



unity FALL PROGRAM (2025)



**The Life and Care
of an Idea**



unity®
Spiritual Center
Westlake

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FORWARD

One interpretation of Jewish scripture suggests that “God created” would be better understood as “God ideated.” An authority in both Hebrew and Greek, Ferrar Fenton, said the same thing this way: “God created that which produced the earth,” or, more clearly, “God created *the idea* [italics mine] of the earth.”

Or, even more clearly: God is Mind.

And this is an important distinction for it suggests that we might turn from interpretations in which the world of form is the product of human hands at work on some ancient and distant assembly line for interpretations in which the world of form is the product of human consciousness at work in our world as it exists here and now.

The Unity tradition has spoken into such a reorientation by suggesting that our collective world is an out-picturing process that starts in Mind, evolves through human idea, and unfolds into realized expression.

Mind. Idea. Expression.

Genesis offers two distinct versions of creation. Captured around the time of the Hebrews’ return to Jerusalem from exile under Babylonian rule, the “Priestly version” which follows sets forth seven days of creation – or seven days of *ideation* – which offer simultaneous layers of meaning, including the layer this author seeks to suggest: seven symbolic days, each offering a relevance to human beings of every era, of every geography, of every faith tradition (and none).

It wouldn’t be unusual for today’s readers to consider these concepts to be sequential steps in some creative process. Please resist this. Like so many pursuits of mind and spirit, it’s just not as linear as our articulations might imply. Please give yourself permission to consider these seven days singly, but to understand them as ever present and alive in you as a totality. Yes, you might find yourself at the end of this study deeply immersed in a recapitulation of Day 1’s suggestions!

In closing, to speak to the students of Unity in specific: the following model departs from the interpretation as set forth by Charles Fillmore in *Mysteries of Genesis*. And while this might strike one as odd, or even antagonistic to Unity thought, I suggest a different perspective. The point of Mr. Fillmore’s interpretations isn’t the interpretations themselves. The point of Mr. Fillmore’s interpretations is that he made welcome experiences of scripture which were deeply personal, meaningful, and universal.

We don’t grow spiritually by memorizing Mr. Fillmore’s interpretations so much as we grow spiritually by doing as he did – by making welcome experiences of our own – experiences which are deeply personal, meaningful, and universal. There is no single, correct interpretation of scripture. This is why scripture speaks to us differently in one season of life than it does in another. What we “get” from scripture changes. It’s supposed to. This is what it means for scripture to “be alive” in us and in our lives.

PROGRAM INTRODUCTION

This seven-week program offers written chapter introductions designed as companions to weekly Sunday morning lectures. This document includes study questions and activities designed for weekly Study Group settings (offered on a love offering basis). Weekly meetings will feature selected songs from USC Music Director, Matthew Wilson, with special thanks due to him, and all Hosts and Facilitators. A Fall Program Facilitators Handbook is available upon request.

It is worthy to note that this program was written in such a way as to integrate its concepts with Unity Spiritual Center's year-long celebration of its 100th anniversary as a spiritual community in northeast Ohio. Certainly, it's also written in such a way as to speak to the newcomer as well.

It's also worthy to note that this program references Unity's Twelve Powers as defined below for the convenience of all participants:

- Imagination: Conception, Vision, Embodiment
- Faith: Perception, Conviction, Expectancy
- Zeal: Enthusiasm, Audacity, Devotion
- Strength: Stability, Courage, Tenacity
- Life: Animation, Vitality, Presence
- Will: Choice, Commitment, Willingness
- Understanding: Comprehension, Realization, Insight
- Love: Magnetism, Harmony, Unity
- Wisdom: Judgement, Discernment, Intuition
- Order: Organization, Adjustment, Evolution
- Release: Cleansing, Renunciation, Repentance
- Power: Concentration, Self-Mastery, Authority

Finally, I welcome all into the experience I call, The Life and Care of an Idea. I'm so very glad you're here.

Rev. Richard Loren Held, D. Div., Senior Minister
September 2025

Week 1 (October 5, 2025)

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light; and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day (Genesis 1:1-5 KJV).

“The first command is ‘Let there be light’ (Gen. 1:3). Light is symbolic of illumination, spiritual intelligence, wisdom. That is, there is light, a creation of Divine Mind, and it is the life of man.”

- Fillmore, Charles. Mysteries of Genesis. Unity School of Christianity, 1936

CHAPTER INTRODUCTION

“In the beginning, God.” I love that opening line. It seems to suggest that there is a universal source from which all expressed form arises. It seems to suggest that there is a singular impetus which you and I share. Imagine the implications of this in a world so deeply divided by religious affiliation, political association, skin color, physical age, ethnic lineage, and beyond.

You and I are made of the same stuff.

The Christian and the Muslim are made of the same stuff. The liberal and the conservative are made of the same stuff. The light-skinned and the brown-skinned are made of the same stuff. The one dying into a human incarnation and the one birthing from a human incarnation are made of the same stuff.

It changes how we see each other. It changes how we value each other. It changes how we relate to each other.

In continuing, “In the beginning, God created,” it seems to suggest that the nature of this universal source (the nature of the singular impetus) is to unfold. In another word, the nature of this God is creativity. Hence, I like to say that each of us is infinity experiencing Itself as finite! Each of us is all-possibility experiencing Itself as limited.

It changes how we understand ourselves.

“Without form,” “void,” and “darkness,” invoke vivid images. For some, such words invoke a bleak landscape of sorts. For me, however, such words invoke more of an empty canvas than a bleak landscape. They invoke more of an “allness” than a “nothingness.” I find these words strangely hopeful; seeming to imply that my world is mine to fashion. I am not the victim of a random universe but a co-creative partner with eternal wisdom itself.

Like the God of Jewish scripture, perhaps the charge of day one is to affirm our readiness as receivers of Mind. If today is a good day to make a change, to seek or to embrace a new idea, we can begin by symbolically lifting our voices to say, “Let there be light. I’m ready.”

CHAPTER POWERS

Understanding and Power

Unity Spiritual Center (1925-1945)

Unity Center first met at the Hotel Cleveland on January 24, 1925 led by layperson Ann Whitcomb Fairfield. Like any new religious movement, expansion into the area was slow. An early Unity minister, Dr. Ernest Wilson (ordained 1916) began holding meetings at Carnegie Hall in downtown Cleveland in 1926. He was soon followed in 1927 by Mrs. Viva January, who moved the meetings to the Old Arcade on Euclid Avenue for several years, and then in 1931 to the Hollenden Hotel. When Mrs. January resigned in 1933 the church was in transition for more than a year until Rev. Earl B. Anthony (ordained 1921) from Pittsburgh, PA began commuting every Sunday evening to hold meetings again at the Hotel Cleveland. At the time very few people, sometimes only three or four, attended meetings regularly. Even so, in 1936 Rev. Earl moved to Cleveland and became the full-time leader of the Cleveland church. Rev. Earl continued to hold meetings in rented ballrooms at the Hotel Cleveland, with a single suite as his office. At the age of 83, he was ready to retire. At that time the church was still growing, but needed stronger financial management.

CHAPTER DISCUSSION

1. Have you ever experienced “day one?” Meaning, have you ever given rise to a new idea? How was it? What did it require of you and how did it turn out?
2. Is there a common circumstance or state of mind from which new ideas tend to rise? For some, the answer might be chaos or need. For others, the answer might be inspiration or vision.
3. Are you pushed by pain, pulled by vision, or both?
4. “If today is a good day to make a change, to seek or to embrace a new idea, we can begin by symbolically lifting our voices to say, ‘Let there be light. I’m ready.’” How do you imagine this “day one” might have applied in the lives of these early visionaries who started a metaphysical church in Northeast Ohio? What do you imagine it required of them?

CHAPTER ACTIVITIES

1. Do you have a practice which you call “spiritual?” Consider adopting one. Such a practice might include something so formal as meditation or something so unexpected as exercise.
2. Make daily note of wacky ideas and grand possibilities. Notice how often something of an inner “editor” rises to negotiate, to argue, to “make sense of,” or even to reject. Name your inner critic and provide instruction such as, “Hang tight, Harold! It’s not your time yet.”

CHAPTER AFFIRMATION: The light of God surrounds me, guiding me to live my best life.

Week 2 (October 12, 2025)

And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters. And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament: and it was so. And God called the firmament Heaven. And the evening and the morning were the second day (Genesis 1:6-8).

“The second day's creation is the second movement of Divine Mind. The central idea in this day's creation is the establishment of a firmament in the ‘midst of the waters’ dividing the ‘waters from the waters.’ ‘Waters’ represent unexpressed possibilities in mind. There must be a ‘firm’ starting point or foundation established. This foundation or ‘firmament’ is faith ‘moving upon’ the unformed capacities of Spirit consciousness. The divine Logos - God as creative power - gives forth the edict ‘Let there be a firmament.’ The first step or ‘day’ in creation involves ‘light’ or understanding, and the second step, faith in the knowing quality of mind.”

- Fillmore, Charles. Mysteries of Genesis. Unity School of Christianity, 1936

CHAPTER INTRODUCTION

So, let's say you're really ready. You're done staring into that all-possibility that is the void - maybe with wonder, maybe with curiosity, maybe even with skepticism, but without any action. And let's say you've opened yourself to that cosmic repository we might call “Mind,” or “God – “ the name is a matter of preference, of course. And let's say new ideas have poured forth. Maybe those new ideas include business models or relational aspirations or personal goals.

Maybe those new ideas are so lofty as to finally grasp universal truths while sitting under a Bodhi tree.

Maybe those new ideas are so basal as to pay your rent so that you might still have access to that Bodhi tree for your enlightenment aspirations next month.

In any case, it's been my experience that ideas are not really created equal, at least not at the level of the human experience. More specifically, I have followed ideas which I've come to wish I had avoided. And I've avoided ideas which I've come to wish I had followed. And, I know I'm not alone. Each of us has finally gotten a dream date that ultimately proved to be anything but a dream. And each of us has finally rejected that bad idea that that ultimately proved to be anything but bad.

While we've long rejected the primitive suggestion that the earth is covered by a literal dome, with stars suspended as if delighting us all in some sort of giant crib, the image of the firmament still speaks. It still speaks because if we consider one metaphysical interpretation of the waters as representing something of a sea comprised of unrealized ideas, then considering how we might divide those “below” from those “above” becomes a worthy conversation.

Now, I should pause and be clear. I don't define ideas "below" from ideas "above" as those which bring pain from those which bring pleasure. In truth, our worst ideas don't prevent us from pleasure any more than our best ideas immunize us from pain. Sorry about that. You will know both pain and pleasure. Like our other famous teaching mythology, we all ate from that tree of duality. It's what it means to be human.

Rather, I define ideas "below" from ideas "above" as those which decidedly are not worth the risk from those which decidedly are worth the risk.

I think about the change makers and avatars of history, and I don't see individuals who managed to avoid all pain. I see individuals driven by such a deep sense of purpose that pain and pleasure were quite simply secondary to that deep sense of purpose. Whether we think of Jesus at the festival or MLK on that balcony – both knew their fate. And both knew that fate was dark. And both pressed forward, nonetheless – Jesus toward crucifixion and MLK toward execution, both driven by something that was, quite simply, worth it.

Like the God of Jewish scripture, if the charge of day one is to affirm our readiness as receivers of Mind, perhaps the charge of day two is to fashion that firmament that separates the waters above from the waters below.

CHAPTER POWERS: Wisdom and Order

Unity Spiritual Center (1945-1965)

In 1959 Rev. Norman Olsson arrived (ordained 1961). By that time the congregation had grown to 150 to 200 people attending Sunday services and adult education classes throughout the week. Rev. Norman moved quickly to adopt bylaws, establish the church as a non-profit organization with the State of Ohio, and elect a Board of Trustees from members of the congregation. With these administrative policies and procedures now in place, the church was eligible to celebrate the privileges of becoming an official Unity ministry.

Within two years of Rev. Norman's becoming senior minister, the congregation moved to the western suburbs of Cleveland, first occupying a commercial space in an office building, then another at the Lakewood YMCA. In addition to Sunday services, the church offered adult education classes during the week taught by Rev. Norman and by a layperson named Essie Croley. Mrs. Croley, a retired schoolteacher, was an astute metaphysician who also taught classes at the Tucker School of Expression, located in the old Arcade in downtown Cleveland. A self-directed student of metaphysics, she was educated through Unity's correspondence courses.

CHAPTER DISCUSSION

1. What is your true north? In other words, what are those values by which you live your life? Can you articulate three or four? What is that "hill you're willing to die on" today?

2. Can you relate to the suggestion that your body recognizes higher ideas and lower ideas before your intellect does? Have you any examples?
3. What values do you perceive in the USC of decades past? What values seem missing, if any?

CHAPTER ACTIVITIES

1. What are those values by which you live your life? Can you articulate three or four? Find ways to keep them present over upcoming weeks. Paint them. Journal them. Study them. If they change, so be it. Begin again.
2. Consider where in your life you have allowed yourself to be motivated by the world without. Examples might include money, things, the choices or behaviors of others. Make a list. Choose one and ask yourself, "Why was I motivated by that? What did I hope to gain?" Allow the question to strip a layer away. Ask yourself again, "Why was I motivated by that? What did I hope to gain?" Allow the question to strip yet another layer. When you think you've arrived at the deepest motivation, make note.

CHAPTER AFFIRMATION: That highest choice-maker within me, is ever eager to guide my way.

Week 3 (October 19, 2025)

And God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear: and it was so. And God called the dry land Earth; and the gathering together of the waters called he Seas: and God saw that it was good. And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth: and it was so. And the earth brought forth grass, and herb yielding seed after his kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself, after his kind: and God saw that it was good. And the evening and the morning were the third day (Genesis 1:9-13).

“The third step in creation is the beginning of the formative activity of the mind called imagination. This gathers ‘the waters ... together unto one place’ so that the ‘dry land’ appears. Then the imagination begins a great multiplication of forms and shapes in the mind.”

- Fillmore, Charles. Mysteries of Genesis. Unity School of Christianity, 1936

CHAPTER INTRODUCTION

“And God said, ‘Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear.’”

After we’ve opened ourselves to consider new ways, new perspectives, new possibilities, even new values and new attitudes (thank you, Patti LaBelle) – after we’ve removed those blinders of habit and mediocrity which we’ve worn for so long, and after we’ve sought to separate the influx into “below” and “above,” or after we’ve sought to separate the influx into that which speaks to our purpose, passion, and values, suddenly the God of Jewish scripture begins to “gather.”

I love this image. I love it because after concepts such as having to find that *one* soulmate or having to discover that *singular* purpose or having to touch that *core* passion have been revealed as laughable antagonists in the grand drama of a limitless Mind, our mental world is left cluttered with new possibilities. We see potential soulmates in every face. We perceive meaningful purposes in countless arenas. We discover deep passions toward various ends.

The need to “gather” speaks because while we might have jettisoned a perspective in which life has been an impossible maze, we have adopted a perspective in which life has become an endless buffet.

Gather, indeed.

Let’s say you’ve opened to new ideas. Let’s say you’ve received an influx of wild stuff to consider. Let’s say you’ve sought to separate those lower ideas which tend to be earthbound and ego-driven from those higher ideas which we might better associate with higher attributes such as purpose, passion, and values. Let’s say you’ve done all of that.

Good job.

Day three seems to suggest that there must come a point at which you will have to choose. You will have to decide. You will have to “gather” the ideas “unto one place.”

And hopefully, no longer are you compelled by the idea of making the “right” choice but by the idea of bringing the right choice-maker to the “next” choice. Is this my soulmate for today? Is this the purpose most appropriate to this juncture in life? Is this the passion which pulls a little harder than the rest?

And in such a moment of commitment, latent powers seem to be released. Scripture suggests that to commit to an herb is to begin to bring forth something of its kind, and to commit to a fruit tree is to begin to bring forth something of its kind. Choices are, in a sense, moments of power – unleashed by nothing more than the decision itself, made with intention and followed by action. It was Thoreau who said the same thing using these words, “The moment one definitely commits oneself, providence moves too. All sorts of things occur to help one that would never otherwise have occurred. A whole stream of events issues from the decision, raising in one's favor all manner of unforeseen incidents and meetings and material assistance, which no man could have dreamt would have come his way.”

Like the God of Jewish scripture, if the charge of day one is to affirm our readiness as receivers of Mind, and if the charge of day two is to fashion that firmament that separates the waters above from the waters below, perhaps the charge of day three is, at long last, to make your next best choice at the grand buffet that is your life.

CHAPTER POWERS

Faith and Will

Unity Spiritual Center (1965 – 1985)

Rev. Norman's next goal for the church was to establish a permanent building of their own that the church could call home. The search for a suitable site began in Lakewood, but due to increasing population and demand for real estate, property values in those areas were too costly for the church's financial means at that time. The perfect property was eventually found, in what appeared to be at the time, a less desirable location. A 3.5-acre plot of land was purchased in what was then the underdeveloped suburb of Westlake. Rev. Norman and the congregation could not have foreseen that within twenty years the Westlake site would be the perfect location for the church.

As with any major building project there were challenges to overcome, but the building was completed and dedicated in April of 1971. Once the primary structure was in place, the congregation now had a base from which to operate and to enhance the campus stepwise as the needs presented themselves.

In August of 1971, Rev. Norman decided to take a sabbatical from ministry. It was at that time that Rev. Robert Wallet (ordained 1962) became the senior minister for the congregation. Rev. Bob provided solid, well-educated, and balanced leadership to the congregation. Building on the legacy of his predecessors, Rev. Bob created a spiritual home where people could come to worship and learn.

In the 1980s, Women of Unity raised funds for a five-year landscaping project. The results of that investment continue to bless the church to this day with the beautiful Prayer Garden and landscaping. An annual Apple Fest was held as a fundraiser. The sale of arts, crafts, and jewelry were among the offerings that benefited the landscaping fund.

CHAPTER DISCUSSION

1. In what ways have you sought to live in “the right way?” How has that approach worked for you and/or worked against you? How does the suggestion that there may be many “right ways” land in you? What does it do in your inner world?
2. Were you to take day one and day two – both days of mind, shall we say - and translate something from that work into a “day of action,” what might that day of action include? How can you take one step into that which has been revealed through your inner processes? Is it time to update your headshot for that dating app? Is it time to at least figure out what that educational aspiration might cost?
3. That signs give way to action is a common idea. That action gives way to signs, less so. Have you had an experience in which your decided action seemed to release powers and garner support that wasn’t there before? Have you experienced signs giving way to action? What about action giving way to signs?

CHAPTER ACTIVITIES

1. Unity’s fifth step is to live into the truths we hold. Identify a truth you hold at this point in the study, and determine how you will “live into it.” This is the difference between magical thinking and spiritual living, really. The latter requires something of us – something of an investment.

CHAPTER AFFIRMATION: I have all the faith I need. I use it wisely to promote good in my life and in the world.

How do you see day three at work in this era of Unity Spiritual Center? In what ways were their best ideas translated into early choices resulting in your sitting here, reading these words?

Week 4 (October 26, 2025)

And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years: And let them be for lights in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth: and it was so. And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: he made the stars also. And God set them in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth. And to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness: and God saw that it was good. And the evening and the morning were the fourth day (Genesis 1:14-19).

“The fourth step in creation is the development of the ‘two great lights,’ the will and the understanding, or the sun (the spiritual I AM) and the moon (the intellect). These are but reflectors of the true light; for God had said, ‘Let there be light: and there was light’ - before the sun and the moon were created.”

- Fillmore, Charles. *Mysteries of Genesis*. Unity School of Christianity, 1936

CHAPTER INTRODUCTION

Charles Fillmore suggests the two great lights to represent something of the spiritual self of us and the intellectual self of us. I quite love that.

I'll start by suggesting that having nothing to lose really isn't a bad place to be. It's not a comfortable place, but it's not a bad place. In fact, it's quite a powerful place. Those who have nothing to lose can give rise to tremendous progress. Having nothing to lose rends us open to our powers in ways that a restrained normalcy may not.

Our friends in recovery might call this position “rock bottom.” And, it's the position from which one finally acknowledges that of our egoic selves (I might say of our intellectual selves), we've done all we knew to do, and it hasn't worked. And from such a position that we finally say, “I open to a Power greater than myself.” And in such an opening, “a Power greater than myself” seems to respond.

But then what often happens is that as life becomes new, as circumstances change, that egoic self of us tempts us to turn from that openness – from that “Power greater than myself,” to those same machinations, to those same intellectual efforts, which landed us at “rock bottom” in the first place. Marianne Williamson in her bestselling book, *A Return to Love*, said it this way, “Until your knees finally hit the floor you're just playing at life ... The moment of surrender is not when life is over. It's when it begins.”

In related interpretations, Mr. Fillmore suggests this as a primary distinction between John the Baptist and Jesus the Christ – the former being the intellectual self of us and the latter being the spiritual self of us. Mr. Fillmore's suggestion is that in the same way that John was the precursor to Jesus, to, too, is the intellect the precursor to the spiritual; that the intellect is a wonderful thing that takes us as far as it can, but that ultimately, we will have to reach beyond the intellect's limitations to realize our fullest selves.

To my thinking, day four and day five stand together to caution us against such tendencies! When we embark upon a daring new way of being, and when life starts to change, the temptation to retreat to the ways of a former self (no matter that the ways of a former self didn't really work) or to a predictable comfort will be strong.

Like the God of Jewish scripture, if the charge of day one is to affirm our readiness as receivers of Mind, and if the charge of day two is to fashion that firmament that separates the waters above from the waters below, and if the charge of day three is, at long last, to make a choice at the grand buffet that is your life, perhaps the charge of day four is to stay the course; to stay courageous in our humility. Perhaps the charge of day four is to lose the rock bottom position but keep the rock bottom mind that's so very open, so very willing, so loudly calling to that greater Power from bended knee.

CHAPTER POWERS

Imagination and Zeal

Unity Spiritual Center (1985-2005)

Rev. Bob retired in August 1993. The Church of Unity, as the congregation was officially known, then hired Rev. Sandra Weisner (ordained 1988). Rev. Sandra served as senior minister for the congregation until 1996. The Board of Trustees hired Rev. Harriet Valliere as interim minister. Rev. Harriet served in that role until July 1997 when Reverends Stan (ordained 1981) and Barbara Smith (ordained 1997), a married couple, were hired as co-ministers.

Just prior to the Smiths' arrival as ministers, the Board of Trustees decided to renovate, renew, and decorate the interior of the building. These improvements included new paint and carpeting in the common areas and Youth classrooms. Upgrades to the interior ceilings and lighting were also made. It was at this time that the church purchased an adjacent residential property just to the west. This purchase added 2.5 acres of land and a single-family home to the property that now totaled 6.0 acres. This expansion gave the church the feel of a campus, not just a site.

In 2001, nearly all congregants collaborated to create a weekend event called The Festival of the Arts. The large Cleveland radio station WDOI predicted that 10,000 people would attend. The festival plan included several large tents, five bands, gourmet health foods, youth games and activities, twenty-two booths with outside vendors, an outdoor bookstore, outdoor portable restrooms and off-duty police to direct traffic. Scheduled for the weekend of September 14 - 16, 2001, the church was ready for a paradigm-shifting event. However, on September 11, 2001, multiple terror attacks occurred in New York City, Washington, DC, and in the skies over Pennsylvania. The organizers were, like the whole world, in a state of shock. Although only 800 - 1000 attended, many were children with parents who were appreciative. The festival suffered a net loss of more than \$55,000.00. Although that loss was recouped in the next six months or so, attendance for Sunday services and weekday classes dropped severely and took more than a year to recover to previous levels. Over

time, the church repaid vendors who had lost money. One food vendor was offered \$5000.00 to cover his losses. He was impressed with the integrity of the church, declined the money, and became much more active in the church.

CHAPTER DISCUSSION

1. Have you experienced a “rock bottom?” A state in which you were, quite simply, out of answers? What did you do? And what was the result? How did it turn out for you?
2. And can you relate to the temptation to return to the comfort of earlier patterns?
3. How might day four have been experienced by the leaders of this era’s Unity Spiritual Center? What do you imagine they might have felt or thought?
4. This era of Unity Spiritual Center knew beginnings and endings – as each of us has. What choices do you imagine they might have considered? What would you have done?

CHAPTER ACTIVITIES

1. Day four carries a theme of humility - humility in the sense that whether it’s our failures or our successes which close us, life has a way of encouraging us to open – yet again - to lay aside both our grievances and our many answers. What are the answers you carry which might keep you stuck? To what do you cling simply because it has worked in the past? Or because it’s an unchallenged assumption?

CHAPTER AFFIRMATION: The Power of God in me creates a world of peace and harmony.

Week 5 (November 2, 2025)

And God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowl that may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven. And God created great whales, and every living creature that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly, after their kind, and every winged fowl after his kind: and God saw that it was good. And God blessed them, saying, Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let fowl multiply in the earth. And the evening and the morning were the fifth day (Genesis 1:20-23).

“The fifth step in creation is the bringing forth of sensation and discrimination. The ‘creatures’ are thoughts. The ‘birds . . . in the open firmament of heaven’ are ideas approaching spiritual understanding.

- Fillmore, Charles. Mysteries of Genesis. Unity School of Christianity, 1936

CHAPTER INTRODUCTION

Manifestation. It’s a word used widely in circles which study materials such as this. Sadly, it’s a word often pointing more toward sense consciousness than spiritual consciousness (more toward acquisition, accumulation and other earthbound, ego-driven matters than spiritual unfoldment). And yet, here we are: manifestation day.

God created great whales, and every living creature that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly, after their kind.

Again, if we can accept water as a symbol speaking to a cause more mental than physical, we are reminded that something of a mental process stands as the foundation for all manner of manifestation which now seems to be springing forth.

You opened. You weighed. You gathered, decided, chose, and acted. You did everything right in the sense that you did everything necessary for day five to be relevant in your world. You did everything right for something, or for many things, in your experience to be changing.

If something relational was the center of your previous “days,” likely something relational is shifting in your experience. If something creative was the center of your previous “days,” likely something creative is shifting in your experience. And famously, God said, “Be fruitful and multiply.”

As I’ve said for many years, there’s a reason the famous Christmas carol – you know the one – places comfort before joy. “Tidings of comfort and joy,” is the line, if you require a reminder.

Oh, great – now you’re humming.

It's a snarky comment, I know, but it carries truth. In far too many endeavors have I stood witness to the human compulsion to sacrifice joy on the altar of comfort. You've finally made it to day five. Something relational is finally shifting in your experience. But you're so accustomed to some stale status quo that comfort is allowed to rush in, sabotage whatever it is that's shifting, eradicate the discomfort of vulnerability (of course), and in so doing, jettison the possibility of satisfaction.

Maybe that's why the famous Christmas carol places comfort before joy.

Twice.

In a row.

Living an inspired life often looks like a grand romance when played out on giant screens by epic heroes. Living an inspired life often feels like a dangerous thriller when played out in normal life by "little old us."

The writer of this epic teaching mythology seemed to recognize this. God created great whales, and every living creature that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly, after their kind. It seems pointed that God didn't say, "Whoa, I didn't see that coming," or, "That didn't exactly turn out how I had planned." Rather, God looked at everything such as it was unfolding and said, "Be fruitful and multiply."

Like the God of Jewish scripture, if the charge of day one is to affirm our readiness as receivers of Mind, and if the charge of day two is to fashion that firmament that separates the waters above from the waters below, and if the charge of day three is, at long last, to make a choice at the grand buffet that is your life, and if the charge of day four is to stay the course; to stay courageous, to lose the rock bottom position but keep the rock bottom mind that's so very open, so very willing, so loudly calling to that greater Power from bended knee, perhaps the charge of day five is to continue. It's to embrace the new vulnerabilities of purposeful living.

CHAPTER POWERS

Strength

Unity Spiritual Center 2005 - 2025

Even after overcoming the challenges from the events of 2001, by 2003 the congregation was ready, willing, and able to continue with growth and upgrades. The name of the organization was officially changed from The Church of Unity to Unity Spiritual Center (USC). The name change was part of the Board of Trustees' long-term and comprehensive vision at that time to greatly expand the church's offerings to include classes and activities seven days a week, and to appeal to younger generations, especially young families. New outdoor signage was added. The parking lot was expanded and repaved in alignment with the board's understanding that if we wanted growth, we had to provide a place for more people to park.

In 2004, leadership decided to reconfigure and renovate the sanctuary including new paint, carpeting, a stage, a large backlit screen, as well as new lighting, projection and sound systems. The traditional wooden church pews were replaced with high quality, and far more comfortable, modern church chairs. Finally, in a very busy year, a 90-foot outdoor labyrinth and children's playground were built and the landscaping and gardens expanded and improved. The labyrinth was a huge labor of love by a few congregants, and was the largest in Ohio at that time.

In 2005, Reverends Stan and Barbara created a sixteen-person worship team to assist them in producing the Sunday services, including new multimedia presentations. Average weekly attendance continued to grow from 160 people in 2005 to more than 200 people in 2006. Attendance at weekly adult education classes also enjoyed strong participation with more than 90 people per week enrolled in various spiritual education courses. Since joining Unity Spiritual Center in 1997, the Smiths established a strong culture of congregational volunteering, and by 2006 more than 100 people had raised their hand to participate in the ways they felt called to do.

With the steady increase in attendance and wanting to move the church to the next level of growth, the Board of Trustees decided to embark on another building project. Dubbed Vision, Venture, Victory, the goal of the capital campaign was to raise more than \$250,000.00 toward a major building expansion. The idea was to create a multi-purpose building that could serve as a venue for a variety of events including retreats, lectures, concerts, parties, weddings, and much more. In addition to the large multi-purpose room, it was to have space for a bookstore, commercial kitchen, and badly needed storage. The addition would approximately double the size of the existing building.

The fundraising effort commenced in mid-2007 with the stated goals being reached by the summer of 2008. The total cost of the building addition was approximately \$1,000,000.00. Financing of \$750,000.00 was secured in August of 2008. In light of the economic environment the country was then entering, the board ultimately decided that living the principles we believe in, and holding only to a prosperity consciousness would support our church through whatever the future would bring, so the building project commenced. Construction teams broke ground in 2009 and the building was completed and opened in 2010.

On May 30, 2011, Rev. Stan made his transition. Rev. Barbara continued as senior minister until her retirement on December 1, 2013. A ministerial search team was appointed by the Board of Trustees to find our next right minister. After meeting with two finalists, an offer was given to and accepted by Rev. Joanne Rowden (ordained 2010). Rev. Joanne's tenure began in November 2014 with great enthusiasm from the congregation. Unity Hall was filled to capacity on her first Sunday as senior minister.

In March of 2020 the world was turned upside down by the global pandemic. Responding to the guidelines set by public officials, the Board of Trustees made the decision to close our facilities to in-person activities. This included Sunday services, youth and adult education, facilities rentals and any other public activities. For the next fourteen months USC continued to provide virtual experiences. A livestream of the Sunday service, with the presenters livestreaming from their homes, was created by a dedicated team led by Rev. Joanne. Her

weekly lessons, music from featured soloists, and sing-alongs provided by the music team and a technical audio/visual team combined to provide the best weekly spiritual experience possible given the circumstances.

In May 2021, with much of the country and the world attempting to return to normal operations, USC reopened for in-person experiences. Weekly attendance after reopening was greatly diminished from pre-2020 levels. Attendance levels before the shutdown were approximately 200 to 225 people per week split between services at 9:00 am and 11:00 am. After reopening, Sunday service was offered only at 11:00 am with attendance averaging approximately 60 to 75 people per week. In February of 2021, Rev. Joanne announced to the congregation that she would be retiring at the end of July that same year. With six months to prepare for the transition, the Board of Trustees appointed a ministerial search team to embark on the journey of finding our next right minister.

CHAPTER DISCUSSION

1. I've often defined consciousness as that to which we've become accustomed. Said more plainly, consciousness is what we've gotten used to. Where in life are you comfortable? And what challenges that comfort? Do compliments unsettle? How much income is too much? And what strategies can you articulate and practice to challenge that discomfort? "Why, thank you very much," might be an example.
2. What vulnerabilities would fade if you knew your success was assured?
3. Have you ever "continued" when you had no more safety net? Marriage could be a good example! What happened? Have you any regrets?
4. Unity Spiritual Center continued. Why did USC emerge successfully while other centers did not?

CHAPTER ACTIVITIES

1. In what ways might you practice simply being in vulnerability this week, without the common responses of resistance or avoidance? Do that.

CHAPTER AFFIRMATION: I am Strength. Perseverance, tenacity, and endurance are mine!

Week 6 (November 9, 2025)

And God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after his kind: and it was so. And God made the beast of the earth after his kind, and cattle after their kind, and every thing that creepeth upon the earth after his kind: and God saw that it was good. And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth. And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat. And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for meat: and it was so. And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day. Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them (Genesis 1:24-31).

“The sixth step in creation is the bringing forth of ideas after their kind. When man approaches the creative level in his thought, he is getting close to God in his consciousness, and then the realization that he is the very image and likeness of his Creator dawns on him. This is the consciousness in man of Christ.”

- Fillmore, Charles. *Mysteries of Genesis*. Unity School of Christianity, 1936

CHAPTER INTRODUCTION

Welcome to day six. It's at this point that God is imagined to have ideated human beings and to have issued the dictate, “Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.”

Now, if you don't already know, biblical translation is a wildly tricky matter. Biblical translations tend to reflect the biases, beliefs, agendas, assumptions, needs, wants, even the inadequacies of their respective translators. This is why I say that to think we can just grab that King James Bible from the nightstand and open it without any context of the history, teaching traditions, cultural norms, political dynamics, situational circumstances, linguistic nuances, and beyond, is to think we can watch a 3-D movie without those multi-colored paper glasses.

The viewer sees. The movie plays. And yet the viewer doesn't see what the movie plays!

That's what it's like.

And it gets even more complicated when semitic languages are involved. Semitic languages are more prone to misinterpretation as meaning tends to be more dependent upon context, collective history, and understanding, then modern western languages which seek precision in each word. To consider that semitic languages are even written from right to left – or from the more creative and artistic hemisphere to the more linear and objective hemisphere - speaks to the differences and the challenges. In the end, semitic languages are even more prone to being weaponized by the biases of a translator – intentional or not.

So, this said, maybe it won't surprise the reader to consider that the semitic source translated into *take dominion* might have been better translated into *take care*.

Does that suggestion shift this text, or what?

What if humanity has spent its past few centuries consuming as the species meant to dominate, only to discover that we must spend our next few centuries recompensing as the species intended to preserve? Would humanity still wave the flag of religious justification if we had to forgo the role of taker for the role of caretaker?

Rabbi Ted Falcon reminds that Jewish tradition often teaches that the world we know is alive and deserves to be treated as such; that Jewish tradition often suggests no separation between humans and nature – all arising from the same Source, and all subject to the natural cycles of “birth, flowering, decay, and death.”

Like the God of Jewish scripture, if the charge of day one is to affirm our readiness as receivers of Mind, and if the charge of day two is to fashion that firmament that separates the waters above from the waters below, and if the charge of day three is, at long last, to make a choice at the grand buffet that is your life, and if the charge of day four is to stay the course; to stay courageous, to lose the rock bottom position but keep the rock bottom mind that's so very open, so very willing, so loudly calling to that greater Power from bended knee, and if the charge of day five is to continue; to embrace the new vulnerabilities of purposeful living, perhaps the charge of day six is to look up from our works, remembering that we are inextricably bound to the family of life - that our creations are never ours alone but that they reach beyond us as if tweaking the strands of that invisible web we share. Perhaps the charge of day six, then, is the charge to a deepened humility, to a heightened sense of personal responsibility, to a renewed commitment to the life beyond our sight and to the life beyond our years.

CHAPTER POWERS

Life and Love

Unity Spiritual Center 2025 -

The search team worked tirelessly for more than three and a half years, until in the summer of 2024 they recommended to the Board of Trustees that they interview a highly qualified candidate named Rev. Dr.

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Richard Loren Held (ordained by Unity in 2017) who accepted the position of senior minister and began his tenure in November 2024.

Although from time to time, some congregants expressed impatience about how long it was taking to find the right minister, in the end the one found was such a wonderful fit for our community, that the search team was showered with gratitude. During the forty months between Rev. Joanne retiring and Rev. Richard beginning, USC was blessed to have the opportunity to learn from a long list of guest speakers, both in-person and those who presented to us via recorded video messages. Held together by the strong leadership of USC Music Director Bonnie Chase, Sunday services during this time were presented in a manner as close as possible to resemble the traditional order of service.

In the aftermath of the pandemic and without a senior minister, Sunday attendance remained below pre-2020 levels but was robust enough for operations to continue. The church was extremely fortunate during this long period between ministers to have a Board of Trustees who were able to persevere with steady leadership and unflinching faith. USC also had an asset that contributed to their financial solvency during this challenging time. The adjacent residential property that was purchased in 1999 was sold in August of 2021. Proceeds from the sale of that property were used for ongoing maintenance and upgrades to the buildings and grounds, and to make up for any shortfalls in income.

In September of 2023, USC Music Director Bonnie Chase and keyboardist Jerry Cergol retired. Bonnie had served as Music Director since 1999. During her tenure she worked with three ministers to help establish and develop the worship team, the order of service, the Choir on Fire, and to provide uplifting music for the congregation each and every week. Jerry had served as church keyboardist since 1961. Beginning as an eighteen year old just out of high school, Jerry was the Rock of Gibraltar for USC's music for more than sixty two years. His skill and professionalism as a musician are surpassed only by his deep commitment to Unity Principles and the example he sets for living the truth he knows.

USC has a long tradition of commitment to youth education, led by current Youth Director Sara Schlegel. Half of the north wing of the building is dedicated to youth education classrooms. Over the years, many hundreds of young people have come through the Youth and Family Ministry (YFM) programs.

Matthew Wilson expressed interest in serving as music director for USC. He had held that position at Unity in Lynwood, WA where Rev. Richard previously served as senior minister. The congregation had the opportunity to hear him sing during Rev. Richard's interview visit and from the many videos of his performances as music director posted online on sites such as YouTube. Matthew formally interviewed for the position and was hired as USC music director in November 2024.

Rev. Richard and Matthew have injected new life into USC. A consistent Sunday presence and new way of approaching familiar subjects have contributed to the steady increase in Sunday attendance. He and Matthew collaborate each week to provide uplifting music and song for our congregation. We now share our Sunday experience with more than 700 people each week who attend services in our "virtual sanctuary." These online

congregants are as much a part of the USC family as those who attend Sunday services in person, and we are equally blessed by their presence.

As USC celebrates our one-hundred-year anniversary, we have one eye looking back to honor our traditions and legacy and the other eye looking forward to our next century as a community.

History written by Greg Skuderin and Terri Brewer – August 23, 2025

CHAPTER DISCUSSION

1. Who made a difference in your life? How did they do it? Do they know? And does it matter?
2. It's been suggested that one begins to know the meaning of life when one plants trees under whose cooling boughs one will never rest. For whom or what do you live, besides yourself?
3. What is the central contribution communities such as USC can make to our greater world? Why does our shared work matter?

CHAPTER ACTIVITIES

1. As a gesture of spiritual understanding, consider the ritual of planting a tree.
2. Write your own obituary. How do you desire to be remembered?

CHAPTER AFFIRMATION: God's love flows into every cell of my body, and I go into the world as its beacon.

Week 7 (November 15, 2025)

And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made. Genesis 1:1–2:3 (Genesis 2:1-3).

CHAPTER INTRODUCTION

At least in part, I speak for a living. It's my job to offer something of relevance on Sunday mornings in a formal fashion, and something of relevance on days between in a less formal fashion. I'm a minister, you see. Like those who read texts such as this, I believe there's something more to life than that which can be grasped by the senses. And my job is to articulate that "something more." I might suggest that such a belief – the deep intuitive sense that there's more to life than a five-sensory, incarnate human momentarily inhabiting a spinning blue-green marble in a remote corner of an infinite universe, is something of the very foundation of all faith traditions.

When we seek to articulate that "something more," however, institutions are born, and problems arise.

Said in a different way, I am creative for a living. I seek different, relatable and memorable ways to point to the same basic ideas, week after week after week:

Let me find a new way to suggest that there's one Life behind all life.

Let me find a new way to suggest that we are expressions of that one Life experiencing its infinite self in finite form, as us.

Let me find a new way to suggest that if the essence of all Life is that singular ground of all being we call God, Life is worthy of reverence, respect, and its right to be.

Let me find a new way to suggest that you – exactly as you are; having nothing to prove, nothing to redeem, nothing to recompense, nothing to overcome, nothing to earn, nothing achieve – are worthy of that same reference and respect.

Let me find a new way to suggest that the powers of the consciousness you hold (the beliefs, the assumptions, the limitations, the expectations) really do act to frame the life you can experience from the life you cannot experience, even though it's all available to you.

Let me find a new way to suggest that there's more to life than you see; and there's more to you than you know.

And then, I work. And I work some more. I assemble words and I create rituals, and I organize inspirations until it feels as if something of that outpouring has exhausted itself. And I might sit longer, but that sense that the process has reached its end remains. Nothing else comes. I can try harder. Nothing else comes.

So, I walk the dog.

And the easy flow of creativity begins again.

Maybe it's the shift from intense focus to carefree availability. Or, maybe it's the chemical responses to being tethered to a 100-pound horse-like creature who can somehow make himself weigh 300 pounds as he careens and leans and lunges as if on some canine caffeine high.

What I do know is this: effort and inspiration ebb and flow in relation with each other. This isn't to say we don't have to work. It is to say that there's something to keeping our work open and connected and flowing from the highest possible self of us, as it will - with ease and at times, delight.

It's been my experience that in any creative endeavor, such moments of sabbath are required. There comes that point at which we've reached a necessary pause; and in a world that suggests we do more, something higher suggests that we do less. In a sense, we call our human efforts to that point complete. We celebrate them. We thank them. Symbolically, if not literally, we stop and walk the dog. We have to release. And it's not the release of giving up and calling it quits. It's the release of stepping back and readying again.

Like the God of Jewish scripture, if the charge of day one is to affirm our readiness as receivers of Mind, and if the charge of day two is to fashion that firmament that separates the waters above from the waters below, and if the charge of day three is, at long last, to make a choice at the grand buffet that is your life, and if the charge of day four is to stay the course; to stay courageous, to lose the rock bottom position but keep the rock bottom mind that's so very open, so very willing, so loudly calling to that greater Power from bended knee, and if the charge of day five is to continue, to embrace the new vulnerabilities of purposeful living, and if the charge of day six is to look up from our works, remembering that we are inextricably bound to the family of life; that our creations are never ours alone but that they reach beyond us as if tweaking the strands of that invisible web we share; the charge to a deepened humility, to a heightened sense of personal responsibility, to a renewed commitment to the life beyond our sight and to the life beyond our years, perhaps the charge of day seven is to pause. Give thanks. Walk the dog and call a moment, such as it's been (however it's been), complete.

Stop once in a while. You've done good. Now begin again.

CHAPTER POWERS

Zeal and Release

Sunday, November 16th, 6:00PM

Fall Program Closing Celebration

All participants are warmly welcome to attend this Fall Program closing celebration. Registration will be available (and required) and dinner will be included.

Wednesday, November 26th, 2025, 7:00PM

Thanksgiving Eve Service and Pie Reception

Unity Cofounders Charles and Myrtle Fillmore encouraged praise and thanksgiving as powerful spiritual disciplines! Modern science would not disagree with their assertion that a heart of gratitude really just makes us healthier, happier, and downright smarter people! All are welcome to bring a favorite pie (although there's always more than enough)!

Sunday, December 21st, 2025, 6:00PM

Solstice Concert and Labyrinth Walk

Solstice as a word is derived from the Latin "sol," meaning sun, and "sistere," meaning to stand still. So, for those of us in the northern hemisphere, let us gather on the night the sun stands still to acknowledge the ending of a deepening darkness, and to welcome the beginning of an emerging light, as our ancestors have done for millennia – millennia well predating the Christian tradition. Amidst a candlelit concert of very special music by Matthew Wilson and Rev. Richard Loren Held, the explanation and presentation of the wassail and yule loaf will bring new meaning to your holiday season as it brings deepened peace to your heart.

Wednesday, December 24th, 2025, 6:00PM

Christmas Eve Candle Lighting Service

Join Rev. Richard, Matthew, Prayer Chaplains, and special guests for this – one of the most sacred evenings of the Christian year, celebrated through the singing of song, the telling of story, and the lighting of candles.

Unity Spiritual Center

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