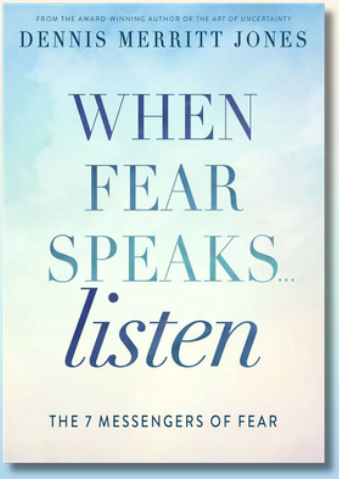
unity palo alto

READING COMPANION & SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE



WEEK 7
November 1 - 7

PART 3
Listening to Fear

 © 2026 John Riley

unity palo alto

LISTENING TO FEAR

The ability to think a thought or have a feeling, step outside of our mind and body, and impartially observe (or analyze) what thought or feeling lays the groundwork for a new life.

… our Fears are nothing more (or less) than emotionally-driven thought impulses coursing through our mind and body that have absolutely no power other than the power we give them.

Fear thrives in the shadows where it tries to loom larger and scarier than it actually is. The moment we drag our Fears into the Light, they begin to wither up because we can see them for the powerless specters they are.

We are meant to meet, not defeat, our Fears. We are meant to dance with our Fears and allow them to educate us, not frighten us

We shall forever be changed as we redefine our relationship with the Seven Messengers of Fear and their many descendants.

By Dennis Merritt Jones

 © 2026 John Riley

unity palo alto

FIVE STEPS TO FREEDOM

Listening to fear

These five steps offer a practical way to listen when fear speaks and use what you learn to open new possibilities.

You can use the steps in the moment or return to an experience later through reflection, journaling, or drawing. You don't have to work through them quickly or find every answer.

Approach yourself with curiosity and compassion.
With practice, the steps can help you recognize familiar patterns and make choices with greater understanding.

1) NOTICE:
Recognize the messenger in your thoughts, feelings, body, and words.

2) PAUSE:
Give yourself space to navigate the messenger and its related emotions. Do whatever works best for you - breathing, walking, meditating, journaling, drawing.

3) LISTEN & LEARN:
Explore what you fear losing and the story beneath it.

4) OPEN:
Make room for a new perspective and a different choice that create new possibilities in your life.

5) AFFIRM:
Put your new understanding into words you can take with you.

 © 2026 John Riley

unity palo alto

OPENING NEW POSSIBILITIES

ANGER *Rage, Resentment*		*Foregiveness, Inner-strength*
WORRY *Anxiety, Regret*		*Present, Grounded*
JUDGEMENT *Superiority, Inferiority, Hate*		*Discernment, Compassion*
SELFISHNESS *Greed, Envy, Jealousy*		*Consideration, Generosity*
SHAME *Guilt, Embarrassment, Perfectionism*		*Worthiness, Self-love*
LONELINESS *Vulnerability, Pride*		*Connection, Oneness*
UNCERTAINTY *Change, Doubt, Procrastination*		*Inner Peace, Possibility*

 © 2026 John Riley

unity palo alto

PART 3: LISTENING TO FEAR

READING COMPANION

Think about these questions as you read. Journal the questions and "aha" moments that come up for you



Which messenger has shown up recently? How has the book helped you recognize or respond to it differently?



What makes it difficult to pause so that you can listen? What helps you stay present instead of following your usual escape pattern?



When you listen beneath a messenger, what do you discover about what matters to you or needs attention? Were you surprised, or did you find what you expected?



Where might a familiar story be impacting your thoughts and choices? What other perspective could you consider?



What becomes possible when you allow yourself to feel fear and still choose how to respond?



Has understanding the messengers given you more compassion for others? What is an example?



What understanding about yourself would you like to carry forward? Express it as a personal affirmation.

 © 2026 John Riley

unity palo alto

WEEK 7 - SMALL GROUP GUIDE

Small Circle Agreements

Confidentiality
I help create a safe environment by maintaining confidentiality.

Right to Pass
It is okay not to share.

"I" statements
I speak for myself and remember that I can never know someone else's experience.

Change your mind as often as you like
Stay open to new ideas and new revelations from our shared wisdom.

Be Present
I listen to others compassionately, respectfully, and appreciatively.

Notice our own reactivity and assume good intentions
We take responsibility for our own reactions and meet each other with love.

Advice-free zone
I practice sacred listening and refrain from giving advice.

Opening Affirmation: *I bring curiosity and compassion to what I discover in myself. As I listen, I make room for new possibilities.*

Check-in:

- What is one thing you've enjoyed about this year's Fall Program?
- Which messenger have you gotten to know best?
- What feels more possible now than it did at the beginning of this study?

Discussion Questions:

- For each chapter, what stood out for you?
- Pick a question from the reading companion and share your answer.
- From your reading / Sunday talk - what inspired, frustrated, confused or clarified something?

unity palo alto

Closing: *Each person shares one positive takeaway from the group meeting today.*

Closing Affirmation: *I can take a meaningful step without knowing the whole path. I trust my ability to learn, respond, and seek support as I go.*

Week 7 Practices:

- **Listen to one messenger.** When a messenger appears, use the five steps to explore what it is bringing to your attention.
- **Try a different response.** Choose one familiar situation and practice responding in a way that honors what matters to you.
- **Return with compassion.** When you fall into an old pattern, notice what happened and give yourself another opportunity to choose.

- **Keep the five steps nearby.** Put them in your journal or phone, or somewhere you'll see them when you need a reminder.
- **Replay with possibility. Draw** or write about a recent moment in two versions: how you responded and what another response could look like.
- **Give your affirmation a home:** Write it on a card or create a small collage. Place it where it can remind you of the choice you want to practice.

 © 2026 John Riley

unity palo alto

FALL PROGRAM RESOURCES



https://www.unitypaloalto.org/when-fear-speaks-listen

DONATE TO UNITY PALO ALTO



https://abundant.unitypaloalto.org/give