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# Connecting

In churches, September is the month of (re)connecting. Although many of us have been present during the summer, we welcome the travelers, the sailors, the hikers, the vacationers, and the late sleepers to resume their attendance at worship, or downstairs with the children, or at committee meetings and programs. September carries the expectation that we are all together again. After time apart, we are reconnected...

...which invites us to ask whether “connecting” is really optional to our community, a choice we are each free to make when, where, and with whom we want. Is “connecting” any different, any deeper, than “friending” someone on social media where we interact through carefully curated photos and posts in a comfortable echo chamber?

Albert Schweitzer offers a different take entirely when he writes:

Just as the wave cannot exist for itself,  
but is ever a part of the heaving surface of the ocean,  
so must I never live my life for itself,  
but always in the experience which is going on around me.

For Schweitzer, life is connected so inextricably that disconnecting is not even a possibility. Interdependence is a done deal in the universe. Nothing has existed, now exists, or ever will exist that does not affect the whole. Schweitzer would not understand the connecting as an abstract theory, or merely one of many options. He experiences it as a universal law, as immutable as gravity. Choosing to ignore the task of “connecting” as a steady practice has brought us to this time when we can see, feel, hear, touch and taste the peril of any belief that our choice (individually, personally) does not matter to the thriving of the universe.

So which will it be? With which kind of connecting will you engage? Will I engage?

In a divided world it is profoundly tempting to retreat to our personal islands of comfort rather than wrestle fully with the messy business of relationship. It is far simpler to interface with media than it is to interface with real, complex human beings. Add that social media encourages us to be superficial, to mask our vulnerabilities. 160 keystrokes on X (formerly, Twitter) cannot capture my paradoxes or yours. In that arena, my true, complicated, humanity is carefully hidden from yours, and we are each left alone to face the events that rend the fabric of our very lives.

Spiritual connecting, as Schweitzer points out, is different not merely in degree, but in essence.

As a spiritual practice, we claim the interdependence that is captured in the simple statement, “Nothing supersedes ‘we.’” Buddhists carry that to its logical conclusion and say that our only permanence is in our interdependence which crosses generations, indeed eons, before and beyond time itself. We rise as wave, return to the whole, perhaps rise again, and return again.

Embodying “connecting” is not about finding a home or community to shelter us, but about living as home. Mi casa es su casa is a proclamation of open boundaries, a spiritual commitment to be vulnerable at the edges, to welcome what you offer whether I understand it, or agree with it, or find it convenient...or not. It affirms that when I am disappointed in how my community behaves, or how you, specifically, behave, I will continue to engage and to open my doors to your presence so that our legacy—ours together—may heal what has been broken and bind up what has been torn. Community is, in fact, that amazing space in which we practice this radical skill of being fully self and fully “we.”

So, perhaps September is not really about (re)connecting, but about recommitting to the daily, hourly discipline of connecting which is our vocation in community on behalf of all that was, is, will be.

May it be so.

Andrea La Sonde Anastos for the Theme Team



Photomontage by Gerd Altman

# Spiritual Practices

## Option A

### Deepening Connections

In Relational Mindfulness, Deborah Eden Tull suggests ways to deepen our connections with ourselves, each other, and the planet. Set your intention to do at least one of the following each day during your time of preparation for Chalice Circle:

- Enjoy the spaciousness of pure awareness or doing nothing but being.
- Slow down and savor an ordinary life experience, such as drinking tea or performing a task at your authentic pace.
- Welcome yourself exactly as you are during an uncomfortable moment, meeting discomfort with curiosity instead of judgment.
- Make yourself available to experience genuine connection with another human being, allowing yourself to be vulnerable, giving them your full nonjudgmental attention, and listening deeply.
- Experience yourself as part of the earth by spending time in nature, interacting with plants or animals, or eating.

At the end of the day, reflect on your practice(s) of connection. What were the qualities you noticed in each of these moments? Consider making notes to share in your Chalice Circle.

## Option B

### Freudenfreude

*Freudenfreude*, the opposite of *schadenfreude* (taking pleasure in another's misfortune), is finding and expressing joy in another's success or happiness. Researchers have found that finding joy in the joy of others is an antidote to depression, but it also allows for connecting more deeply with others.

Consider practicing these ways to cultivate freudenfreude:

1. Look for success, bliss, achievement, happiness, and the best in others around you. Practice noticing joy, both for those close to you and strangers.
2. Express happiness to another as appropriate: hug a friend or smile at a stranger. Say something positive to acquaintances: “congratulations”; “I’m so happy for you”; “that’s so great”; “it’s wonderful to share your happiness”.

Consider keeping a “bliss journal” for a week or during the month: note when you witnessed someone else's happiness and how you responded. Consider jotting down as many positive responses as you can to use when practicing freudenfreude. Do these practices come naturally to you or are they challenging? Do

they become easier to do the more you engage in the proactive? Did commenting positively and sharing the joy of another increase your connection to that person? What other ways can you cultivate freudenfreude?

## **Option C**

### **Better Together**

Consider practicing these four strategies for connecting:

1. Commit to setting aside 15 minutes each day to connect with someone you care about.
2. When you are with another person, really be with them. Avoid thinking about all the other distractions and to-dos of the day. Instead of thinking about what you might do or say next, give the person all your attention, listening fully, looking at them, and focusing on them.
3. Connect to yourself. You will be able to build a deeper connection to another if you have a strong connection to yourself and experience joy in solitude.
4. Help someone else and allow another to help you. Practice connecting to another by providing and/or receiving assistance, whether it be offering a smile to a stranger, asking someone's advice, accepting help on a project, or mowing the lawn of an elderly neighbor.

In what ways did you practice connecting? Did you discover new strategies for connecting? Which were the most meaningful to you? How has this spiritual practice changed your perspective, behavior, or thinking? Do you think you will be able to or find it useful to continue practicing these strategies for connecting in the future?



Photo by fauxels

# Questions to Ponder

Read through the questions below and notice which ones resonate with you. One or more of the questions might seem particularly compelling – or some might stir resistance in you. Either of these reactions might make the question fruitful to consider. Choose just one and take time to consider it, over several days if possible. Write it down on a piece of paper you carry in your pocket. Or take a picture of that paper with your phone. Or record it in your journal – and spend some time, each day if you can, reflecting on it in writing or otherwise, noticing where it leads you and what you learn from it, and your response to it.

## Questions

1. Do you have a soul friend, an anam cara? What about this relationship makes the person a soul friend? Is it mutual?
2. Think of a time you have experienced a connection through music, story, or visual art. What happened? How are the arts a spiritual practice for you?
3. When do you feel most connected/at peace? What activities help you get in touch with your essence? What pulls you away from inner connection?
4. What helps you to be available for greater connection, deeper intimacy, and ease with people? What pulls you away?
5. How has vulnerability, your own or another's, opened you to greater connection? What helps you risk being vulnerable with others?
6. How has turning toward, rather than away from, difficult feelings helped you live in greater connection?
7. How have you shifted from an “I” consciousness to a “we” consciousness?
8. When or where do you experience interconnection most fully in your daily life? What conscious habits or practices do you engage in to align your life with interconnection—with nature, the food you eat, the elements you interact with, the resources you use?
9. How have you been made to feel “other than?” How have you made people feel “other than?” How does it feel in your body and in your heart when you view difference as “other than?”
10. Do you nurture your connections with your ancestors, or loved ones who have died? How?
11. In what ways does technology help and hinder connection for you?
12. When do you feel most connected with your body? What is that like?
13. Is connecting with the sacred or holy part of your spirituality? How does it happen? What is it like?
14. When you think about the people to whom you most feel connected, what is it about them that powers the connection? It may be helpful to list the people who come to mind and then jot down the words beside each name that best describe your connection.
15. Do you believe in synchronicity, (coincidences that are too coincidental to be just that and are connected in some way)? Is tending to synchronicity another way we live our 7th Principle, “Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part?”
16. **What is your question?** Your question may not be listed above. As always, if the above questions don’t name what life is asking of you now, spend the month listening to your heart to hear what your question is.

# Inspiration

## Recommended Resources For Personal Exploration & Reflection

Here you will find a variety of resources to help you take a deeper dive into the worship theme. These offer you several ways to engage with the theme that invite you to consider it thoughtfully, to inspire thinking, and open you to new insights. They are optional. As you browse the packet, consider trying out several that hold meaning for you and, possibly, one or two that may feel challenging.

### Word Definitions

(v) joining or being joined. From Latin connectere (“fasten together”), from con- (“together”) + nectere (“bind”). [Dictionary.com]

The word “connecting” can mean many things depending on the context.

In the context of technology, it can mean establishing a physical or virtual connection between two devices or systems.

In the context of relationships, it can mean forming a bond or connection with another person.

In the context of ideas, it can mean finding a relationship between two or more concepts. [Google Bard]

### Wise Words

In everyone's life, there is a great need for an anam cara, a soul friend. In this love, you are understood as you are without mask or pretension. The superficial and functional lies and half-truths of social acquaintance fall away, you can be as you really are. Love allows understanding to dawn, and understanding is precious. Where you are understood, you are at home.

—John O'Donohue, *Anam Cara: A Book of Celtic Wisdom*

We are here to awaken from the illusion of our separateness. —Thich Nhat Hanh

Yet even when we cannot see the gold, the light and love of our true nature cannot be dimmed, tarnished, or erased. It calls to us daily through our longing for connection, our urge to understand reality, our delight in beauty, our natural desire to help others. Our deepest intuition is that there is something beyond our habitual story of a separate and isolated self: something vast, mysterious, and sacred. —Tara Brach, *Trusting the Gold*

Connection is the energy that exists between people when they feel seen, heard, and valued; when they can give and receive without judgment; and when they derive sustenance and strength from the relationship. —Brene Brown, *Atlas of the Heart*



Photo  
by  
Annie  
Spratt

### What Are People For (excerpt)

We clasp the hands of those that go before us, and  
the hands of those who come after us;  
we enter the little circle of each other's arms,  
and the larger circle of friends,  
whose hands are joined in a dance,  
and the larger circle of all creatures, passing in and  
out of life, who move also in a dance to a music so  
subtle and vast that no ear hears it except in  
fragments. —Wendell Berry

The life I touch for good or ill will touch another life,  
and in turn another, until who knows where the  
trembling stops or in what far place my touch will be  
felt. —Frederick Buechner

If we all do one random act of kindness daily, we  
might just set the world in the right direction.  
—Martin Kornfield

One day last month, a white woman pulled over and  
ran over to us with a shopping bag. She said she sees  
us every morning and is so moved by my obvious  
love and adoration for my daughter that she felt  
compelled to do something kind for us. She noticed  
that I never have on a coat and I often stand in the  
rain. She didn't know if the things would fit, she  
said, but the receipt was in the bag. She smiled and  
drove away. —Rayla D. Mattson, UUA Braver/Wiser  
[www.uua.org/braverwiser/kindness-others](http://www.uua.org/braverwiser/kindness-others)

The patterns are simple, but followed together, they  
make for a whole that is wiser than the sum of its  
parts. Go for a walk; cultivate hunches; write  
everything down, but keep your folders messy;  
embrace serendipity; make generative mistakes; take  
on multiple hobbies; frequent coffeehouses and  
other liquid networks; follow the links; let others  
build on your ideas; borrow, recycle; reinvent. Build  
a tangled bank.

—Steven Johnson, *Where Good Ideas Come From*

The most basic and powerful way to connect to  
another person is to listen. Just listen. Perhaps the  
most important thing we ever give each other is our  
attention.... A loving silence often has far more  
power to heal and to connect than the most  
well-intentioned words.

—Rachel Naomi Remen, *Kitchen Table Wisdom*

Wonderful how completely everything in wild  
nature fits into us, as if truly part and parent of us.  
The sun shines not on us, but in us. The rivers flow  
not past, but through us, thrilling, tingling, vibrating  
every fiber and cell of the substance of our bodies,  
making them glide and sing. —John Muir

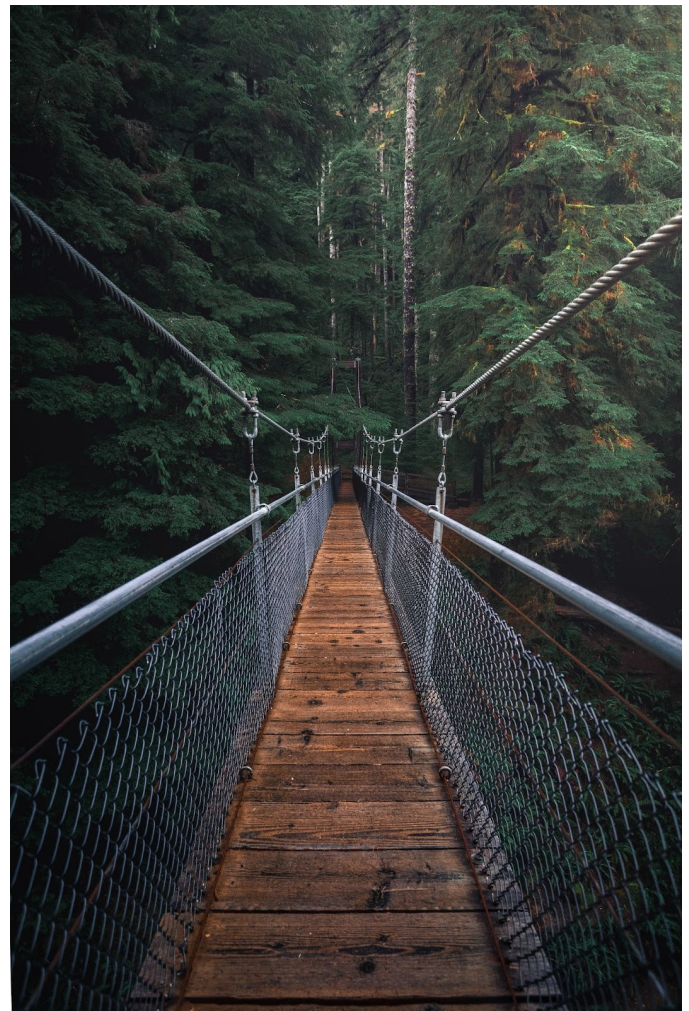


Photo by Jacob Colvin

## Poetry

### Sentimental Moment or Why Did the Baguette Cross the Road?

Robert Hershon

Don't fill up on bread  
I say absent-mindedly  
The servings here are huge

My son, whose hair may be  
receding a bit, says  
Did you really just  
say that to me?

What he doesn't know  
is that when we're walking  
together, when we get  
to the curb  
I sometimes start to reach  
for his hand.

### Invocation (excerpt)

Everett Hoagland

Help us to see ourselves in all creation,  
and all creation in ourselves, ourselves in one  
another.

Remind those of us who like connections  
made with similes, metaphors, symbols  
all of us are, everything is  
already connected.

Remind us as oceans go, so go we. As the air goes, so  
go we.

As other life forms on Earth go, so go we.

As our planet goes, so go we. Great Poet,  
who inspired In The Beginning was The Word . . .

edit our thought so our ethics are our politics,  
and our actions the afterlives of our words.

<https://bit.ly/47G2cDL>

### A Wasp Woman Visits a Black Junkie in Prison (excerpt)

Ethridge Knight

After explanations and regulations, he  
Walked warily in.  
Black hair covered his chin, subscribing to  
Villainous ideal.  
“This can not be real,” he thought, “this is a  
Classical mistake;  
This is a cake baked with embarrassing icing;  
Somebody’s got  
Likely as not, a big fat tongue in cheek!  
What have I to do  
With a prim and proper-blooded lady?”  
Christ in deed has risen  
When a Junkie in prison visits with a Wasp woman.

...

After the seating  
And the greeting, they fished for a denominator,  
Common or uncommon;  
And could only summon up the fact that both were  
human.  
“Be at ease, man!  
Try to please, man!—the lady is as lost as you:  
‘You got children, Ma’am?’” he said aloud.

The thrust broke the dam, and their lines wiggled in  
the water.  
She offered no pills  
To cure his many ills, no compact sermons, but small  
And funny talk:  
“My baby began to walk... simply cannot keep his  
room clean...”  
Her chatter sparked no resurrection and truly  
No shackles were shaken  
But after she had taken her leave, he walked softly,  
And for hours used no hot words.

<https://bit.ly/3YJFK8F>

## Articles

### “How Stories Connect And Persuade Us: Unleashing The Brain Power Of Narrative”

by Elena Renken

Neuroscience shows that stories connect tellers and listeners, wielding strong influence over attitudes, behavior, and beliefs. <https://bit.ly/3YEtQgB>

### “Connecting with Nature”

From the Mental Health Foundation, UK.

Top tips on how you can build your own connection with nature. <https://bit.ly/3QNE4cC>

### “Vacation and The Art of Presence: Anaïs Nin on How to Truly Unplug and Reconnect with Your Senses” by Maria Popova, *The Marginalian*

This article speaks about the ability to connect with ourselves and the present. It asks us to realize this skill as a way of building true relationship, of seeing one another, of connecting. <https://bit.ly/3OIWBEl>

### “Community: How To Bond With Your People Based On Some Unexpected Science”

by Tracy Brower, *Forbes*, November 1, 2021

Connection is a fundamental human need. This article describes how to bond with your people and strengthen community, based on some surprising insights from the animal world. <https://bit.ly/3qICBte>

### “Connection and Care”

Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA), “Our Faith—Religious Practices”

Unitarian Universalism connects you with real people: people who will be real with you. Learning and laughing across generations and cultures, we build relationships of care and support. Learn more about some of our programs (also known as “ministries”) that support connection and care throughout Unitarian Universalism.

[www.uua.org/beliefs/what-we-do/connection](http://www.uua.org/beliefs/what-we-do/connection)

## Prayers

### Chalice Lighting: Connection and Commitment Cynthia Landrum, UUA Worship Web

As we kindle this flame,  
May it spark in each of us  
Connection and commitment  
To this living tradition  
And to each other.

## Books

### *Healing the Divide: Poems of Kindness & Connection*

Edited by James Crews. Green Writers Press, 2019

This anthology features poems by Mark Doty, Ross Gay, Joy Harjo, Marie Howe, Naomi Shihab Nye, Natasha Trethewey, and many others. With an intimate focus on everyday moments of vulnerability and connection, these poems prove the possibility of creating in our lives the beloved community.

<https://bit.ly/3QPRzbB>

### *Relational Mindfulness: A Handbook for Deepening Our Connection with Ourselves, Each Other, and the Planet*

by Deborah Eden Tull. Wisdom Publications, 2018

In an age of global uncertainty, this guidebook offers an inspiring set of teachings and practices for deepening intimacy, remembering our interconnection, and embodying compassionate awareness in all of our relationships.

<https://bit.ly/45CSOyW>

### *Together: The Healing Power of Human Connection in a Sometimes Lonely World*

by Vivek H Murthy M.D. Harper Collins, 2023.

We humans are social creatures with an innate desire to connect in community, in relationships, in service to each other, and in sharing a life with others. Murphy, the 19th Surgeon General of the U.S. under Obama, offers four key strategies to deepen our connections. In the Unity Bookstall.

<https://bit.ly/3EITGLO>

*Finding Refuge: Heart Work for Healing Collective Grief*

by Michelle Cassandra Johnson. Shambhala, 2021.

This book is intended to serve as a tool for connecting to your grief in order to heal yourself, thus allowing you to create conditions to heal what continually shatters many of us—the immense amount of suffering on the planet. Johnson shows how to connect and be present with this grief through spiritual practice.

In the Anderson Library: 204.4 J.

[www.librarycat.org/lib/UnityChurch/item/214897200](https://www.librarycat.org/lib/UnityChurch/item/214897200)

*Mindful of Race: Transforming Racism from the Inside Out*

by Ruth King. Sounds True, 2018.

King says, “racism is a heart disease and it's curable.” She shows us how to connect with ourselves to make “a difference from the inside out.”

In the Unity Anderson Library: 294.3 K.

<https://ruthking.net/>

*In This Together: Connecting with Your Community to Combat Climate Change*

by Marianne E. Krasny. Comstock, 2023.

This book contains not only excellent information, but stories and practical ideas for gathering and empowering communities of all ages, genders, races, socio-economic levels. Since the poor as well as BIPOC communities are disproportionately affected by climate change, this book is a call to solidarity with all voices. <https://bit.ly/3P1FIWG>

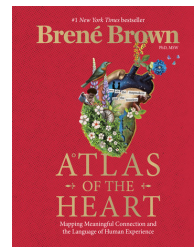


Fridays for Future by Stefan Muller. (CC BY 2.0)

*Atlas of the Heart: Mapping Meaningful Connection and the Language of Human Experience*

by Brené Brown. Random House, 2021.

In *Atlas of the Heart*, Brown takes us on a journey



through eighty-seven of the emotions and experiences that define what it means to be human. As she maps the necessary skills and an actionable framework for meaningful connection, she gives us the language and tools to access a universe of new choices and

second chances—a universe where we can share and steward the stories of our bravest and most heartbreaking moments with one another in a way that builds connection.

Brown shares, “I want this book to be an atlas for all of us, because I believe that, with an adventurous heart and the right maps, we can travel anywhere and never fear losing ourselves.” (Publisher description) <https://bit.ly/3P4lNX6>

*Real Friends Talk About Race: Bridging the Gaps Through Uncomfortable Conversations*

by Yseult P. Mukantabana and Hannah Summerhill. Harper Collins, 2023.

*Real Friends Talk About Race* is an essential guide for those who want to have stronger interracial relationships—whether it's with friends, colleagues, or loved ones.

Having conversations about race is uncomfortable. But for progress between individuals (and our communities) to happen, we need to be able to speak openly and honestly. Podcast hosts of *The Kinswomen* Yseult and Hannah use their own friendship and experiences from different racial backgrounds to offer guidance on navigating these layered conversations.

The duo share their two perspectives on the ways in which culture, history, and white supremacy have

prevented us from having the skills to build trust and healthy relationships across race. Yseult and Hannah approach these topics with love and candor—calling readers in (not out) to confront hard realities and their own internalized biases, while also sharing prescriptive advice, encouragement, and a sense of community.

A must-read for anyone looking to listen, learn, and feel empowered to have meaningful conversations about race.

<https://bit.ly/3slljDb>

## Children's Books

### *The Invisible String*

by Patrice Karst, illustrated by Joanne Lew-Vriethoff. Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, 2018.

In this relatable and reassuring contemporary classic, a mother tells her two children that they're all connected by an invisible string made of love.



### *Buddha and the Rose*

by Mallika Chopra, illustrated by Neha Rawat. Running Kids Press, 2022.

As a milkmaid gazes at the Buddha and then at the rose, she closes her eyes, takes a deep breath, and opens her eyes. What she sees and feels changed her life forever. This is a subtle, powerful, and calming story about our connection with the natural world and the universe that connects all of us.

### *Where We Come From*

by Diane Wilson, Sun Yung Shin, Shannon Gibney, John Coy. Lerner, 2022.

Four Minneapolis authors from four different cultural backgrounds write about connecting with place, language, spirit, and story. They note, “We all come from stardust, sparks of light connected by story, creating a circle of past, present, and future,

ancestors, families, and you.” The book is beautifully illustrated by Dion MBD. In the Childrne’s Library.

## Movies

### *My Octopus Teacher*

Directed by Pippa Ehrlich and James Reed, 2020.

A filmmaker forges an unusual friendship with an octopus living in a South African kelp forest, learning as the animal shares the mysteries of her world. An example of the amazing connection possible between humans and the animal/sea life world. Netflix, 2020.

<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt12888462/>

### *Lost in Translation*

Written and directed by Sophia Coppola, 2003.

Two disoriented Americans at different stages in their lives meet while in Tokyo for different purposes. Coppola says that the story is about “things being disconnected and looking for moments of connection.”

[https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0335266/?ref=fn\\_al\\_tt\\_1](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0335266/?ref=fn_al_tt_1)

## Videos

### *Working: What We Do All Day*, S1:E1 Service Jobs

Directed by Caroline Sun. Hosted by Barack Obama.

“We may not think about it, but we’re all a part of something larger than any single one of us,” Obama says in the series. “Work is one of the forces that connects us.” The first episode features people in service jobs, and explores how people connect to their jobs, finding meaning and purpose in all walks of life. Netflix. <https://bit.ly/3P3Robi>

### “Embracing Otherness, Embracing Myself”

Thandiwe Newton

Actor Thandiwe Newton tells the story of finding her “otherness”—first, as a child growing up in two distinct cultures, and then as an actor playing with many different selves. TED Talk. <https://bit.ly/3KJBjVB>

## “Love Letters to Strangers”

Hannah Brencher

Hannah Brencher's mother always wrote her letters. So when she felt herself bottom into depression after college, she did what felt natural—she wrote love letters and left them for strangers to find. The act has become a global initiative, The World Needs More Love Letters, which rushes handwritten letters to those in need of a boost. TED Talk.

<https://bit.ly/3KLNfFW>

## Podcasts

### “Sharing Isn't Caring, It's Much More,” Case for Connection

Hosted by Ryan Jenkins & Steven Van Cohen, April 12, 2022.

In the Case for Connection podcast series, the hosts explore the research and evidence behind why human connection is so crucial in an often lonely and isolated world.

In this episode, they discuss the story of Christopher McCandless (subject of *Into the Wild*), an American adventurer who, in 1992, walked into the central Alaska wilderness to disconnect from society and live on his own. With minimal supplies, McCandless took up residence in an abandoned bus and lived off the land. Eventually, he became ill and starved to death when he was unable to retreat to civilization for help. When discovered by a hunter, McCandless's final journal entry was “Happiness is only real when shared.” The hosts conclude that “At the end of the day we pine for people. Life is better together.”

<https://thecaseforconnection.buzzsprout.com>

## Music

### “Connecting” Spotify Playlist

<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/32z5NDWNd3uK8tj15hqQhe?si=b02b2fcee6b4db8>

“Connection” —The Rolling Stones

“All Together Now” —The Beatles

“More Than This” —Roxy Music

“Hold Us Together - Hope Mix” —H.E.R., Tauren Wells

“Digging Deeper” —Alison Goldfrapp, Claptone

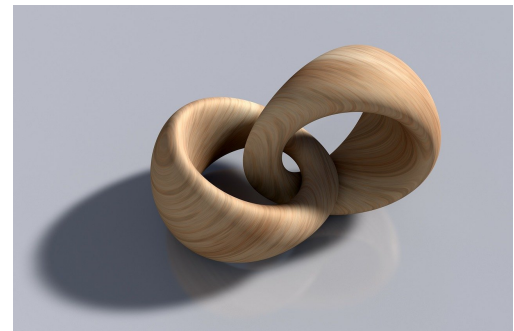
“We” —Neil Diamond

“And We Danced” —The Hooters

“Let My Love Open The Door” —Megan Simon

“The Shape I’m In” —The Band

“Take Me As I Am” —Mary J. Blige



Rings by Ralf Kunze

Cover: Interconnect by John Hain

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