Unitarian Church of Montpelier

Soul Matters Circle

New Participant Guide

There is a quality of listening that is possible among a circle of human beings, who by their attentiveness to one another create a space in which each person is able to give voice to the truth of his or her life. There is the miracle of authentic narrative, made possible by listening that holds still long enough to let the truth be told. Where there is this kind of listening and speaking, a new kind of community is born - a community of life.

- Rebecca Parker, Unitarian Theologian

I pin my hopes to quiet processes and small circles, in which vital and transforming events take place.

- Rufus Jones, Quaker historian & theologian

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PART I: Helping Each Other Become the People We Most Want To Be

Unitarian Universalism is about connection. We are a religion that sees people struggling, not against our own sinful souls, but against a shallow, frantic and materialistic world that all-too-often leaves us disconnected from our deepest selves, life's gifts and needs greater than one's own. And so our congregations work to heal that divide by helping each other listen to our deepest selves, open to life's gifts and serve needs greater than our own. Soul Matters supports this mission of helping people listen, open, and serve by offering its participants:

- Formative space & circles of learning, support and challenge
- Opportunities for spiritual deepening and practice
- An intimate home within a larger church community

...so they become the people they want to be.

In other words, Soul Matters is about ***becoming***.

PART II: We Create ~ Formative Space

The core purpose of Soul Matters is to create formative space for individuals. This is a space of acceptance and safety in which group members can explore their deepest values and inner voice without judgment or coercion. The below reading explains the power and importance of this sacred space.

The Soul is Shy: The Importance of Deep Listening and Formative Space

Parker J. Palmer, from A Hidden Wholeness

So what do we do in a circle of trust? We speak our own truth; we listen receptively to the truth of others; we ask each other honest, open questions instead of giving counsel; and we offer each other the healing and empowering gifts of silence and laughter... Our purpose is not to teach anyone anything but to give the inner teacher a chance to teach us.

Spaces designed to welcome the soul and support the inner journey are rare. But the principles and practices that shape such spaces are neither new nor untested. Some are embedded in monastic tradition, for the monastery is the archetypal "community of solitudes." Some emerged over four hundred years of Quaker faith and practice. Some were revived in the transpersonal psychology movement of the mid-twentieth century. And some are embodied in the processes of spiritual formation that can be found at the heart of most of the world's great wisdom traditions.

"Formation" may be the best name for what happens in a circle of trust, because the word refers, historically, to soul-work done in a communal setting. But a quick disclaimer is in order, since "formation" sometimes means a process in which the pressure of orthodox doctrine, sacred text, and institutional authority is applied to the misshapen soul in order to conform it to the shape dictated by some theology. This approach is rooted in the idea that we are born with souls deformed by sin, and our situation is hopeless until the authorities "form" us properly.

But all of that is turned upside down by the principles of a circle of trust. In a circle of trust, formation flows from the belief that we are born with souls in perfect form. As time goes on, we are subject to powers of deformation, from within as well as without, that twist us into shapes quite different from the shape of the soul. But the soul never loses its original form, and never stops calling us back to our birthright integrity.

In a circle of trust, the powers of deformation are held at bay long enough for the soul to emerge and speak its truth. Here, we are not required to conform ourselves to some external template. Instead, we are invited to conform our lives to the shape of our own souls. In a circle of trust we can grow our selfhood like a plant-from the potential within the seed of the soul, in ground made fertile by the quality of our relationships, toward the light of our own wholeness—trusting the soul to know its own shape better than any external authority ever can.

PART III: We Embrace ~ A Theology of Connection

The Soul Matters approach is central to our Unitarian Universalist Theology

Our Unitarian Universalist theology is complex and yet at the same time it can also be boiled down to a single focus on healing spiritual disconnection. To put it simply, our congregations gather to heal disconnection by listening to our deepest selves, opening to life's gifts and serving needs greater than our own. Soul Matters is a container in which we explore the genuine meaning of this theology in our lives. Below are five distinctive attributes of our Soul Matters program. They are our way of supporting this journey toward a deeper connection with ourselves, the mystery of life, and others.

1. Soul Matters is Rooted in a Theology Focused on Spiritual Connection.

Many of us grew up in a Christian context galvanized around the theological idea of sin. From such a perspective, one looks out at the world and notices people struggling with a sense of themselves and the wider human community as tragically flawed, and even in some cases, impure. Thus, religious communities grounded in this perspective see their primary gift to the world as forgiveness, or in some cases, a means to purity. We Unitarian Universalists see the world from a different perspective. When we look out, what we notice most are the many people struggling with spiritual disconnection. We see ourselves and many around us hungering to re-connect with their deepest selves, life's gifts and needs greater than their own. Helping people with this struggle is the focus on Unitarian Universalism and our congregation. And so we speak of the job of the church as offering people three lifelines, captured simply in the phrase: "Listen, Open, Serve." This is what we are about: we heal spiritual disconnection by helping people listen to their deepest selves, open to life's gifts and serve needs greater than their own.

With this theology in mind, many of us are moved by the way spiritual writer and small group advocate, Parker Palmer, talks about small groups as helping people survive "the blizzard of the world." He writes,

> There was a time when farmers on the Great Plains, at the first sign of a blizzard, would run a rope from the back door of their house out to the barn. They all knew stories of people who had wandered off and been frozen to death, having lost sight of home in a whiteout while still in their own backyards.
>
> Today we live in a blizzard of another sort. It swirls around us as economic injustice, ecological ruin, physical and spiritual violence, and their inevitable outcome, war. It swirls within us as fear and frenzy, greed and deceit, and indifference to the suffering of others. We all know stories of people who have wandered off into this madness and been separated from their own souls, losing their moral bearings and even their mortal lives.
>
> The lost ones come from every walk of life: clergy and corporate executives, politicians and people on the street, celebrities and schoolchildren. Some of us fear that we, or

those we love, will become lost in the storm. Some of us are lost at this moment and are trying to find our way home. Some are lost without knowing it. Some of us have just reached for the rope. Others are in the middle of the journey trying to keep hold of our grip. Others have just arrived home.
My own experience of the blizzard, which includes getting lost in it more often than I like to admit, tells me that the soul's order and life's hope can never be destroyed. It may be obscured by the common compassion of friends, that rope is always close at hand, …offering, time after time, the chance to regain our bearings…and find our way home again.

From A Hidden Wholeness

The gift of Parker Palmer's words is to remind us that we all on some level are struggling to find our way back home--to what we care most deeply about and who we most want to be. So Soul Matters is not just "an evening of good discussion" or "an opportunity for intellectual stimulation" or even " a chance to meet new friends." At its best, it is a path back home.

2. Soul Matters is an Opportunity to Explore the Worship Themes in More Depth.
(and get the bonus of spiritual connection to the church as a whole)

Soul Matters is not a "stand alone" program. It is inextricably connected to the worship life of our congregation by providing group members with opportunities to explore our congregation's monthly worship themes in more depth. Besides helping us go deeper, this has the added benefit of connecting us to the wider church community. Since we are all dealing with the same theme, we have a point of connection that allows us to feel part of the same journey (and even strike up a conversation a bit more easily!)

It is important to stress that Soul Matters groups are *not* sermon discussion groups. The goal is not to explore *the sermons* in more depth, but to explore *the monthly theme* in more depth. Having the sermons in the background enriches the experience, but they are not the focus. The focus is on the monthly questions and a spiritual exercises, which provide a different kind of experience than worship offers.

And that leads us to the next distinctive aspect of Soul Matters:

3. Soul Matters is an Invitation to Experience the Worship Theme, Not Just Talk about It.

Unitarian Universalists want to do more than just read and talk about spiritual topics. Provocative readings are important. Thinking about and discussing a topic is important. But there is nothing like experiential learning. Indeed many of us learn and process concepts best through direct experience.

Given this, group members are given a "spiritual exercise" each month to engage prior to the meeting. For instance, when we wrestled with the concept of grace, we didn't just read what theologians had to say about it, we also challenged ourselves to find a way to bring grace (a gift one doesn't expect, earn or even deserve) into another person's life. We did the same with the topic of prayer; we didn't just read theories and perspectives on prayer, we challenged ourselves to find a new way to pray (or even try prayer for the first time!). These spiritual exercises differ radically month to month. Sometimes they are profound and involved. Other times, simple and playful. Sometimes members report having "the most moving experience of my life." Other times, they come in and say "I'm not sure that worked for me, but it did make me realize..." No matter what, we ask members to try the exercises, believing that—whether you "enjoyed" it or not—the experience of doing it will help you learn something about life and yourself--something that sitting in a room just thinking about the topic never could.

One last thought: we've recently begun to think of our spiritual exercises as koans. In Zen practice, koans are thought of as "unanswerable questions." The point is not to "figure it out" or "find the right answer." In fact, many spiritual questions cannot be answered by the rational mind but must be experienced. The meaning is in the engagement, wherever that engagement leads. They take us on a journey whose destination is neither right nor wrong, but always enriching. At their best, this is what our spiritual exercises do for us.

It is also important to stress the difference between spiritual exercises and spiritual practice. Our monthly exercises are not intended to take the place of on-going, even daily practices that center us. They supplement our practices and ask us to delve deeper.

4. Soul Matters Offers Questions To Walk With, Not Talk Through.

Soul Matters also takes a unique approach to questions. Most small group material includes discussion questions. In this traditional model, questions serve as group tools to keep the discussion focused and structured. Soul Matters uses questions differently. We see them as tools for *individual* exploration. Instead of asking our groups to go through the questions one by one and discussion them, we invite group members to read all the questions ahead of time and find the one or two questions that "hook them"--that speak to them in some dramatic or challenging way. We then invite the group members to "live with" or "walk with" that question for the few weeks leading up to the group. One way to put this is to say: "Find the question that hooks you and let it take you on a ride." Group members then come to the meeting, not with an answer to each of the questions on the list, but with a story about the one or two questions that spoke to them and lead to deeper, personal learning. In this sense, the questions serve as an additional spiritual exercise, another experiential exercise prior to the group that helps them connect the theme with their daily living or personal history.

5. Soul Matters is a Reminder That UUism is Distinctive, Not an "Anything Goes" Religion

Each month, our theme focuses us on a spiritual value that our faith tradition has historically honored and emphasized. So with each meeting, we are reminded that our faith dreams of a preferred way for us

to be in the world, challenging each of us to ask **"What does it mean to live a life with these *particular* values front and center?"** There's an important reminder here: Unitarian Universalism is *not* a religion of "anything goes." Rather our faith has a unique vision of the good life. Yes, we affirm personal choice and individuality, but there are some core values that our faith asks all of us to engage, take seriously and apply to our daily living.

PART IV: We Create ~ Community

In Soul Matters we engage each other in a covenantal relationship. So we commit to honoring a particular format and clear relational commitments during our group meetings. Through these promises to each other, we find meaning and connection. Below is the format and covenant we use to accomplish this.

Meeting Format

Meetings usually last 2 hours and follow this structure:

- **Opening:** Chalice Lighting and Centering Words. Facilitators offer opening words from a favorite poet/writer or by using a small section of the readings that were assigned for that month. Some leaders offer meditative words or a prayer. There are lots of ways to do this. Each group finds what fits them best.

- **Brief Check-In:** Members briefly share what is going on in their lives. The goal is to get beyond chit-chat and do more than "catch up." The technique that is most often used is to ask members to briefly share "how it is with your spirit" by commenting on one thing that is "pulling at or draining your spirit" and one thing that is "feeding, filling or lifting up your spirit." Each member usually takes only a couple minutes to share. This part of the meeting typically it takes no more 20 minutes.

- **Discussion of the Spiritual Exercise:** Discussions start with members sharing their experience of doing the spiritual exercise. Common questions that facilitators ask are: "What was it like for you to attempt the exercise?" "Did it lead to any unexpected feelings or insights?" "Did it go as you expected?" "How did it challenge, change or deepen your understanding of this month's theme?"

  This is where we work hard to practice deep listening. To start, there is no back and forth conversation. Instead group members focus on listening and providing each other with the formative space to hear ourselves think or, as Parker Palmer puts it, to let our shy soul speak

  It is only after everyone has had a chance to share, that the facilitator opens the floor and invites members into a time of reflective conversation. This is when members speak from their own experience, and comment on the connections they saw between each other's stories and experiences. A common question at this point is: "How did listening to everyone else help you see or learn something new about your own story?"

  This is absolutely *not* a time to offer advice or argue about who's right. We follow the guidelines of "no fixing, no saving, no advising, no setting each other straight!"

- **Discussion of the "Questions To Wrestle With":** We don't treat these questions like "homework." We do not engage every single one. Instead, participants look them over a couple weeks ahead of time and find the one that "hooks" them most. Then they let that question take them "on a ride." They live with it for a while and allow it to regularly break into--and break open--their ordinary thoughts. And then we come to our Soul Matters meeting prepared to share that journey with our group.

- **Check-Out:** Meetings end by each member briefly sharing a statement of gratitude. Facilitators ask participants to think about what they've experienced together that evening and then lift up one comment or experience for which they are particularly grateful.

- **Closing**: Groups end by extinguishing the chalice and sharing a closing reading or offering closing words.

Group Covenant

A covenant is a list of the ways we agree to be together as a group. The idea of covenant is central to Unitarian Universalism. Historically, we've been a covenantal religion rather than a creedal religion. In other words, we are bound by the way we promise to treat each other, rather than by common beliefs and creeds. So forming a covenant isn't just good group technique, it is a core Unitarian Universalist practice. It is the means by which we are held together in community.

When starting a new group, a group covenant is one of the first things discussed and affirmed. Facilitators also promise to have the group revisit and re-affirm the covenant yearly. The following covenant is popular among our Soul Matters groups. Most groups end up adopting it as is, but every group is encouraged to adapt it to its unique characteristics and desired ways of being together.

Soul Matters Group Covenant Template

As group members,

Before our meetings, we agree to:
- make meetings a priority, including being on time.
- contact one of the co-facilitators ahead of time if we are unable to attend.
- read the material and engage the assigned spiritual exercise.

During our meetings, we agree to:
- practice deep listening, offering each other time to share without interruption.
- the practice of "no fixing, no saving, no advising, no setting each other straight!" during times of discussion and cross-talk.
- monitor the length and frequency of our own participation so all members have opportunities to speak.
- speak for ourselves and try to speak from both the heart and the intellect.
- make time to say good bye when a member decides to leave the group.
- periodically revisit, edit and re-affirm this covenant as a group.

After our meetings, we agree to:
- follow up with other members as needed, especially anyone who miss a meeting without notice to make sure they are okay.
- respect the privacy of group members by keeping personal information confidential.
- keep each other in our prayers and hearts, reaching out to each other in tangible ways to ensure that we are a caring community for one another.
- actively keep a look out for other church members who might need and fit with our group, recognizing that inviting is the job of us all and a way of expressing our gratitude for the gifts we've found through our group. We will make sure potential new members are introduced to our group facilitator so they can go over the New Participant Packet with them.

As the facilitator, I will...
- start and end meetings on time.
- make sure all voices are heard.
- help the group be a circle of caring and concern.
- ensure that another group member facilitates if I cannot attend.
- ensure that the group periodically revisits and re-affirms this covenant.
- let the group know in advance that a new member will be joining the group.
- welcome new members with intentionality by personally meeting with them to go over the New Participant Packet to make sure they are comfortable with and agree to our process.
- ensure we make time for the group to say good-bye to members who leave.

PART V: An Example Monthly Packet

November 2013

What Does It Mean To Live A Life Of Rootedness?

Many of us sing it every Sunday: "Roots hold me close; wings set me free. Spirit of life, come to me, come to me." These lines from our beloved hymn, Spirit of Life, are a window into one of Unitarian Universalism's most radical theological assertions: Divinity and spirit are encountered not through blind faith or forgiveness of sin, but through remaining rooted in our deepest and most unique selves. For UUs, the religious search has more to do with the hunger for authenticity than for redemption.

Indeed, who of us is not felt an ache for "home."? We live in a culture that is constantly challenging the connection to our deepest selves. Speed and noise make it almost impossible to hear the call of our inner voice. The cult of celebrity and marketing urge us to imitate others. Consumerism celebrates the accumulation of stuff rather than the knowledge of self. Capitalism requires us to be mobile rather than rooted in community. All of it adding up to a nagging and numbing sense of shallowness.

So this month we invite each other into the radically counter-cultural practice of simply reconnecting with ourselves.

For some of us this will be a journey back into our ancestry. For others it will involve remembering stories from our childhood. Some will hopefully rediscover the importance of community and neighborliness. Others will rightly recommit to core values that have sat dormant for far too long. And all of us should leave this month feeling a little less lost and a lot more found.

There is a Jewish story that gets told from our pulpits at least once a year. It is the story of the great Rabbi Zusha, who was found agitated and upset as he lay on deathbed. His students asked, "Rebbe, why are you so sad? After all the the great things you have accomplished, your place in heaven is assured!" "I'm afraid!" Zusha replied, "Because when I get to heaven, God won't ask me 'Why weren't you more like Moses?' or 'Why weren't you more like King David?' God will ask 'Zusha, why weren't you more like Zusha?' And then what will I say!?"

We love this story because it reminds us of the power of particularity. Knowing your unique self doesn't just feel good; it indeed sets you free. Heaven is not an escape from this life; it is finally living into the life that is truly yours.

That's what roots do. They give us ourselves back.

So, here's to a month of holding on to and being held by our roots more closely!

Our Spiritual Exercises:

OPTION A:

What Has Today Taught You about Rootedness?

1. *Take a blank sheet of paper and write at the top, "I'm most at home when..."*
2. *Then, for 5 to 10 days, sit down in the evening and complete that sentence anew each night.*

The goal of this simple exercise is not only to pay attention to the many sources of connection that surround you, but also to be surprised. At the end of this exercise, you are likely to see a pattern that you hadn't noticed before. Or maybe you'll discover a new source of rootedness that wants more of your attention. Come to your group ready to read your list.

OPTION B:

What Three Things Would You Take?

We've heard the question (and a few of us even have been faced with it): If your house was on fire or a storm was on its way, what three things would you quickly grab on the way out of your house? Don't rush this exercise. Take a week to look around. Come to your group with the list of (or actual items) three things that you would want to hold onto in order to hold on to yourself.

OPTION C:

If you had to choose one story to explain your roots, what would it be?

There is a deep connection between rootedness and storytelling. We all have at least one story that others need to hear in order to truly know and understand who we are. What one story would you use to explain yourself to others? What one story do you frequently return to to remember who you are? Bring it with you to your group.

Questions To Live With:

*As always, don't treat these questions like "homework." You do not need to engage every single one. Instead, simply look them over and find **the one** that "hooks" you most. Then let it take you on a ride. Live with it for a while. Allow it to regularly break into--and break open--your ordinary thoughts. And then come to your Soul Matters meeting prepared to share that journey with your group.*

Do you feel more or less rooted the older you get?

What roots you most? People? Places? Ideas? Stories? Hopes? Values?

Are there ways in which you are overly-rooted? Stuck in commitments? Overly attached? Needing to find roots that feed you and free you, rather than bind you and leave you feeling tangled up?

How do we know if we are too rooted or not rooted enough?

Can you name three ways by which you offer (or offered) your children roots?

What is your commitment to justice rooted in? What guides and animates your passion for justice? A personal experience? A philosophical perspective? An emotion, such as empathy? Would you say that your ethics are abstract and universal or rooted in your personal history?

Is there a difference between "feeling rooted" and "experiencing the divine"?

Are you still seeking home or have you found it?

Does technology (cell phones, facebook, email, etc) serve your sense of rootedness or leave you disconnected?

When has wandering helped you become more rooted?

How do you describe the connection between rootedness and love? Robert Fulghum says that home is wherever his wife is. Would you say the same?

When do you feel the least lonely? Some of us feel most lonely in crowds? Others of us need the energy of people in order to come alive? For some, rootedness involves a relationship with our pets or the woods. What enables you to feel connected and rooted once again?

Do you know what future you are rooted in? Christian philosopher, Simone Weil, claims that rootedness involves relating to both "particular treasures of the past and certain particular expectations for the future." How is this true for you?

If you had to choose one story to explain your roots, what would it be?

Recommended Resources:

As always, this is not required reading. We will not analyze or dissect these pieces in our group. They are simply meant to get your thinking started, and maybe to open you to new ways of thinking about what it means to "live a life of rootedness."

First Thoughts:

"So for 39 years I've bounced around the Greater Rochester area. Each place was only temporary, a stop over/place holder for my real home; I never really fit in. I'm at home the most when I'm in the woods, camping in a canvas tent or blanket & oil cloth. It really doesn't matter much where the woods are; I'm at home, rooted in my comfort zone. There is some place between where I physically live and my true comfort zone, where I'm 'rooted.' My soul comes alive, there are endless possibilities, life is an exciting adventure - THIS is the place where I'm rooted! Rootedness is a mindset - not a place. Rootedness is an awareness of possibility, an energy - positive, creative, boundless."
- Soul Matters Facilitator

"I sit here at Blenheim, surrounded by generations of Blantons; buffeted by memories. Everywhere I look I see beloved faces and in my head I hear the laughter and the hustle and bustle of days gone by when this old house was filled with my grandparents, parents, aunts and uncles, myriad cousins and the vast number of other relatives and friends who somehow felt Blenheim was home. But most of them are gone now and today the old house is empty and silent. It occasionally creaks and groans as the furnace roars on or the water pipes gurgle and knock. It seems to be held together not by rusty nails and hinges, frail timbers and old plantation-made hardware, but by sheer will to survive." - Soul Matters Facilitator

Wise Words:

"Be sure you put your feet in the right place, then stand firm." – Abraham Lincoln

"To be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul. It is one of the hardest to define. A human being has roots by virtue of his real, active and natural participation in the life of a community which preserves in living shape certain particular treasures of the past and certain particular expectations for the future."
– Simone Weil

"What can you do to promote world peace? Go home and love your family"
– Mother Teresa

"'Where's home for you?' a stranger asked a fellow traveler. "Wherever she is,' came the reply, as the man pointed at his wife."
- Overheard conversation from Robert Fulghum

"When despair for the world grows in me and I wake in the night at the least sound in fear o what my life and my children's lives may be, I go and lie down where the wood drake rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds. I come into the peace of wild things who do not tax their lives with forethought of grief. I come into the presence of still water. And I feel above me the day-blind stars waiting with their light. For a time I rest in the grace of the world, and am free."
– Wendell Berry

"The whole story is about place. They prevent you from owning it and so they take from your life what they take… Because of the many places that the circumstances of the Diaspora made us live in, and because we so often had to leave them, our places lost their meaning and their concreteness… The vagrant holds on to nothing… Places for him are means of transport to other places, to other conditions, as though they were wine or shoes."
– Palestinian poet Mourid Barghouti

"You can't go tramping around from church to church to fulfill your obligations. You've got to settle on one church and throw your life into it, and build it up. Who would want to go to a picnic all the time and eat out of other people's baskets? It's our obligation as members of one church to give ourselves to it. You've got to feel that you are part of the greatest organization on earth that is going to outlast all the rest of them. You've got to feel the importance of your own individual participation in its life. The church is the only hope of peace and good will to all [people] that exists among us. It's the last hope of the earth, and yours is a high and holy opportunity to support it with undeviating loyalty."
- Carl Sandburg,

I love the dark hours of my being.
My mind deepens into them.

There I can find, as in old letters,
the days of my life, already lived,
and held like a legend, and understood.

Then the knowing comes: I can open
to another life that's wide and timeless.

So I am sometimes like a tree
rustling over a gravesite
and making real the dream
of the one its living roots
embrace:

a dream once lost
among sorrows and songs.
~ Ranier Maria Rilke

Videos:

TED Talk: Pico Iyer: Where is Home?
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3m6dV7Xo3Vc
"Writer Pico Iyer -- who himself has three or four 'origins' -- meditates on the meaning of home, where we truly come from, the joy of traveling and the serenity of standing still."

The Time You Have (In Jelly Beans)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=BOksW_NabEk

The Overview Effect
http://www.karmatube.org/videos.php?id=4066
"Forty years ago, the astronauts of Apollo 8 orbited the moon for the first time and snapped the iconic "Blue Marble" photographs of the earth from space. It was not only an image of stunning beauty; it represented a powerful new perspective of earthly life and its place within the cosmos. It produced a radical shift in self-awareness."

"Mother Trees Connect the Forest"
http://www.karmatube.org/videos.php?id=2764
"Professor Suzanne Simard shows that all trees in a forest ecosystem are interconnected, with the largest, oldest, "mother trees" serving as hubs."

God Grew Tired of Us: Sense of Place & Community
http://video.nationalgeographic.com/video/movies/god-grew-tired/sense-of-place-ggtu/
In America, the Lost Boys reflect on the culture they left behind and reminisce about life back in Sudan.
Roots (1977)
TV Mini-series
"A dramatization of author Alex Haley's family line from ancestor Kunta Kinte's enslavement to his descendants' liberation."

Visual meditation on rootedness
George Grimm Howell, UU
http://geospirituality.com/rootedness.html

My Hometown
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=77gKSp8WoRg
Bruce Springsteen's ode to staying loyal to the place that is home & the people who raised you.

Books:

Rooted in the Land: Essays on Community and Place
By William Vitek and Wes Jackson
"This collection of 34 essays by philosophers, theologians, farmers, political scientists, economists, and academicians examines the role of the community and sense of place in our lives."

From Where We Stand: Recovering a Sense of Place
By Deborah Tall
This book, set in the Finger Lakes region of New York, is a "discussion of the importance of place to humankind and reflects on sacred ground and boundaries, among other topics."

Dwellings: A Spiritual History of the Living World
By Linda Hogan
"Award-winning Chickasaw poet and novelist Linda Hogan explores her lifelong love of the living world and all its inhabitants."

The Things They Carried
By Tim O'Brien

Articles:

"Young: Family Ties Do Not Stop at Border with Mexico"
http://www.chron.com/opinion/outlook/article/Young-Family-ties-do-not-stop-at-border-with-4866791.php

"Loneliness Is Deadly"
http://www.slate.com/articles/health_and_science/medical_examiner/2013/08/dangers_of_loneliness_social_isolation_is_deadlier_than_obesity.html

"Unambitious Loser with Happy, Fulfilling Life Still Lives in Hometown"

http://www.theonion.com/articles/unambitious-loser-with-happy-fulfilling-life-still,33233/
A satirical look from "The Onion" at how we often view "success" in relation to our roots.

"Tradition, Rootedness, and Freedom"
http://www.patheos.com/blogs/allergicpagan/2011/10/26/tradition-rootedness-and-freedom/

"Three Timeless Parables for Regaining Perspective"
http://www.dailygood.org/more.php?n=4871

The Power of the Particular
By David Brooks
On the sometimes faux sense of belonging we can support and argues for a deeper commitment to places.
http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/26/opinion/brooks-the-power-of-the-particular.html?_r=0&pagewanted=print

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