

THE POWER TO FORGIVE

Week #2 of a 6-Week "Gratitude" Series

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Okay; so you ready for tonight?

I'm going to wander a bit tonight. Not physically, but I'm going to tell some stories that don't look like they fit together. And if it works, by the end I'm going to tie them up in a bow. If it doesn't work, just know that it was a good try. Right? [Congregation laughs]

Okay; so here's where we're going to start tonight. I have a question: Which is better? To be given a million dollars or to earn a million dollars? Okay; how many of you want to say it's better to be given a million dollars? [Congregation chatters] How many want to say it's better to earn a million dollars? Okay!

So here's the challenge, and I'm surprised by the answer. Because in our culture, earning it is better than being given it. True? Like, we worry that if don't earn it that we're not going to enjoy it. Or you don't take it seriously. We have this thing about earning, right? That it's better to earn; when we earn something, we feel like we get real excited. right? *"I did this; I built this. This is ... I did it!"* Right? *"It's mine! I did it!"*

And I don't want to disagree with that. But I also want to put it in a spiritual context. Because there's this spiritual concept called Grace. And Grace says that the overflowing goodness of God is greater than you deserve. It's greater than you've earned. It's greater than anything else.

But to access Grace, you have to be willing to receive it. And by and large in our culture, if we don't earn it, we don't appreciate it. And I want to talk about that, because I want to talk about how the obstacles of considering that the only spiritual path that is valid is if you earn it. Because I believe for all of us that God has greater good for us. Greater, infinite good. Right? But that we have to be willing to receive it, not earn it.

Like, there's people who believe that you can earn your way into heaven. Right? And some of us [laugh] know that if we had to earn our way into heaven we're going to be a few bucks short, right? [Congregation laughs] Because we've been a little shenanigan-ers from time to time, right?

And so there is a belief that says spiritual people have to earn the blessings of God; even heaven. And there's ... even in the New Testament, in the writing of Paul, there's a discussion about whether -- the Grace of God -- we earn it or whether it's given to us. Whether it's Grace.

And in Ephesians 2: 8 and 9 we read this:

"For by Grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing; it is a gift from God -- not because of works, lest any man should boast."

Like, I want you to really hear that, right? That Paul is challenging us to acknowledge what we receive is a gift from God. And we're not to boast about our blessings, but to acknowledge God in our blessings.

Now, am I suggesting that we shouldn't work hard? No! Am I suggesting that life is better; that there's an activity of when you give your all to something, when you put yourself into this whole situation. But I also want us to look at Grace tonight. And the power that Grace has -- that God is -- to bless each and every one of us.

Because if we have to earn the blessings of God, I think we're out of luck. If we have to open our mind, our heart, our soul and to let them in, and to receive them, I think is our path.

Do you know in the Bible there's two Creation stories? And you know what the first one is? What's the first Creation story in the Bible? In Genesis? The seven days of Creation, right? Seven days of Creation are the first Creation story. Right?

And the first Creation story talks about the meta-Creation; it talks about creating heaven and earth. It's the big picture Creation story. And I believe that it wasn't intended to be -- and again, this is where I get myself into trouble again -- it wasn't intended to be taken literally. It's a metaphor for a spiritual process. It's a metaphor for the creation process: of understanding how words become matter. How *"Let there be light, and there was light,"* and how God spoke into creation. And creation was created. I'll do a Wednesday night just about the seven days of Creation.

But tonight I want to talk about the other Creation story. And the other Creation story is Adam and Eve. And Adam and Eve is the story of coming to know good and evil. And in our human experience -- and I don't want to get too "woo woo" -- but in our human experience, we come in from the dimension of pure goodness. That we were created at that level of God's good, and we come into the world of form. And in the world of form, we have an experience of learning good and evil.

And I think that most of us -- as we come into form -- have had an experience that was painful. Have you all had at least one painful life experience? [Congregation laughs] Right? And so Adam and Eve talks to us about what we do in living in a world of good and bad, of good and evil. It talks to us about what that is like as a soul coming into a three-dimensional incarnation and discovering a world of good and evil when you weren't prepared for it.

When my [laughs] baby girl was born, she was so pure. Now my son was not quite as pure you could tell. [Laughs with congregation] But my baby girl; when she came into this world, she was so pure! Right? That three-dimensional form was so hard for her.

How many of you, when you came into this life experience, it was harder than you expected? Did anybody have that experience? Like all the "sensitives." Like, it was more; it was harder; it was denser; it was heavier.

So here's the story:

"Now the serpent was more subtle than all the other wild creatures that the Lord had made. And he said to the woman, 'Did God say you should not eat of any tree of the garden?' And the woman said to the serpent, 'No.'"

Oh, no. It doesn't really say "No." I'm sorry!

"We may eat any tree in the garden, any fruit of the tree in the garden, but God said we should not eat of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden. Neither shall we touch it, lest we die."

But the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not die. And God knows that you can eat it, and your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God. And you will know good and evil.'

So when the woman saw that the fruit was good, and that it was delightful to the eye, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took the fruit and she ate it. And she also gave it to her husband, and he ate it. And both of their eyes were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves aprons."

Right? So there's a part of us when we come into three-dimensional form that thinks we shouldn't know good and evil. That we just should stay in that place of pure innocence. Right? And it sounds great! Right?

But there is a spiritual step here. That in understanding good and evil, we can actually learn to transcend it. But you can't transcend what you haven't experienced.

So Adam and Eve come into the realm of form -- they come into Creation -- and they experience good and evil. And the way that we tend to do that is by getting knocked around a bit by life. By going through painful experiences. Right?

And then Verse 8:

"And then they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees in the garden. But the Lord called out to man and said, [in lilting voice] 'Where are you?'"

[Congregation laughs] Maybe not quite with that inflection, but I ...

"And he said, 'I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, and I hid myself.'"

That moment, God knew the jig was up. It doesn't say that, but God knew.

"God said, 'Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree which I commanded you not to eat?'"

And the man said ... [shakes his head vigorously 'No.'] [Congregation laughs]

"And man said, 'The woman who you gave me gave me the fruit of the tree, and I just ate it.'"

Right? Wasn't me, right? It was her fault! Right? It's been her fault for the last 2,000 years! For the last 10,000 years: *"It wasn't me; it was her!"*

"And the Lord God said to the woman, 'What have you done?' And the woman said, 'It wasn't me! It was that darn serpent that beguiled me, and I ate it.'"

Right? So it's just passing the buck, right? They're naked; they're ashamed. They now have their eyes open to good and evil. And they're ashamed.

And if you've had children, you know that moment where they experience something, and you can't take it back for them. You can't change it for them. It's their soul's journey. And no matter how much you love them and care about them, it's their deal. And as parents, your hearts break. And you would take it back in a minute. You would take the consequences; you would take the pain. You would take the situation. And you can't. You just can't.

And the two consequences that God spoke to Adam and Eve was that when we know the separation -- moving from oneness to duality. When we experience ourselves being separate or cut off ... Once we move into duality, God said the consequences for women would be pain in childbirth and, for men, that we would make our way off the sweat of our brow.

And I want you to see that, in Unity, we teach that both the masculine and the feminine are part of all of us. And so, when we feel cut off from God, the creative process is painful. There's a line where it talks about that Adam will eat from the ground that has been tainted or cursed.

And it's like, from the moment that Adam came into the experience, he was looking to God as his Source. And he was looking up and he was looking at all the infinite possibilities. But then from that

sense of separation -- when he felt disconnected from God -- then he began to make his way by looking down. And then the creation process is painful. And he only got by through the sweat of his brow.

Even now in our spiritual life, when we feel disconnected from God, our own internal creative process is often difficult. And our life is often painful. Right? And I want you to see that the pain that you've gone through in your life unfortunately is part of your soul's journey. And there's really two ways that we can look at this. And the reason this is so important to me as we look at forgiveness, is those two paths that are before us really are ...

We either move forward through our works, which in Hinduism and Buddhism we call karma -- or we move forward by Grace. And if we move forward by karma -- by our work -- in Buddhism and Hinduism it's taught that it can take 100,000 lifetimes to get back into enlightenment. It can take a 100,000 lifetimes to be God-realized again. Right?

And so in Hinduism and Buddhism, every debt has to be paid. Every karmic debt has to be paid. And it doesn't matter how long it take you to pay every karmic debt, every karmic debt has to be paid before you can move back again into oneness with God.

But what does Grace say? Grace says that, as you forgive, you are forgiven and everything is made right. Like, it's a free gift. But it's not completely free, because you have to be willing to forgive to move from karma to Grace. And in our culture, we're actually more comfortable earning it. We'd rather work it off. *"Is there a time plan? Is there a payment plan? Is there a process I can do so I can just work this off, because I don't want to forgive that son-of-a-gun. That son-of-a-gun does not deserve my forgiveness; I would rather go through lifetimes to have to make everything right than actually forgive that person for whatever they did."*

I want you to see the challenge here! Right? Because our ego wants that son-of-a-gun to pay for everything that they've ever done to us! We do! We want our sweet revenge! And we will come back lifetime after lifetime, according to Hinduism and Buddhism, to see and wait for our sweet revenge.

Or we forgive. And the moment we forgive, all debt is paid in full. All debt is paid in full!

Luke 12: 58 and 59; this is again Jesus:

"When you go with your adversary to the magistrate, to court, make every effort along the way to settle with him, lest he drag you to the judge, the judge delivers you to the officer, and the officer throws you into prison. For I tell you, you shall not depart from there until you have paid every last mite."

Alright? So when we pay every last mite, is that Grace or is that karma? It's karma! Right? So Jesus is saying [laughs] when you're arguing with your adversary, get over yourself! Because if you don't get over yourself and make every effort to settle with him, *"lest he drag you to the judge, the judge will deliver you to the officer, the officer will throw you into prison. And I tell you, you shall not depart from there until every last mite is paid."*

Let me read the version that's in Matthew 5:25:

"Make friends quickly with your accuser while you're going with him to court, lest your accuser will hand you over to the judge, the judge to the guard, and you will be put in prison. Truly I say to you, you will never get out until you've paid every last penny."

So Jesus is trying to make this very clear! Yes; you can live karma. Yes! You can take as long as you want, and your list can be as long as you want. You can come back over and over and over again to clear up all these issues. Or you can decide quickly to forgive everyone and stay in Grace.

You just can't do both. You can't hold on to those resentments and fully live in the Grace of God. You have to decide; it's going to be one way or the other. And they are two very distinct paths in front of us as spiritual beings. And we have to decide which path we want to live.

And we tell ourselves, *"Oh, my little unforgiveness; it doesn't really matter. That person really deserves my unforgiveness."* Or, *"That person really was a rascal; I don't really have to forgive him."* Or, *"That person is just evil or terrible or awful, and I don't have to forgive him."*

And you don't! How much time do you got? How many times do you want to go around this ring? How much karma do you want to do?

But in karma, you do not get off -- in the Buddhism -- you do not get off the wheel of karma until every single debt is paid in full. Every debt is paid in full.

So let me ask you about this one. Matthew 11:29-30:

"Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your soul. For my yoke is easy, and my burdens are light."

Is that karma or Grace? It's Grace! It's Grace! It's Jesus teaching Grace.

And our ego hates Grace. Because our ego wants everything fair. And our ego would punish ourselves to make sure that the people around us who hurt us also get punished. Our ego wants to make sure everything lines up and everything's fair and everything's organized and it's just so. And year after year, lifetime after lifetime, we have to pay the debt of unforgiveness.

So tonight we're celebrating 40 days of gratitude. And I want you tonight to really see the benefit and to be grateful for forgiveness.

Anybody ever play when you were a kid -- or with your kids -- Chutes and Ladders? And Chutes and Ladders was a little game where you rolled the dice and whatever it was. And you get to these spots, and in these spots you can either move forward -- like jump 20 spaces or whatever -- or you'd slide back.

And over and over again ... What I want you to see is, over and over again, forgiveness is the path to move forward!

"Thank you, God, for the opportunity I have to forgive everyone for everything. Thank you, God, for the opportunity I have to forgive everyone for everything."

Will you say that with me?

[With congregation]: *"Thank you, God, for the opportunity I have to forgive everyone for everything."*

Now, because you have free will, do you have a God-given right to hold on to resentments for as long as you want to? God's old! [Congregation laughs] God will stick with you until you are ready to forgive! And you need to go around the wheel one more time? Praise God; let's go around the wheel one more time.

The Dalai Lama said he will continue to incarnate until there is no suffering in the world. I'm not doing that! [Congregation laughs] If you want to stay and suffer, God bless you, but I'm moving on after this one. Right?

But you have a right; you have a right! You have a right until every one of your accounts are paid in full, however far back they go! You have a right to stick in karma and live it out a hundred, thousand, million times until you're sure that everyone has got exactly what they deserved. And your little ego is just happy that everyone has been sufficiently punished.

"I forgive everyone for everything."

Together: [with congregation] *"I forgive everyone for everything."*

Now, is this hard? Yes! It is hard! It is hard to forgive people who don't deserve our forgiveness! And our ego tells us over and over and over again that they don't deserve our forgiveness. And yet, when we decide to forgive, we get to move forward. Not only are they released, but we're released, and the whole game gets easier.

"I forgive everyone for everything."

Together: [with congregation] *"I forgive everyone for everything."*

Okay, so let's just recap for a second. Does everybody in this room ...? You've known good and evil in this lifetime. Has everybody got that one? Right? That there is good and evil in this life experience. I want to make sure that everyone got that. Some of us got that at a very early age. Like, an age so tender that we didn't ... in no way could anyone say we deserved that, but we got it anyway. So we know good and evil.

But we're going to demonstrate mastery by forgiving it anyway. And as we forgive anyway, we get the Grace of God.

So what would you rather have? That grievance; that upset; that disappointment? Or the Grace of God? And over and over and over again, no matter what has been done to me -- no matter what I've done to others -- the Grace of God is better. It's better!

And your ego can take you around the wheel one more time or your spirit can say, *"Enough. Enough! I forgive everyone for everything. I'm tired of the craziness. I'm tired of the resentments. I'm tired of the upset. I'm tired of the pain. I'm tired of watching what other people are doing and keeping track whether they're blessed or what their story is or what their drama is. I forgive everyone for everything."*

Together: [with congregation] *"I forgive everyone for everything."*

Will you pray with me?

I invite you to open your mind, your heart, your soul to the activity of God that is right here, right now. And this may be the greatest thing I've ever asked of you: to simply and totally let it all go. To do a complete search of your soul and let go of all resentment. And that you can decide as a spiritual being in the image and likeness of God that you don't want to do more karma. That you're ready to just let yourself and everybody in your life free.

"I forgive everyone for everything."

Together: [with congregation] *"I forgive everyone for everything."*

And at that moment, the fullness of God lifts you to a place that you've never been before.

"I forgive everyone for everything."

Together: [with congregation]: *"I forgive everyone for everything."*

Just breathe that in for a moment. That you're deciding to free yourself from all karmic debt. Completely, totally, forever.

"I forgive everyone for everything."

In the name and through the power of the Living Christ, we give thanks for the power to forgive and the power that forgiveness has to set us free. And so it is. Amen.

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