



# *Soul Matters*

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## **The Gift of Heritage**

**October: Material for Individual Reflection**



# Welcome to the Gift of Heritage

*Some people are your relatives, but others are your ancestors, and you choose the ones you want to have as ancestors. You create yourself out of [their] values. — Ralph Ellison*

Be on the lookout, friends. The ghosts are on their way! After all, you can't talk about heritage without talking about - and encountering - ancestors.

And we're not talking about relatives here. As Ralph Ellison points out, there's a big difference between relatives and ancestors. Relatives give us our brown eyes and bowed legs; ancestors bestow a legacy. Relatives are those we tell stories about; ancestors call us to carry stories forward. Relatives live on in our DNA; ancestors live in the whispers of our hearts. Our relatives allowed us to be here; our ancestors tell us why we are here. The difference comes down to values. Values we use to construct not just our stories but ourselves.

Take success. Remember that old line, "He was born on third base but believes that he hit a triple." People with a clear sense of heritage and ancestry, know the truth of how they got where they are. Instead of telling tall tales about their magnificent swing, they speak of "the shoulders on which I stand." Hubris or humility? Ancestors at their best never let us forget the latter.

You will also hear ancestor-conscious people speak of blessings differently. When we get gifts from the kind of ancestors Ellison is talking about, those gifts always come with *a responsibility*. There is no such thing as keeping the gifts of heritage to oneself. They are meant to be passed on. Ancestors don't just remind you that they came before; they remind you of those who will come after.

Another way to put this is to say that ancestors remind us that we are *part of something larger*. Even *obligated* to something larger, because as much as we need these larger webs and stories, they need us too. Ancestors say: Whether or not the sacred stories and values stay relevant, depends on you! Whether or not each other's histories are told truly, depends on you! Whether the family cycles of health are strengthened and family cycles of dysfunction are stopped depends on you! Whether or not that arc is bent back toward justice, is up to you! Ancestors plop these incomplete and intimidating endeavors in our laps and say, "We've done our part and taken it as far as we can. The next step of the journey is in your hands."

Which of course also means that our hands *are connected*. Our ancestors handed precious projects to us. We are asked to hand those precious projects on to those who follow. And they will hopefully continue the sacred chain.

And in the end, maybe that's what this heritage thing is all about: seeing ourselves as part of a sacred chain. We are not small. Our lives are not insignificant. Our lives aren't even entirely our own. Every choice we make has consequences for others. Every word we write with our lives twists and propels a plotline that began before we got here and will continue after we are gone.

It all helps us see that it's not just relatives and ancestors that differ. Heritage & history do too. History may rightly shout, "It's important to know where we came from!" But heritage says, "You matter! Even more than you know."

And what about those ghosts? Yes, some of them are here to haunt us. But the bulk of them are just excitedly hanging on to the edge of their seats, watching and wondering which direction we will take the story they started.

# Our Spiritual Exercises

It's one thing to analyze a theme; it's quite another to experience it. By pulling us out of the space of *thinking* and into the space of *doing*, these exercises invite us to figure out not just what we have to say about life, but also what life has to say *to us*!

Pick the exercise that speaks to you the most. Come to your group ready to share why you picked the exercise you did and what gift it gave you.

## Option A

### ***The Memento That Matters***

We all have one: a favorite [family memento](#) that holds something important about our family heritage and history. Most of the time, these mementos also keep us grounded in a value or offer us comfort or inspiration when we need it most.

So this month reflect on one of your favorite family mementos and figure out why it has such a hold on you? If possible, bring that memento with you to show to your group.

## Option B

### ***Record an Elder... or Yourself***

Heritage is passed down in the stories we tell. It's even [more meaningful](#) when we can hear those stories in the voice of our elders and ancestors.

So this month, record an elder. Ask them to share stories from your family heritage so they aren't lost. Or interview them to capture their story. You can find some [good questions](#) to ask from NPR's StoryCorps project. There also are some great questions to use in Option D below. Here's some general guidance about how to go about this project: <https://lifehacker.com/now-s-the-time-to-record-grandmas-family-stories-1843251629>

Or... if you are an elder, record yourself! We guarantee you that your family will be grateful!

Consider bringing in a snippet from your recording to your group to share.

## Option C

### ***Cook & Share a Piece of Your Heritage***

Heritage isn't just held in our minds and memory. Just as often, it's held in the food we eat, and the recipes passed down to us.

So this month, reconnect with your family heritage with one or more of these food activities:

- Dig out an old family recipe and have your family cook it with you. As you do, share the stories connected with it.
- Invite over a small circle of friends and have each of them bring a dish from a family recipe or their particular culture. During dinner take turns sharing your stories connected to the dish everyone brought.
- Talk to a parent, aunt, uncle, or grandparent and ask them to share their favorite family recipe with you.

And maybe most important of all, whichever option you choose, consider making the recipe again the day of your group and sharing it with your Soul Matters friends!

## Option D

### *Ask Them About Their Dance with Heritage*

One of the best ways to explore our monthly themes is to have conversations about them with people close to you. It not only deepens our conversations but also our relationships.

Below is a list of “heritage questions” to help you on your way. Be sure to let your conversation partner know in advance that this won’t be a typical conversation. Telling them a bit about Soul Matters will help set the stage.

Come to your group ready to share what surprised you about the conversation(s) and what gift or insight it gave you.

#### Heritage Questions:

- If you could talk to one of your ancestors, who would you choose? And what would you ask them?
- What story told by (or about) your ancestors has shaped you the most?
- What story do you want to be remembered by?
- What is your favorite family memento? And why does it have such a hold on you?
- If you could change one thing about your family heritage, what would it be?
- If you could change one thing about our culture’s political heritage/history, what would it be?
- What’s the legacy of your first embarrassment?
- What’s the legacy of your first award/triumph?
- It’s been said that we are remembered for the rules we break. What broken rule might you be remembered by?

## Option E

### *Which Heritage Quote Calls to You?*

Sometimes we read a quote and it perfectly captures what’s going on for us right now. Or it 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 illuminates your journey with the gift of heritage.**

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

*This list of questions is an aid for deep reflection. They are meant not so much to be answered as to take you somewhere.*

*Read through the list 2-3 times until one question sticks out for you and captures your attention, or as some faith traditions say, until one of the questions "shimmers."*

*Then reflect on that question by asking yourself:*

- *What is going on in my life right now that makes this question so pronounced for me?*
- *What memory is this question inviting me to revisit? And why?*
- *How might Life or your inner voice be trying to offer me a word of comfort or challenge through this question?*

*Writing out your thoughts often enables you to go deeper. It also sometimes helps to read the list of questions 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 metaphor best describes your relationship to your family heritage? A giant hug? A dinner table with everyone talking at once? An anchor? A guidepost?
2. What story told by (or about) your ancestors has shaped you the most?
3. How has staying close to your ancestors been healing for you?
4. If you could talk to one of your ancestors, who would you choose? And what would you ask them?
5. What is your favorite family memento? And why does it have such a hold on you?
6. If you could change one thing about your family heritage, what would it be?
7. Often parents consciously or unconsciously transfer their unfulfilled dreams onto their children. What have you learned about dancing with your parents' unfulfilled dreams?
8. How have your ancestors helped you understand and hold on to beauty?
9. What story do you want to be remembered by?
10. What article of clothing ties you to your ancestors?
11. We usually think of heritage as tied to people, but *places* shape us as much as our family trees. What "inheritance" was passed on to you by your childhood hometown or childhood house?
12. What's the legacy of your first embarrassment?
13. What's the legacy of your first award/triumph?
14. It's been said that we are remembered for the rules we break. What broken rule might you be remembered by? What rule did your parents break?
15. **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 Gift of Heritage.*

### Wise Words

The past is never dead. It's not even past.

*William Faulkner*

History doesn't repeat itself, but it does rhyme.

*Mark Twain*

Some people are your relatives, but others are your ancestors, and you choose the ones you want to have as ancestors. You create yourself out of those values.

*Ralph Ellison*

In times like these, I look to the past. I come from people not meant to survive, and here is our bloodline, stronger than ever.

*Brittany Packnett*

Walking. I am listening in a deeper way. Suddenly all my ancestors are behind me. Be still, they say. Watch and listen. You are the result of the love of thousands.

[Linda Hogan](#)

To acknowledge our ancestors means we are aware that we did not make ourselves.

*Alice Walker*

When a society or a civilization perishes, one condition can always be found. They forgot where they came from.

*Carl Sandburg*

When heritage becomes a box instead of an inspiration, it has gone too far.

*Brandon Sanderson*

When we lie about the past, we steal from the future.

[Abigail Bengson](#)

My father used to say that stories are part of the most precious heritage of humankind.

*Tahir Shah*

The Dead are our nearest neighbors.

*John O'Donohue*

We are a collage—a remix—of our ancestors. We have spiritual DNA, as well as physical, and our lot in life is to answer the questions posed by the people who came before us.

[Austin Kleon](#)

I became aware of the fateful links between me and my ancestors. I feel very strongly that I am under the influence of things or questions which were left incomplete and unanswered by my parents and grandparents and more distant ancestors... It has always seemed to me that I had to answer questions which fate had posed to my forefathers, and which had not yet been answered, or as if I had to complete, or perhaps continue, things which previous ages had left unfinished.

[Carl Jung](#)

Whereas history pleads, "Protect what we put into place!" Heritage urges, "Know the plotline of which you are a part." History is what happened; Heritage is a story still unfolding. History tends to trap us in tales about what they did; Heritage inevitably gets us talking about what we are called to do.

*Rev. Scott Tayler*

If something did go terribly wrong in human history – and given the current state of the world, it's hard to deny something did – then perhaps it began to go wrong precisely when people started losing that freedom to imagine and enact other forms of social existence, to such a degree that some now feel this particular type of freedom hardly even existed, or was barely exercised, for the greater part of human history.

[David Graeber](#)

There's a tension in me. I've lived with what Toni Morrison calls the white gaze... while I was writing This Here Flesh, I had to keep asking myself, "Who's in the room with you, Cole?" I'm almost embarrassed to say how many times the answer was some white intellectual man that didn't care about me... these kind of specters, these haunts were just looming over my writing and I had to kind of keep exorcizing the room and say, "No, I know who I want in the room with me. I want my ancestors. I want my own voice, my own soul."

[Cole Arthur Riley](#), on the heritage of [the white gaze](#)

Here is what I would like for you to know: In America, it is traditional to destroy the black body — it is heritage.

[Ta-Nehisi Coates](#)

This is the thing: If you have the option to not think about or even consider history,... that's how you know you're on board the ship that serves hors d'oeuvres and fluffs your pillows, while others are out at sea, swimming or drowning, or clinging to little inflatable rafts that they have to take turns keeping inflated, people short of breath, who've never even heard of the words hors d'oeuvres or fluff.

[Tommy Orange](#)

The mission of your life should be to leave a better world behind than what you inherited.

*Sri Ravi Shankar*

You are remembered for the rules you break.

*Douglas MacArthur*

God's love remains your heritage

*Anonymous Christian minister*

### Where I'm From

[George Ella Lyon](#)

Full poem found [HERE](#)

I am from the forsythia bush  
the Dutch elm  
whose long-gone limbs I remember  
as if they were my own.  
I'm from the know-it-alls and the pass-it-ons...  
I'm from He restoreth my soul...  
I am from those moments--  
snapped before I budded...

### Remember the Sky

*Joy Harjo*

Full poem found [HERE](#)

Video reflection [HERE](#)

Remember your birth, how your mother struggled to give you form and breath. You are evidence of her life, and her mother's, and hers...

Remember the earth whose skin you are...

Remember you are all people and all people are you..."

## 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 [The Gift of Heritage](#).

Click [here](#) for all [Spotify playlists](#).

Click [here](#) for the YouTube playlist on [The Gift of Heritage](#).

Click [here](#) for all the [YouTube playlists](#).

## Videos & Podcasts

Sinead O'Connor - Arsenio Hall 1991

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mAf7fGEeRQs>

On the legacy of a moral vision we forget

On the Heritage & Origin of "Race"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=926PqQUOV0g>

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vm-L9\\_yjY0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vm-L9_yjY0)

Abigail DeVille Listens to History

<https://art21.org/watch/new-york-close-up/abigail-deville-listens-to-history/>

Calling out official American history as "garbage," Abigail DeVille uses discarded materials herself, like old furniture and tattered flags, to construct complex room-sized installations evoking the overlooked histories of Black Americans in all its messiness and grandeur...



### What is Generational Trauma?

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

### Can Trauma Be Inherited?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NuIM39dcUs4&t=74s>

### The Secret To Healing Trauma - Dr. Gabor Mate

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wgJJDBNkoQ8>

### Reflecting On The Past To Understand The Present

<https://www.npr.org/2018/06/14/607757718/looking-back-reflecting-on-the-past-to-understand-the-present>

“So often we get stuck in the past, rehashing what we should have done, and what we no longer have...”

### Debate: The World Will Be a Better Place in 5, 50 and 500 years

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FYhvGnExyZc&t=1237s>

### On What the Heritage of AI Will Be...

- **Holding AI Accountable**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oAxNkehgZEU>
- **AI Expert's Urgent Wake-Up Call**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hY8upuGzQBg>
- **Can Neurotechnology Already Read Our Minds?**  
<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/intelligence-squared/id708371900?i=1000614321786>

## Articles

### Reflections on the 1980s Article II Revision—and Why it's Time to Revise Again

<https://www.uuworld.org/articles/80sarticleii>

On our heritage of updating our guiding UU values.

### Remembering The Black Empowerment Tragedy - UU World Magazine

<https://www.uuworld.org/articles/empowerment-tragedy>

### Channeling African Heritage to Empower Black Children

<https://www.thisiscolossal.com/2023/06/creativesoul-photography/>

### Barbie Answers Oppenheimer

<https://annehelen.substack.com/p/barbie-answers-oppenheimer>

On challenging the heritage of a masculinist vision of the world

## Books

### [Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents](#)

*Isabel Wilkerson*

### [Kindred](#)

*Octavia Butler*

### [There There](#)

*Tommy Orange*

### [The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity](#)

*David Graeber & David Wengrow*

## Movies & T.V.

### [The Bear](#)

On the haunting heritage of grief and the love that gets us through.

### [Harriet](#)

[Coco](#) (*family friendly*)

### Movies and TV on the potential inheritance of A.I.

[Ex Machina](#)

[Three Black Mirror Episodes on A.I. Her](#)

## 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 Taylor. 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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