



# Design for the Human Soul



**Sacred  
Design Lab**

# Why design for the human soul?



**U**nmet soul needs shape our time. The more we go hungry for meaning, connection and purpose, the more we act from isolation and despair.

This plays out in the way we live, love, work, and lead.<sup>1</sup>

The problem is soul-deep.  
So, too, must be our response.

We have always been more than we're told. Where do we go to remember that we are artists of the eternal?<sup>2</sup>

In a time of institutional religious decline, many of us are bereft of community, ritual, story, and celebration. Headlines document the march of loneliness, addiction, depression, suicide, and hatred. Most interventions treat the symptoms rather than the cause.

There is another way.

Designing for the human soul centers our capacity to experience and create in the realms that matter most.



# The Soul Needs

# Belonging



Giving and receiving the experience of being deeply known and loved.<sup>3</sup>

We belong to each other. Designing for this means creating conditions for each person to deepen connection with other people, place, story, and time. The felt experience of belonging changes the way we show up. It stimulates loyalty, compassion, and joy, and diminishes anxiety, loneliness, and fear. When we feel at home, we invite others in. Belonging opens hearts. And we can design for it.

Guiding Questions:

Who am I?

Whose am I?

# The Soul Needs



# Becoming



Growing into the people we are called to be.

We each carry gifts the world needs. Yet too often, we measure our value by limiting standards: bank balance, body weight, double taps. True becoming is measured by our growing capacity to say “yes” to the soul’s call, even when it feels impossible; to tend our inner gifts, share them in community, and bountifully receive the gifts of others.<sup>4</sup> Soul-centered design fuels impossible yesses.<sup>5</sup>

Guiding Questions:

Why do I matter?

What is the “yes” that calls me?



A night sky with a starry background and silhouettes of trees framing the scene. The sky is a deep purple and blue, filled with numerous small, bright stars. The trees are dark and silhouetted against the sky, creating a natural frame around the central text.

# The Soul Needs

# Beyond



Experiencing ourselves as part of something more.

When our soul is fed, we remember in our bones that we are bound up in something beyond ourselves; something ineffably present. We feel fully big and fully small, our tap root sunk into a place that is old and deep. When we design for the soul, we map pathways for people to encounter and move closer to this endlessly renewable resource at the heart of all things, unleashing creativity and courage.

Guiding Questions:

What is the eternal artistry of which we are part?

How would we be if we remembered?

# But how?

How do we meet the needs of the soul and move toward flourishing?

Luckily, humans have been responding to this question all over the world for thousands of years. Their wisdom is our most ancient inheritance. Now our work is to apply it.

By listening to elders, learning from hundreds of spiritual innovators and practitioners, reading our way through books and wisdom stories, and seeking out as many experiences as we can, we've collected a portfolio of ancient best practices to design for belonging, becoming, and beyond.



# Ancient Practices

We see a future emerging in which the wisdom  
of our ancestors...

...is remixed to create countless new iterations  
of soul-centered design.

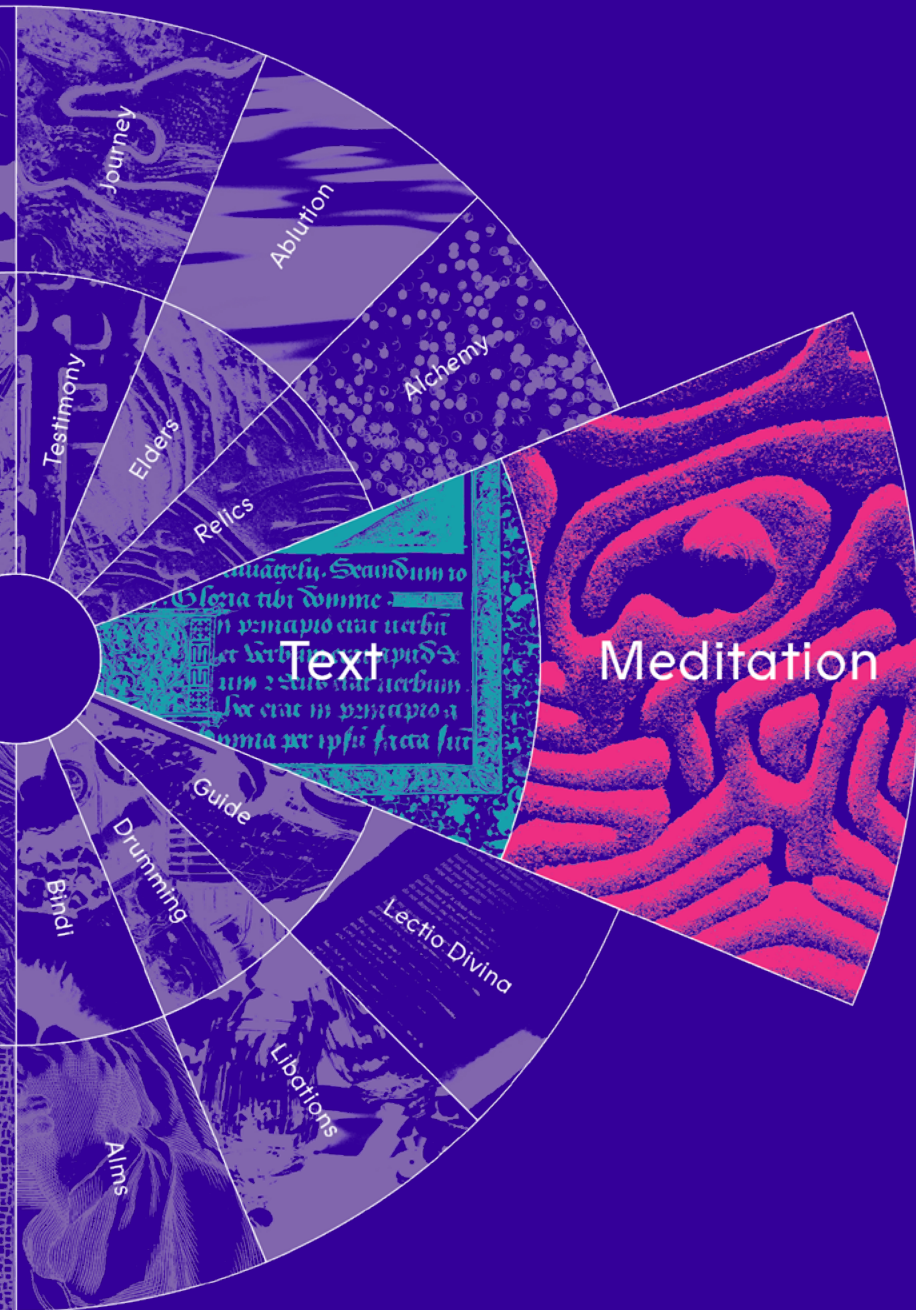
# Emergent Challenges<sup>6</sup>



Call Equip healthcare systems to combat the epidemic of social isolation.

Partner Healthcare foundation

Impact Inspired by the success of congregational small groups in deepening relationships, Sacred Design Lab (Sacred) is piloting strategies that help patients nourish an inner circle of social support. Translating meaning-making practices from early Methodism and Jewish havruta study, Sacred is developing practical strategies for health care providers to offer effective “social prescribing” to achieve better health outcomes.



Call Reduce suffering and support emotional wellbeing through an app.

Partner Tech company

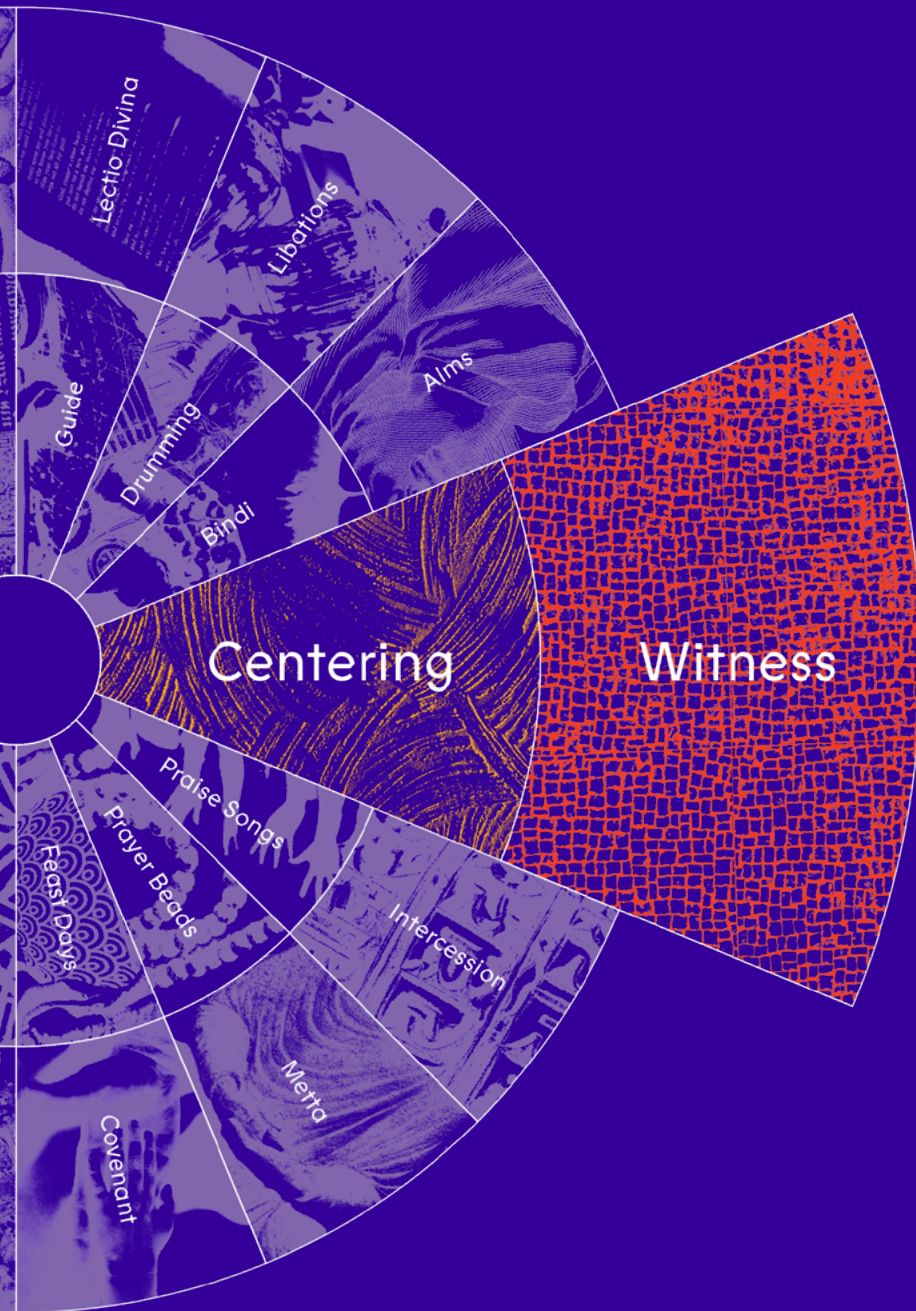
Impact Drawing on Buddhist meditation, monastic reflection practices, and embodied nature-based celebrations, Sacred created a wide-ranging bank of practices for app-users to withstand emotional turbulence and find meaning and connection throughout their day.



Call **Stimulate public engagement strategies across difference.**

Partner **Global design firm**

Impact **Reimagining the Biblical tradition of covenant, Sacred ideated new social containers (spaces, events, and journeys) to unleash creative conversations among people across difference, dismantling stereotypes and building new friendships and collaborations.**



Call **Grow resilience among young social change leaders.**

Partner **Civic engagement foundation**

Impact **Building on the wisdom of contemplative practices like the Jesuit examen and Quaker clearness committee, Sacred is helping to prototype a reflection tool that allows for both personal introspection and group accompaniment to sustain community action and social justice leadership over time.**



# What is your call?

Uplift mental health

Reduce inequality in cities

Reimagine ageing

Transform the daily commute

Counteract extremism

End isolation parenting

Grow community

Enhance human performance

Create new third spaces

Unleash the circular economy

It's no mistake that #love is the top hashtag on Instagram, and that they can't make Marvel movies fast enough. We long to be called to something more than ourselves. We have the tools if we will just use them.

In the era of Siri and Alexa, ancient practices remind us what makes us human. They ground us in our better nature, which compels us to lives of love, justice, and risking the impossible.

If that sounds daunting, you're right! This work asks us to challenge long-held assumptions, open to new experiences, and go beyond what we knew ourselves to be. It also makes us more than we are.

When we nourish the soul, we come alive. Belonging and becoming stimulate spiritual imagination, allowing us to see and reach for

that which lies beyond. This is the foundation on which we begin to co-create the world our hearts know is possible.<sup>7</sup>

If you are a divinely restless, intellectually curious, and entrepreneurially practical leader, someone who feels the tug toward human flourishing and is ready to try something new, we invite you to come explore how ancient best practices might transform your work.

We at Sacred Design Lab believe that those who dare—those people and organizations with the courage to engage the soul—will be the ones leading our culture and economy into the coming decades.

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A tropical scene featuring several palm trees in the foreground and middle ground. The sky is bright blue with scattered white clouds. The overall atmosphere is warm and sunny.

# Who We Are

## Sacred Design Lab

is a research and design consultancy working to create a culture of belonging and becoming. We translate ancient wisdom and practices to help organizations develop products, programs, and experiences that uplift social and spiritual lives.

We are designers, theologians, practitioners, strategists and gatherers. We are animated by joy, inspired by tradition, and motivated by the future.



## Angie Thurston

is sounding a call for the soul. Moved by the plight of isolation and despair, she is dedicated to connecting the inner life of spirit to the outer life of action for social change. Angie is the co-creator of the Formation Project, a startup designed for spiritual deepening among people who don't live in the same place or share a set of religious beliefs.

A spiritual nerd to the core, Angie spends as much time as possible meditating, reading the Urantia Book, and volunteering at Recovery Café DC. She is a graduate of Brown University and Harvard Divinity School, where she is a Ministry Innovation Fellow. Angie lives in Alexandria, VA with her husband Vipin Thekk.

## Casper ter Kuile

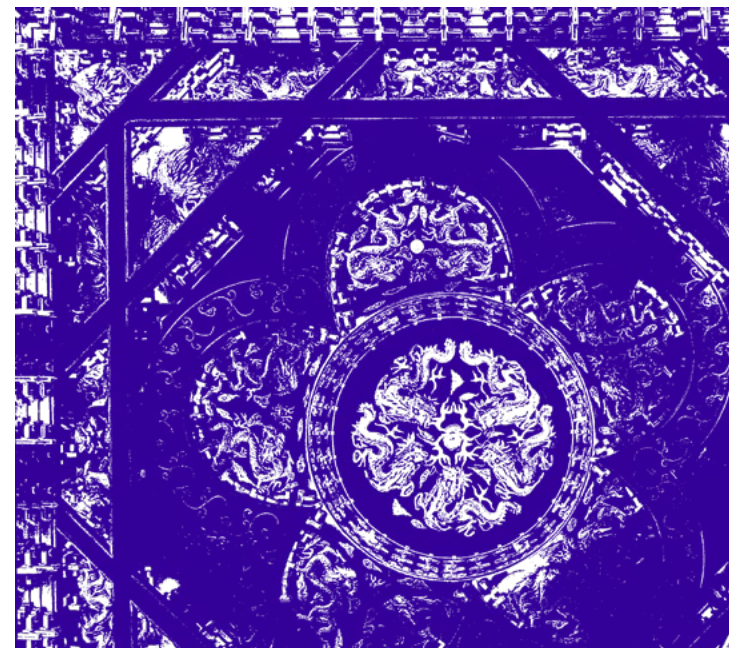
is helping to build a world of joyful belonging. In the midst of enormous changes in how we experience community and spirituality, Casper connects people and co-creates projects that help us live lives of greater connection, meaning, and depth. Nothing makes him happier than learning from religious tradition and reimagining it for our context.

Casper holds Masters of Divinity and Public Policy degrees from Harvard University, and remains a Ministry Innovation Fellow at Harvard Divinity School. He co-hosts the award-winning podcast Harry Potter and the Sacred Text. His book, *The Power of Ritual* (HarperOne) will be published in the summer of 2020. He lives in Brooklyn, NY with his husband Sean Lair.

## Sue Phillips

is relentlessly delighted by liberating ancient wisdom to help solve gnarly problems. An ordained minister and former denominational executive in the Unitarian Universalist tradition, Sue is passionate about inspiring spiritual flourishing, equipping people for meaning-making, and witnessing the transformation that happens when we get all up in life's biggest questions.

She is part business strategist, part design geek, and part monastic. A graduate of Colgate University and the Episcopal Divinity School, Sue has taught at Harvard Divinity School, where she is a Ministry Innovation Fellow. She lives in Tacoma, WA with her wife Tandi Rogers.



# Endnotes

- 1 With a bow to Brené Brown and her trailblazing *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead*.
- 2 Thank you to the late John O'Donohue, one of our great inspirations, for this language in *Anam Cara*.
- 3 To our friend and elder Killian Noe, who taught us this phrase and what it means to live this way.
- 4 Inspired by Malidoma Patrice Somé in *The Healing Wisdom of Africa: Finding Life Purpose Through Nature, Ritual, and Community*.
- 5 We learned about impossible yesses from the Church of the Saviour community in Washington, D.C.
- 6 Our friends at Alt\*Div use the beautiful phrase, "a conversation between the ancient and the emergent."
- 7 How many times we have drawn on this phrase! Thank you, Charles Eisenstein, for your gift of evocation.

# Thanks to

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Scott Heiferman

Make meaning at [sacred.design](https://sacred.design)