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# We must not stop talking about joy in science

Dialogues about STEMM cannot lose sight of the bigger picture in times of turmoil—and that includes remembering the joy and inspiration that drives science and scientists.

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2025 has been a rough year for science and scientists. Cancelled grants, shifting funder priorities, changing regulations, and general uncertainty have not only led to the loss of opportunities for scientific research and discovery, but to anxiety, stress, and frustration for those whose work hangs in the balance. Even among those who have not been directly affected, a chill and a sense of unease loom over their work. They may feel fear or even guilt when seeing the effects on their colleagues and friends. And young people who have been considering a career in the sciences are now rethinking their goals.

In the midst of this atmosphere, it may seem counterintuitive to focus on joy and inspiration. But that's exactly what we need.

Joy is not only an emotional antidote to stress and despair, but also a vital tool as we seek to dive into our mission of advancing science and serving society.

## Reconnect with community

As scientists, it can be hard to talk about what we are feeling. We are trained to communicate solely in facts, to set aside our feelings about our work in favor of simply the verifiable objective data. We may be unpracticed at seeking help, expressing anxiety, or finding support in community. But now more than ever, we need to pull together and remind ourselves of what drew us to science to begin with. We need to rekindle the joy and inspiration, the sense of awe, the thrill of discoveries both big and small, and the wonder and curiosity that makes science more than a job for so many of us. We need to reconnect with our community.

This is vital not only for our own well-being and the well-being of the scientific enterprise, but it also is important as we think about our larger place in society. We not only need to connect with one another, but we need to connect with our larger communities —family, friends, relatives, neighbors, as well as community leaders, educators, politicians, and decision makers. We hear a lot about “trust in science,” but what really matters is “trust in scientists.” And yet scientists are often seen as standoffish, stuck in the lab, odd or quirky, unemotional. The average person on the street may be forgiven for not remembering that scientists are also, in fact, the average person on the street.

But this is just the reminder that the larger public needs — that scientists are human. That we are drawn to this work by the same kinds of values that motivate people in all walks of life — a desire to do good, to learn more, to make a living, to explore uncharted waters, to make the world a better

place, to advance technology, to teach, to help people. This is especially important when we are connecting with people who may be uncertain about science's role in society or skeptical about scientific evidence. A recent study by Timothy O'Brien and Shiri Noy found that the moral values that people associate with scientists affect their support for science overall. We need to let people know where we are coming from, what drives us, and what we stand for.

It can be difficult, after years of training in staying "objective" in our communication, to shift into language of joy and inspiration, wonder and motivation, fear and uncertainty, but these are the common currency of humanity. They help us connect with those with whom we share a lot and with those with whom we may think we share very little. And they pave the way for deeper dialogue about science and society, about what our goals and priorities should be, about how we ethically do science and apply our scientific knowledge and technological advances in the world.

## What's your story?

As we work to facilitate deeper engagement among scientific and religious communities (recognizing that these often overlap), the Dialogue on Science, Ethics, and Religion is putting a new focus on how we help scientists talk about their work in a way that celebrates the humans behind the science. We are providing new avenues for scientists to share their own stories about what inspires the work they do, how it has impacted how they see the world, what challenges it has raised for them, and where they find joy in their work.

On December 10, DoSER is hosting our 2025 December Dialogues "The Heart of Science," where we will feature five scientists telling the stories of where they have found inspiration, joy, and wonder in the work they do. And for those who attend in person, the reception after the event will provide the opportunity to connect with others and share some of your own story.

Even in the storms of 2025, there is joy and wonder to celebrate. New discoveries are still being made, connections are still being built, questions are still being asked, and the world is still longing to be explored. When we work to rekindle our inspiration, we provide hope in the face of adversity and build community and strength. What's your story?



DoSER



*Facilitating dialogue and engagement between scientific and religious communities on science, technology, and society.*

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