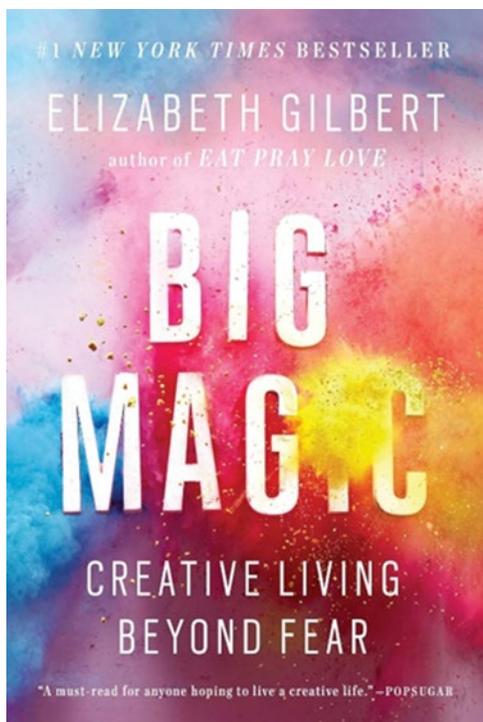


Unity of Fairfax presents...



Unity Awakening 2023

Big Magic: Creative Living Beyond Fear



Workbook by
Rev. Russell Heiland

A six-week series based on
Big Magic: Creative Living Beyond Fear
by Elizabeth Gilbert

October 1 – November 5, 2023

This workbook belongs to:



Unity Awakening 2023:
Big Magic: Creative Living Beyond Fear
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Introduction

Welcome to Unity Awakening 2023!



Dear Friends,

This is the tenth annual experience of Unity Awakening—an opportunity for the Unity of Fairfax community to come together and deepen our understanding of spiritual principles through Sunday messages and group study. For this year’s Unity Awakening, we will be studying *Big Magic: Creative Living Beyond Fear* by Elizabeth Gilbert.



I was inspired to select *Big Magic* based on a conversation with Amy Conley, Director of Music and Arts. We were in discussion of how individuals and communities are re-creating themselves in the post-pandemic world and realized that understanding the creative process itself was key to moving forward in an inspired and Spirit-driven manner.

Unity of Fairfax is also in the process of reviewing and revising its Vision, Mission, and Core Values. This, too, is a creative endeavor to which the principles articulated in *Big Magic* apply.

A new element to Unity Awakening for 2023 are group art projects in which everyone can participate. Since this is a series about creativity, let’s create together! In weekly newsletters and Sunday community news, you will be informed of the projects and how you can contribute.

Please make participating in the group sessions and art projects a priority. In the sacred container of the group, you will find friendship, inspiration, and an expanded sense of community. Be sure to stay current with your reading and thoughtfully respond to the study guide questions.

Enjoy the journey of Unity Awakening 2023!

Rev. Russell Heiland

Schedule for Unity Awakening 2023



Days	Starting	Time	Where
Sundays	October 1*	9:30 -10:30 am	Hybrid
Wednesdays	October 4	10:00 – 11:30 am	Hybrid
Thursdays	October 5	7:00 – 8:30 pm	Zoom only

* in the Metaphysical Group

Week	Date	Sunday Message	Read	Pages
1	October 1	Scary, Scary, Scary	Courage	1-27
2	October 8	Enchanté	Enchantment	31-78
3	October 15	Your Permission Slip	Permission	81-136
4	October 22	Keep Going	Persistence	139-198
5	October 29	Stubborn Gladness	Trust	201-264
6	November 5	Make Space for Paradox	Divinity	267-273

Note: Throughout this study guide, there are references to pages from *Big Magic: Creative Living Beyond Fear*. These refers to:

Gilbert, Elizabeth. *Big Magic: Creative Living Beyond Fear*. Riverhead Books, New York, NY, 20015.

Copies of *Big Magic: Creative Living Beyond Fear* are available in the Unity of Fairfax bookstore.

Week 1: Courage



October 1

Big Magic: Creative Living Beyond Fear by Elizabeth Gilbert

Reading: Courage (pp. 1-27)

Welcome to the first session of our six-week small group study! In the first meeting, there will be a brief conversation of group dynamics and group agreements. Your active participation in the discussions will enrich this experience for you and the other members of your group.

Please note that this discussion guide is just that—a guide. Sometimes a group will have such a rich discussion on one question that the group will not cover all questions in the guide. That's perfectly okay. Each group, and each meeting of each group, will have its own rhythm.

It is required that each group participant have a copy of the book *Big Magic: Creative Living Beyond Fear*. Additionally, you will want to have a journal or notebook to record your private inspirations and reflections. You may even want to have art supplies on hand as you may find yourself feeling moved to doodle, draw, or paint something. Many a brilliant innovation has had its inception on the back of a paper napkin!

Participants in Unity Awakening 2023 are encouraged to approach each week with an open mind and open heart. This program is as much a personal journey as it is an academic exploration. Respect for each individual's unique perspectives and experiences is paramount in creating an engaging and safe space to learn and grow.

Group members will be at different levels of comfort with small group processing. Below you will find a basic listing of group agreements with space to add any others that may be warranted. Following these agreements will foster a sense of trust that will add to the vitality of your group.

Group Agreements

- We appreciate your engagement and welcome those of you online to have your cameras on and microphones off unless you are speaking; however, in order to feel more comfortable, feel free to turn your camera and mic off. We assume you are paying attention unless you tell us otherwise in the chat.
- It is expected that you will participate and, to the extent you are comfortable, share from your experience. Please use the raise hand function when you would like to speak.
- Please assume everything personal that is shared is to be kept anonymous.
- Please be respectful of differences of opinion.
- Please do not offer unsolicited advice.
- Please be mindful of allowing others to share.

- No care-taking; i.e. ask for what you need and let others do the same for themselves.
- If a topic discussed touches you deeply, please speak to Amy or Rev. Russell about it after class, or send one of them a private message in the chat.
- If you have a question, please ask it!
- If this class is not meeting your needs for spiritual education and enrichment, please share your concerns with either Amy or Rev. Russell.
- _____
- _____

What does the term “creative living” mean to you?

In your own words, what is the connection between courage and creativity?

Describe how curiosity impacts creativity.

What have you done to bolster courage in challenging times?

How do creativity and courage influence your spiritual life?

“...if you can’t learn to travel comfortably alongside your fear, then you’ll never be able to go anywhere interesting or do anything interesting.” – Elizabeth Gilbert, p. 26

Share why you agree or disagree with the Elizabeth Gilbert quote above.

“True courage is not bravado. It is not ‘nerve,’ nor is it indifference to suffering. Courage is not generally estimated at its true value, because we do not understand its spiritual quality. True spiritual courage will lift us above every hindrance, even that of an accusing conscience that refuses to remit past sins and keeps us in a state of self-condemnation and remorse. True courage looks to God for the solution of every problem.” – Charles Fillmore, co-founder of Unity

Share why you agree or disagree with Charles Fillmore on “courage.”

Week 2: Enchantment



October 8

Big Magic: Creative Living Beyond Fear by Elizabeth Gilbert

Reading: Courage (pp. 31-78)

Beginning with the second week of the study, the first question for consideration will be the same. It is this: Is there an idea or inspiration from last week that you would like to explore further? If so, what is it?

What is inspiration to you, and how do you experience it?

“[Ideas] are completely separate from us, but capable of interacting with us – albeit strangely. Ideas have no material body, but they do have consciousness, and they certainly have will. Ideas are driven by a single impulse: to be made manifest. And the only way an idea can be made manifest in our world is through collaboration with a human partner.” Elizabeth Gilbert, p. 35

Is it possible she is describing what in Unity are called “divine ideas”? Share why you agree or disagree.

How does spirituality encourage you to remain open to the “magic” Gilbert describes?

The author says, “*You can’t repeat it. You can’t explain it. But it felt as if you were being guided.*” Elizabeth Gilbert, p. 66. Have you ever had the experience of “being guided”? If so, describe the experience.

Can the experience of enchantment be likened to a spiritual epiphany? Share why you agree or disagree.

“This thing called faith has been much misunderstood. The Anglo-Saxon root from which we derive the word means “to live by.” Faith is not a theory that we hold to but a power that holds us. It is a level of thinking by which we actually become a part of the all-accomplishing infinite mind of God. On this level our mental capacity is expanded somewhat as sunlight unfolds a flower into full bloom—capacities hitherto undreamed of are released, and the way is open to confidence, creativity, and success.” Eric Butterworth, speech delivered May 20, 1975.

What do you think is the connection between faith and creativity?

Week 3: Permission



October 15

Big Magic: Creative Living Beyond Fear by Elizabeth Gilbert

Reading: Permission (pp. 139-198)

Is there an idea or inspiration from last week that you would like to explore further? If so, what is it?

Creativity takes many forms. In what ways are you a creative person?

“No, creative entitlement simply means believing that **you are allowed to be here**, and that—merely by being here—you are allowed to have a voice and a vision of your own.” Gilbert, p. 92

How comfortable are you with the idea of “creative entitlement”? Were there or are there internal or external structures that make this concept easy or difficult for you to accept?

“Speak to your darkest and most negative interior voices the way a hostage negotiator speaks to a violent psychopath: calmly, but firmly. Most of all, never back down. You cannot afford to back down. The life you are negotiating to save, after all, is your own.” Gilbert, p. 95

How does this passage relate to Unity’s teaching about the use of affirmations and denials?

The author says, “You must be willing to take risks if you want to live a creative existence. But if you are going to gamble, **know that you are gambling**. Never roll the dice without being aware that you are holding a pair of dice in your hands. And make certain that you can actually cover your bets (both emotionally and financially).” Gilbert, p. 105

In your own words, what do you think Elizabeth Gilbert’s message is here?

Complaining has many consequences. What are they?

This chapter concludes with a discussion about paradox. Describe a paradox that is meaningful to you.

Week 4: Persistence



October 22

Big Magic: Creative Living Beyond Fear by Elizabeth Gilbert

Reading: Permission (pp. 81-136)

Is there an idea or inspiration from last week that you would like to explore further? If so, what is it?

Gilbert writes, “I also promised that I would never ask writing to take care of me financially, but that **I would always take care of it**—meaning that I would always support us both, by any means necessary.” Gilbert, p. 140

What creative endeavor (or life passion) do you support even if you have to have a “day job” to do so?

Name something you have committed to or maintained persistently. What is it that motivates you to remain engaged?

Do you think the act of persisting in your creative endeavors can be considered a form of spiritual practice? Why or why not?

One way to move through times of doubt is to “fake it till you make it.” Another is to “faith it till you make it.” What’s the difference between these two approaches and when might one be better than the other?

“We must understand that the drive for perfectionism is a corrosive waste of time, because nothing is ever beyond criticism.” Gilbert, p. 169

What do you know or believe about perfectionism, and how do you deal with it in yourself or others?

In writing about the story “Elk Talk,” Gilbert says, “I saw it as proof that you must never surrender, that no doesn’t always mean **no**, and that miraculous turns of fate can happen to those who persist in showing up.” Gilbert, p. 193

Describe a time when you experienced a “miraculous turn of fate.”

Week 5: Trust

October 29



Big Magic: Creative Living Beyond Fear by Elizabeth Gilbert

Reading: Permission (pp. 201-264)

Is there an idea or inspiration from last week that you would like to explore further? If so, what is it?

The author raises an interesting question about the relationship between the individual and his/her work or creativity. How would you answer the question, “Does the subject of your work or creativity love you back?”

“I choose to trust that inspiration is always nearby, the whole time I’m working, trying its damndest to impart assistance.” Gilbert, p. 219

Why do you think the author emphasizes the importance of trust in discussion of the creative process?

How is the act of trusting in one’s creative journey analogous to having faith in a spiritual path?

Trickster or Martyr (pp. 221-228)...which one of these has greater influence in your creative process and why?

“Curiosity is the truth and the way of creative living.” Gilbert, p. 237. Share an experience in which simply being curious led to a big discovery about yourself or about the world.

Gilbert provides her approach for dealing with failure and disappointment. How do you move through failure and disappointment, and how might her approach be beneficial to you?

Week 6: Divinity



November 5

Big Magic: Creative Living Beyond Fear by Elizabeth Gilbert

Reading: Permission (pp. 267-273)

Is there an idea or inspiration from last week that you would like to explore further? If so, what is it?

The final story in the book is about the transformation of Balinese temple dances. Describe a time of transformation in your life. Looking back, what elements of “Big Magic” were present?

In Unity we often mention “co-creating with the Divine.” What does this mean to you?

Only when we are at our most playful can divinity finally get serious with us.” Gilbert, p. 273

Do you agree or disagree with this paradoxical statement? Why or why not?

In what ways do you encounter divinity?

“Creation is not something that God does, or did. It is what God is. It is what you are.” Eric Butterworth, *The Creative Life: 7 Keys to Your Inner Genius*

Share why you agree or disagree with this statement.

What is your biggest takeaway from *Big Magic*, and how will you integrate it into your life?

Acknowledgements from Rev. Russell Heiland



Hey Everybody,

Our Unity Awakening 2023 study of *Big Magic: Creative Living Beyond Fear* is itself the result of saying yes to inspiration.

As Spiritual Leader of Unity of Fairfax, I have been persistent in my commitment to ministry at Unity of Fairfax and, as was described in the text, have willingly eaten a few of those, uh, not-so-tasty sandwiches as a part of that commitment. The most recent and biggest one was the pandemic.

Through discernment, the idea came to me that it was time to review and revise our vision, mission, and core values; the world was now divided into pre-pandemic and post-pandemic timeframes. So what was Spirit's calling for Unity of Fairfax to be and do now? It was time to create our next iteration of the divine idea that is Unity of Fairfax.

But how? As I shared in the introduction, that's when the idea jumped to Amy Conley, Director of Music and Arts. In a conversation about the theme of Unity Awakening 2023, she suggested *Big Magic*. I ordered copies, and we both knew this was it. Part of it, anyway.

The *Big Magic* idea continued to grow, and I thought I remembered that someone said Fidel Realmo-Carey was an artist. Not only is he an artist and visionary, but so is Carolyn Berry. Amy and I met with them and the idea of *Big Magic* group art projects was born. They, too, said yes to the idea. Not only would we engage in the spiritual work of reviewing and revising our vision, mission, and core values, but as a community we would co-create physical expressions of Spirit's movement through us.

The *Big Magic* idea then found its way into the area of finances. It has become a practice in recent years to do a fundraiser in the autumn to raise an amount related to the age of the church. So this year we have engaged in a *Big Magic* \$67,000 Fundraising Campaign; and rather than simply ask for money, we were inspired to create multiple fun and community-building events including a raffle, a chili and karaoke night, a drum circle, a cabaret show, and an auction, as well as a direct appeal.

And in many other ways *Big Magic* is making an impact in all areas of our ministry. I feel it, and hope you do, too! After all, we really are "breaking free in '23"!

All this being said, there are so many folks who make the magic at Unity of Fairfax, but a few warrant special mention in relation to Unity Awakening 2023: *Big Magic*. They include:

- ✦ Amy Conley, Director of Music and Arts, too many contributions to count!
- ✦ Beverly Ellis, Director of Youth and Family Ministry, adaptation of this curriculum for youth.

- ✦ And the rest of the Unity of Fairfax staff without whom I absolutely could not do my job: Patie Wilcox, Tony Rogers, Ronald Sanchez.
- ✦ Carolyn Berry and Fidel Realmo-Carey, artists and visionaries
- ✦ Peter Chapin, background research
- ✦ Mara Rodriguez, Spanish translation
- ✦ Gaye Newton, editing and formatting
- ✦ Steve Marcom, website
- ✦ Mary Mass, karaoke and raffle tickets
- ✦ Debi Smith, entertainer
- ✦ Sharon Sobel, videos and marketing
- ✦ Rob Chavez and Rob Jacoby, auction
- ✦ Daniel Greenberg, Nina Gibson, Tamara Stuchlak, drum circle
- ✦ Board of Trustees: Bowman Kell, Ed Merritt, Rev. Sherrie Quander, Dave Richardson, Julie Fisher, Midd Hunt, holding the “high watch” for Unity of Fairfax!
- ✦ And, of course, Unity Awakening 2023 would not happen without *YOU!* Your enthusiasm for *Big Magic* and engagement at Unity of Fairfax are the foundations of this dynamic spiritual community.

About Unity of Fairfax

Unity of Fairfax was founded in 1956. It is affiliated with Unity Worldwide Ministries, a global network of ministries, ministers, licensed teachers and individuals sharing the vision and aim of furthering the Unity tradition of “practical Christianity” as demonstrated by Jesus Christ. A wealth of additional information can be found online at:

- ✦ www.unityoffairfax.org
- ✦ www.unityworldwideministries.org

Vision

Centered in Divine Love, we honor and celebrate a world awakened to peace, abundance and respect for all creation.

Mission

We are a vibrant, spiritual community awakening each life to the Christ within.

Core Values

At Unity of Fairfax, we offer a welcoming, safe environment to explore one’s own relationship with God in a community of like-minded individuals. We maintain a positive, uplifting energy by looking for the good in every persona and circumstance and affirming the healing power of love and acceptance. We seek to be of service and to experience the joy of living, the wonder of loving, and the miracles produced by faith through our core values:

- ✦ **Spirit Centered:** We turn to Spirit for guidance and active communication.
- ✦ **Love in Action:** We actively express unconditional love in all we think, say and do.
- ✦ **Inclusive:** We are welcoming, cooperative, connected, accepting and compassionate to all.
- ✦ **Peace:** As bearers of Spirit’s divine inspiration, we are the peace we hope to see in the world.
- ✦ **Integrity:** Our thoughts, words and deeds are trustworthy, authentic, respectful and responsible.

