

UNITY OF FORT LAUDERDALE · WEEK 1 OF 6

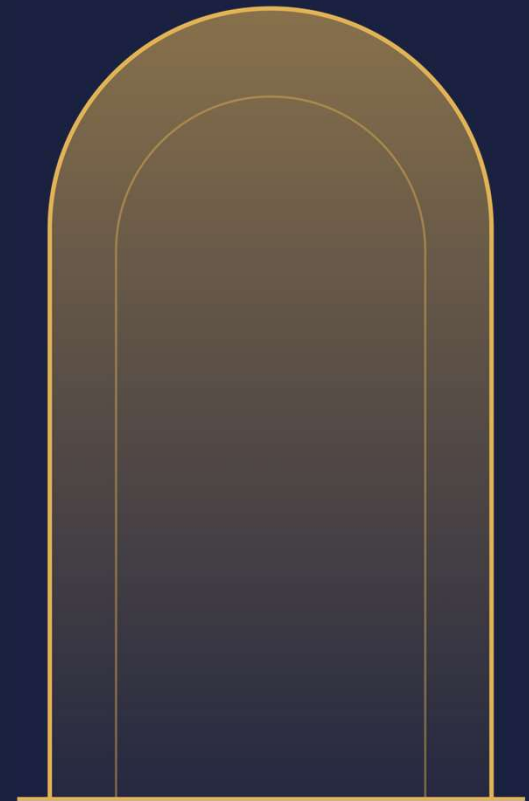
THRESHOLD

A 6-Week Journey to Wholeness

Tonight: The Nervous System as Sacred Ground

Rev. Bryan Sawchuk · Tuesday, October 13, 2026 · 7:00–8:30 PM on Zoom

ASK *In one word, how are you arriving tonight? Type it in the chat.*



THE JOURNEY

We are living in a threshold time

Between and between the world we knew and the one still forming. These six weeks treat that in-between space not as something to escape, but as **sacred ground**.

01

Unity teaching

02

SEM: Spiritual &
Emotional Maturity

03

Edwin Olson's Liminal
Consciousness

04

The Fillmores'
Correspondence School
lessons

Spiritual law approached like a dependable science — practical Truths anyone can test and apply in daily life.

ASK What drew you to this class at this moment in your life?

What you'll take away

01

A daily grounding practice for anxiety and stress in real time

02

A new relationship with money, rooted in security and trust

03

Tools for showing love as action, not just feeling

04

A felt sense of connection and CommUnity in an isolating world

05

Renewed trust in your imagination as spiritual guidance

06

A simple, sustainable practice that lasts beyond week six

ASK Which one of these do you most need right now?

PROSPERITY INVESTMENT

\$60

Suggested, per person

Includes all six live sessions, CommUnity connection and materials.

Everyone is welcome.

Please don't let the investment be a barrier. Pay what you're able, pop in for a few sessions, or reach out and we'll find a way.

GIVE ONLINE

unityfortlauderdale.org/give

Fund: **THRESHOLD ~ 2026**

IN PERSON OR BY MAIL

Unity of Fort Lauderdale

2598 E Sunrise Blvd #2104, Fort Lauderdale, FL 33304

Six Tuesdays, one threshold

Date	Theme	The invitation
Oct 13 · Tonight	The Nervous System as Sacred Ground	The pause as a doorway, not a problem
Oct 20	Prosperity Reframed	From scarcity to security and trust
Oct 27	Love & Relationship in an Isolated Age	Love as action, not just feeling
Nov 3	Connection Beyond the Self	Transcending division, creating greater wholes
Nov 10	Imagination as Spiritual Faculty	The power that shapes what comes next
Nov 17	Integration: Living the New Story	Building a practice that lasts

ASK Which week are you most curious about — and why?

Every Tuesday · 7:00–8:30 PM · Live on Zoom

Tonight's flow

1	Welcome — how we'll be together	10 min
2	Experience first — a guided pause	15 min
3	Reflect — sharing in small groups	15 min
4	Make meaning — the teaching	20 min
5	Deepen — return to the practice	15 min
6	Experiment — your practice this week	10 min
7	Close — silence and prayer	5 min

WHY WE BEGIN HERE

Why start with the nervous system?

Before we can think new thoughts, the body has to feel centered enough to think them. When we are stressed, our bodies shift into protection mode, and protection mode narrows what we can see, feel and imagine. So our journey to wholeness begins in the body — with the pause.

What we are carrying

This has been a hard year to feel whole. Nearly 9 in 10 Americans report financial stress, and the U.S. Surgeon General's 2023 advisory found about half of U.S. adults report loneliness.

What the research shows

A 2023 Stanford study (Balban et al., Cell Reports Medicine) found that just 5 minutes a day of slow breathing with long exhales improved mood and lowered anxiety over one month.

What Unity teaches

We create our experiences through the activity of our consciousness. A calm, open body gives our consciousness room to choose a new thought, a new feeling, a new response.

STEP 1 • WELCOME • 10 MIN

How we'll be together — and what it means

Give and receive welcome

Come as you are. You belong here, tired, hopeful, skeptical or all three.

By invitation, not demand

You never have to share. Passing, keeping your camera off, or just listening is always okay.

No fixing or advising

No fixing, saving, advising or correcting. When someone shares, we listen. We don't solve their problem or tell them what to do.

Turn to wonder

When the going gets rough and you feel judgment rising, get curious instead: "I wonder what that is like for them... or for me?"

Trust and learn from the silence

Silence is not dead air. It is where insight arrives. We won't rush to fill it.

What is shared here stays here

Stories stay in this circle. What you learned about yourself is yours to take.

Adapted from Parker J. Palmer's Circle of Trust® Touchstones

Ask: "Can I get a nod or thumbs up if you're willing to hold these together?"

STEP 2 • EXPERIENCE FIRST • 15 MIN

A guided pause — what we are about to do

We start with experience, not explanation. For the next 10 minutes I'll guide you inward with a few simple questions, based on a practice called Focusing. There is nothing to get right. Your only job is to notice.

Focusing

A practice developed by philosopher and psychologist Eugene Gendlin: gently listening to what the body knows before we have words for it.

Felt sense

The body's wordless knowing — a tight chest before a hard talk, a "gut feeling," a lightness when something is right.

Your choice

Eyes open or closed. Sitting, lying down. If anything feels like too much, open your eyes and simply watch.

HAVE READY

Something to write with — at the end you'll jot down a word or image.

STEP 2 · GUIDED PAUSE · READ SLOWLY · PART 1 OF 2

1 · Arrive, and clear a space

Get comfortable. Close your eyes or soften your gaze — or keep them open and simply watch.

Feel your feet on the floor... the chair holding you. Breathe in slowly... and let it go, a little longer on the out-breath.

[pause — three slow breaths together]

Now gently ask yourself: "How is my life going right now?" Don't answer with your head. Just notice what comes.

Imagine setting each thing down beside you, just for now, like packages on a table.

[pause — 30 seconds of silence]

2 · Notice, and receive

Bring your attention into your body — your throat, your chest, your belly. Ask: "Where does my body hold this year?"

Tightness, heaviness, buzzing, or nothing at all — whatever is there is welcome. Stay with it kindly, the way you'd sit with a friend who's had a hard day.

[pause — 30 seconds]

Let a word, a phrase or an image come from that place. Don't think it up; let it arrive. Does it fit? If not, let another come.

[pause — 30 seconds]

Whatever came, receive it: "Thank you. I hear you." One more breath... and gently come back. Jot down your word or image.

STEP 3 • REFLECT • 15 MIN

Share in twos and threes

In breakout rooms, each person takes about 3 minutes to share. The others simply listen — or ask an honest, open question: a question you do NOT already know the answer to, that helps the speaker hear themselves, not you.

THE SPEAKER REFLECTS ON

- *What did you notice in your body?*
- *What word or image came to you?*
- *What surprised you?*

Instead of fixing...	Try an honest, open question
<i>"You should try..."</i>	"What was that like for you?"
<i>"That happened to me too..."</i>	"Where did you feel that in your body?"
<i>"Don't worry, it'll be fine."</i>	"Is there more you'd like to say about that?"
<i>"Have you thought about...?"</i>	"What surprised you most?"

Who goes first? The person whose birthday is closest to today. Passing is always okay.

WELCOME BACK

What was it like to be listened to?

Most of us rarely get listened to without someone trying to fix us. Being truly heard is itself a nervous system experience — it tells the body "you are safe here." That is why we listen this way.

ASK THE WHOLE GROUP

- *What was it like to be listened to without being fixed?*
- *What was it like to listen without fixing?*
- *One word for what you noticed — unmute or type it in the chat.*

STEP 4 · MAKE MEANING · 20 MIN

limen

Latin: **threshold**

Liminal spaces are "times of uncertainty, questioning, making sense of how to handle a transition and being on the threshold of something new but not quite there yet." — Edwin E. Olson

Anthropologist Victor Turner called this being "betwixt and between" — like a young person who is no longer a child, but not yet an adult. Everyday thresholds: a move, a retirement, a new job or a lost one, the end of a relationship, children leaving home, a changing body, a changing world. The in-between feeling is not a sign something is wrong. It is the threshold — and what you touched in the pause is what it feels like to stand there consciously.

ASK

What threshold are you standing on right now?

STEP 4 • KEY WORDS

What is the nervous system?

Nervous system

The body's communication network — the brain, spinal cord and nerves — constantly scanning for safety or danger and telling the body how to respond.

Autonomic nervous system

The automatic part we don't consciously control: heartbeat, breathing, digestion. It runs our stress response, usually below our awareness.

Sympathetic — the gas pedal

Mobilizes us to act: faster heart, shallow breath, tense muscles. Helpful in real danger; exhausting when it never turns off.

Parasympathetic — the brake

Calms us to rest, digest, heal and connect. A slow, long exhale is one of the quickest ways to press the brake.

Vagus nerve

The longest nerve in the body, linking the brain with the heart, lungs and gut. It carries many of the brake's "you are safe" signals.

Regulation

The ability to return to calm after stress. Not never getting upset — but finding our way back. It can be practiced and strengthened.

ASK Which is more active in you right now — the gas pedal or the brake?

STEP 4 • KEY WORDS

What is the vagus nerve?

The vagus nerve is the longest nerve in the body. Its name comes from the Latin for "wandering," because it wanders from the brainstem down through the neck to the heart, lungs and digestive system. It is the main pathway of the body's brake, the part of the nervous system that says "you are safe now."

What it does

Slows the heart rate, deepens the breath, supports digestion, and connects to the voice and face. It helps us rest, heal and connect with others.

A two-way street

Most of its fibers carry messages FROM the body TO the brain. How we breathe, sound and move tells the brain whether we are safe.

How we engage it

A long, slow exhale. Humming, chanting or singing. Cool water on the face. A warm voice or a kind face. Laughter and connection.

UNITY CONNECTION

This is one reason singing, chanting, affirmations spoken aloud and silent prayer calm us. Our spiritual practices speak directly to the body.

STEP 4 • UNITY CONNECTION

The body and Unity Principle 3

"We create our experiences through the activity of our consciousness" — our thoughts, feelings, energy and vibration.

The body shapes our thoughts

When the body is in protection mode, consciousness narrows to threat. We think the same fearful thoughts, feel the same feelings, and create the same experiences.

Our thoughts shape the body

A worried thought speeds the heart; a grateful thought softens the breath. Consciousness and body are partners, not separate.

The pause is where we choose

Calming the body opens space between stimulus and response. In that space, consciousness can choose a new thought — and create a new experience.

REAL-LIFE EXAMPLE

- *The same email arrives twice. Calm, you read it as a simple request. Stressed, you read it as criticism. Same words — different state — different experience.*
- *Ask: When has your state changed how you read a situation?*

STEP 4 • MAKE MEANING

Your nervous system is a filter, not a failure

What it means: Olson describes the brain and nervous system as a gatekeeper that protects us from a "fire-hydrant rush" of everything we could take in. Aldous Huxley called it a "reducing valve." Under stress, the filter tightens and lets in only what feels urgent. That isn't failure — it's protection. But it also screens out beauty, kindness, guidance and new possibilities.

Driving in a storm

You turn the radio off without thinking. Your system narrows focus to stay safe — wise in the moment.

Money worries

You notice every bill and every price tag, but miss the friend's offer of help or the beauty of the evening.

A hard conversation

You hear the one critical sentence and miss the three appreciative ones that came before it.

"When we reduce the watchfulness of the brain, information from Consciousness flows in." — Edwin Olson

ASK

When you're stressed, what does your filter let in — and what does it screen out?

STEP 4 · A SIMPLE MAP

The nervous system ladder in real life

Therapist Deb Dana describes three states we move through many times a day. Picture one situation: an unexpected bill arrives.

Top · Safe & connected

Calm, curious, open to others

"Okay, I'll call tomorrow and set up a plan."

Middle · Mobilized (fight or flight)

Anxious, restless, on edge

Heart races. You snap at your partner. You scroll for hours.

Bottom · Shutdown

Numb, foggy, far away

You leave it unopened, go numb, and want to sleep.

GLIMMERS — AND A QUESTION

Glimmers are small moments that cue safety: a warm voice, sunlight, a pet, one slow breath. Where have you spent most of this year on the ladder? What is one glimmer you've noticed?

Adapted from Deb Dana's Polyvagal Ladder — a helpful map, not settled science

STEP 4 • PRACTICAL TOOLS

How to climb one rung at a time

We don't leap from the bottom to the top. We move one rung at a time — gently, with compassion.

From anxious → safe

- Lengthen the exhale: breathe in for 4, out for 6–8
- Feel your feet on the floor
- Name 5 things you can see
- Splash cool water on your face

From numb → mobilized

- Gentle movement: stretch, walk, sway
- Warmth: a blanket, tea, a shower
- A friendly voice: call someone
- Hum or sing — it stimulates the vagus nerve

Staying near the top

- Notice and savor glimmers
- Connection with safe people
- Prayer and meditation
- Time in nature

WHY THE LONG EXHALE WORKS

Exhaling slows the heart rate through the vagus nerve — the body's natural brake. A longer out-breath than in-breath tells the body "you are safe."

The pause is a doorway, not a problem

When we feel blocked, Olson writes, "pausing until a different idea flows in is the right thing to do." Drawing on Ervin Laszlo, he offers four movements for the pause:

Be open

to guidance from beyond
the self

Accept

the reality of what
emerges

Sense

the importance of the
message

Trust

the guidance that has
been provided

In Unity terms, the pause is where we turn from appearances to Truth. "Be still, and know that I am God." — Psalm 46:10

ASK When has a pause opened a door in your life?

STEP 4 • THE PAUSE IN REAL LIFE

The pause in action: the angry text

A family member sends a text that stings. Your heart races, your thumbs are already typing a reply. This is the threshold moment. Instead of sending, you pause.

Pause

Put the phone down. One long exhale. Feet on the floor.

Be open

"What else might be true here? What might they be going through?"

Accept

"I feel hurt, and that's okay. I don't have to push it away."

Sense

"What really matters here? The relationship matters more than being right."

Trust

"A better response will come. I can answer tomorrow."

ASK

Where in your life this week could a pause become a doorway?

STEP 5 • DEEPEN • 15 MIN

Return to the pause — with new eyes

Now we go back into the same practice, but this time with words for what we notice. Same pause, deeper awareness. I'll guide; you simply follow.

1 • Settle

Feet on the floor. In for 4... out for 6. Three times.

2 • Locate

Ask: "Where am I on the ladder right now?" Safe, mobilized, or shut down? No wrong answer.

3 • Open the door

Be open... accept what is here... sense what matters... trust.

4 • Listen

Ask: "What wants to come through?" And simply wait.

THEN SHARE WITH THE WHOLE GROUP

One word or one sentence about what you noticed — unmute or type in the chat.

INTEGRATION • USE ANY TIME

Questions for the body, right now

Take a breath. There are no right answers. Simply notice, and share only if you wish.

IN THE BODY, RIGHT NOW

- *What am I noticing in my body right now?*
- *Where is there tension, ease, warmth or numbness?*
- *If this sensation could speak, what would it say?*
- *What does my body need in this moment?*

WITH A REAL SITUATION

- *Bring to mind one stress in your life right now. What happens in my body as I think of it?*
- *Where am I on the ladder as I hold it?*
- *What would one rung up feel like?*
- *What might a pause make possible here?*

Facilitator: choose one or two questions. Leave silence before inviting shares.

INTEGRATION • RESTING IN THE UNKNOWN

Can you be willing to not know — yet?

The threshold is the place where the old has ended and the new has not yet arrived. Our habit is to rush to an answer, a fix or a plan. The invitation is to stay in the doorway a little longer, and let something new come through.

QUESTIONS FOR THE UNKNOWN

- *Can I be willing to pause, without needing the answer yet?*
- *What if not knowing is part of the threshold, not a sign that something is wrong?*
- *What happens in my body when I let go of having to figure it out?*
- *What might want to emerge if I don't force it?*
- *Can I trust that guidance will come, in its own time?*

"Be still, and know that I am God." — Psalm 46:10

STEP 6 • EXPERIMENT • 10 MIN

Your practice this week

01 • One daily pause

Three slow breaths, longer on the exhale. Notice where you are on the ladder. Ask: "What does this moment need?"

When: before you check your phone in the morning, at a red light, or before a meal.

02 • One glimmer a day

Notice and name one small moment of safety or joy, and write it down.

Example: "The sun on my face while walking the dog." "My friend's laugh on the phone."

03 • Optional journal

"What is your current view of consciousness?" Write freely for 5 minutes.

Keep your answer — we'll revisit it on November 17 to see what has shifted.

ASK

Which one practice are you choosing this week? Type it in the chat.

STEP 7 · CLOSE IN SILENCE AND PRAYER

"Please show me what I need to know to live a life of joy and meaning no matter what I am experiencing. I am so exhausted from emotional pain and anxiety and stress and lack of trust. Please help me."

— Gary Zukav, as quoted in Edwin Olson's *Liminal Consciousness*

SEE YOU NEXT TUESDAY

Prosperity Reframed

Moving from scarcity to security and trust

Tuesday, October 20 • 7:00–8:30 PM • Live on Zoom

Unity of Fort Lauderdale • unityfortlauderdale.org • 954-228-0819

