we die. After listing what many people believe happens, the songwriter, Iris Dement, completes the exploration with the chorus, “I think I’ll just let the mystery be.”

Before playing the song ask your children about some questions they think are really hard to answer. Feel free to share your own.

While playing the song, you can invite family members to write down the questions they hear. You can also just ask them to listen for the questions that are being asked. Do you hear any that are the same as what we thought of? Do you hear any new questions?

#### Activity

Listen to “Let the Mystery Be” by Iris DeMent:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nlaoR5m4L80>

#### Questions to Ask After the Song

We shared/listed our big questions – what were the questions in the song? Do you have possible answers for those questions? What does it mean to “let the mystery be?”

#### Ways to Return to the Song throughout the Week

This chorus could be a sweet “inside joke” for the family when, throughout this month and beyond, you encounter the unknown. (For example, why does only one sock come out of the dryer, when we washed two? Who keeps forgetting to put the milk back in the refrigerator? What is the dog thinking when she looks at us like that? Let the mystery be!)

It could also be a way to find comfort and peace with not knowing. “Let the mystery be” can be a way to acknowledge that there is wisdom in the gentle release of that which is not ours to control.



## Extra Mile #2: Gazing Into the Mystery

### Activity: Stargazing

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.

### What to Say Before

“What do we know about the sky and space? (Affirm what is known and add some favorite facts such as there being 100 billion stars in the universe, or that 1.3 million earths could fit in our sun, or that there are 150 moons in our solar system.) Some people feel a sense of mystery when they feel very small in the universe. Tonight, we’re going to go stargazing and see what we can see and wonder about what we can’t see.”

### Questions to Ask After

Your family may find the experience of looking at the sky together does not need questions. Sometimes experiences speak for themselves. You may also ask:

- What did you wonder about while we looked at the sky? (The wonderings that arise might not be about the universe - some may say they wondered about what happens after death or they thought about what they will be like as they grow older - whatever comes up can be a way to honor and talk about life’s many mysteries).
- Before we looked at the sky, we talked about what we know. What don’t we know about the universe?
- How did it feel while we were looking at the sky together?
- Did you make up stories to explain what you saw? (This can be an opportunity to learn about constellations).

### Add to Your Experience: Stargazing Music!

Consider enhancing your stargazing experience by playing a few songs from our Soul Matters stargazing playlist. Find it

here: <https://open.spotify.com/user/mjf4kicgvwkk17jfbzb0un6qg/playlist/5rrW8k0fsLN2nz9VmyKQME?si=rEmAynxrSPGqLxzwRcOqoQ>



## Extra Mile #3: Create a “Mindfulness Jar”

### What to Say Before

“Sometimes our minds have so many questions about what we do not know, we can feel confused and maybe even overwhelmed. We are going to make Mindfulness Jars to help our thoughts settle down and we can practice ‘letting the mystery be.’”

**Directions can be found here:** <http://blissfulkids.com/mindfulness-kids-teens-calming-glitter-jar-aka-mind-jar/>

### Ways to Use the Jar throughout the Week

Have the jars on hand for times in which family members need to settle their thoughts, such as a particularly challenging experience. Shaking them and watching the glitter settle as they “let the mystery be” can also be an evening ritual.



## A Blessing for You & Your Home

Blessings to you, dear custodians of mysterious beings with their own dreams, fears, abilities, and thoughts. May the mystery encourage you to explore possibilities with curiosity and remind you of the unknown depths within us all.



## Get Soulful Home Every Month!

Each month we create a new Soulful Home guide designed around the monthly theme.

Think of it as your partner in bringing home the conversations you are having at church.

Subscription information is on our website at:

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

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



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