

YOUR AUDACIOUS LIFE

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Alright; you ready for me? [Congregation: "Yes!"] Okay!

So the question that I want to start with tonight is: Is life for you, against you, or neutral?

How many of you want to vote that life is for you? How many of you want to believe that's the right answer, whether you really believe it or not? [Congregation laughs] How many of you think life is kind of neutral; sometimes it's for you and sometimes it's against you? How many of you ... [Laughs] Thank you for your honesty, right? And how many of you want to clearly believe that life is against you? And it is always against you, and it is your job to overcome every hurdle. But it's not cutting you a bit of slack and it's going to take you out if you can. Anybody want to vote for that one?

Come on, have you ever felt that way about life? Most of us have! Right? Most of us have been knocked down once or twice -- more than we thought was necessary -- and we began to really wonder if life is for us or against us. Right?

And that's really the whole premise of today is: Do you believe that you're safe in life?

I have a nemesis. Or I had a nemesis. Do you know what a nemesis is? It's like an adversary that is an arch adversary. I have -- or I had -- this weed at the end of my driveway ... [Congregation laughs] ... that would not go away! And I did some things to that weed that I still am ashamed of. [Congregation laughs] And I did everything in my power to take that weed out, and I'm man enough to admit it. I mean, it mocked me. I would go out in my driveway and it would laugh in my face about how many times I tried to dig it out. I mean, I can't even tell you! I had to go to confession just to admit my guilt that I've had with this weed. And this weed would just keep ... Have you ever had a weed like that? That would just keep coming back?

And finally, I looked down at my weed -- and it's now become my weed -- and I realized how Darth Vader felt looking at Luke Skywalker. [Congregation laughs] You know, when he says, "*The Force is mighty in you, young Skywalker.*" Right?

And at that moment, I realized that the power of life in us all is infinitely greater than we can imagine. And no matter what your life has been like -- no matter what the obstacles or challenges or problems have been in your life -- the life of God in you is greater than that.

And if it takes a weed to teach us that ... Because has everybody had a spiritual teacher that you could not believe was your spiritual teacher? Like the person you wanted the least in your whole world to be your spiritual teacher? And actually taught you some of the most profound lessons you've ever learned? Well, this weed -- on the left side of my driveway, right there where I can see it -- taught me that the power of God in me can never, ever, ever be denied.

And I believe that's true! And I think that most of us live with a level of fear that something "out there" is greater than the power of God in us. And tonight, what I want us to look at is: What does it look like for you to live your most audacious life?

Because for most of us, there's been a fear -- in one way or another -- in our life that has caused us to not fully live. To draw back. To play small. To run away. To hide. And to diminish the life force that's within us.

And tonight, I want to see what it would look like if you lived your best life. If you no longer allowed fears of any kind to keep you small, but you were willing to get up every day and -- no matter what the

obstacle; no matter what the challenge; no matter what the problem may be -- you were willing to get up and live the best version of you. And to fully and completely glorify the Spirit of God within you.

Because I think for many of us, we're trying to decide how safe it is for us to turn our light up all the way. And can we decide tonight that it's actually safe enough for you to be the best version of you? For you to be audaciously you?

In Matthew 6:30 we read, "*But if God so clothed the grasses of the field, which today are alive and tomorrow are thrown in the oven, will He not so much more clothe you, oh, men of little faith. Therefore, do not anxious, saying, 'What shall I eat or what shall I drink or what shall I wear?' For even the Gentiles seek these things. And your Heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek ye first His kingdom and His righteousness and all these things will be yours, as well.*"

So the real question that I have for you tonight is: If you honestly look at yourself -- at who you are and how you're showing up day in and day out -- would you say that you're living fully alive? Partially alive? Or barely alive? [Laughs] Like, if you had to tell yourself the truth! Like, are you bringing the best version of you every day? Or are you going through the motions?

And only you know! You know if there's a reservoir of goodness, of Godness, of Spirit within you that you kind of dance around, but you don't really live. And what if today you decided to bring your fully aliveness to this moment?

See, one of the things I've always loved about working and serving in ministry is that there's something special about an "alive" church. Right? And the way that a church becomes alive is when the people in the church are fully living.

You know, I have a friend who's been to many denominations -- many churches -- all over the country. And she says, "*You know, most of the churches I go to, what I experience is the 'chosen frozen.'*" And I said, "*What?*" And she said, "*You know; the people who believe they're the chosen ones, but they've been frozen in that for so long that their aliveness doesn't come out anymore. They're not really living their aliveness. They're not living their faith. They're not really putting it to work. God's not doing amazing things in their life, because did that 50 years ago, or a hundred years ago, and God's not doing it now.*"

And so I want to challenge us tonight to make sure that we're bringing our aliveness into this moment, into our experience. That we're living our faith in a dynamic, passionate way so that we don't get stuck: we don't get stuck in our limitations; we don't get stuck in our victim places; we don't get stuck in our smallness. That we are really willing to live and to live full out.

For many of us, this may be kind of close to, if not our final chapter. And if this is it -- if this is the last quarter or the last half of your life -- how are you going to live it? You know, are you going to go through the motions? Or are you going to put your faith and really live?

You know, one of my favorite poems is called "Warning" by Jenny Joseph. And many of you, I'm sure, have heard lines from this poem. But I'm going to share the whole thing with you.

*When I am an old woman I shall wear purple
With a red hat which doesn't go, and doesn't suit me.
And I shall spend my pension on brandy and summer gloves
And satin sandals, and say there's no money for butter.
I shall sit down on the pavement when I'm tired
And gobble up samples in shops and press alarm bells
And run with a stick along the public railings*

*And make up for the sobriety of my youth.
I shall go out in my slippers in the rain
And pick flowers in other people's gardens
And learn to spit.*

{Congregation laughs} I love that line! "*And learn to spit!*"

*You can wear terrible shoes and even grow fat
And eat three pounds of sausages at a go
Or only bread and pickle for a week
And hoard pencils and papers and beer mats and things in boxes.*

*But now you must have to wear clothes that are sensible and keep you dry
And pay your rent and do not swear in the streets
And set a good example for children.
We must have friends to dinner and read papers.*

*But maybe I ought to practice a little now?
So people who know me will not be shocked and surprised
When suddenly I am old, and I start to wear purple.*

I love that, right? Because for many of us, there's this fear -- this concern -- about how it's supposed to look; and how we're supposed to show up; and how we're supposed to act; and how it's all supposed to fit together. And what if life allows us to be more audacious than that?

So because of this poem, the whole Red Hat Society was formed. It was formed out of southern California by the Exalted Queen Mother. And who doesn't want to be the Exalted Queen Mother, right? I mean, even that title is fabulous!

So the Exalted Queen Mother is Sue Ellen Cooper. And she gifted a friend with a copy of this poem and a red hat. And they would get all decked out in their red hats that they found in thrift stores, and they would go have tea. And the two of them became four; and four became eight; until there was, like, 20 of them. And then they broke off into another group.

And it all started in southern California. And they would wear their red and their purple. And that group splintered off into other groups, as they called it, "of furiously organized disorganization. They were called the "Daughters of Society," and you had to be at least 50 years old to be one of these daughters. And you had to be 50 before you got to wear a red hat and a purple outfit. But you were invited in if you were under 50, but you were called a "pink hatter," and you had to wear a pink hat and a lavender outfits.

But their number one rule was that you had to have as much fun as possible.

And I really want you to get a mindset, as we move into this year, about this year. And really establish how you're going to live this year. And to see if there's more room for you to show up in a way that's more fun; more, even, outrageous, if you will.

I remember when I resigned from this ministry years ago, one of the ladies came up to me -- and I think what she said to me she meant as a compliment -- but I wasn't altogether sure about the compliment. She said to me, "*You wear your arrogance like a crown, but it helped us all believe.*" Right?

And I thought, "*Hmm. Do I like that?*" [Congregation laughs] Right? Because, you know, the whole idea of being a spiritual teacher. And you know, you can't be too arrogant. You've got to have a degree of arrogance, because you're inviting people, right? And the more I thought about it, it was, "*Yes!*" Because

I believed that things were possible, things changed! We went from our little church to a big church because I had the arrogance to believe it was possible, and I enrolled others in that belief.

And I want you to see that the world is changed by people who are willing to be audacious. Who don't stay in their little boxes and believe their little boxes is all there is. The world is transformed by people who have the courage to believe outrageous things are possible, and then go about doing it.

And today, I want you to be fully alive. I want you to see whatever the fears or the concerns or the limitations that have caused you to put your foot on the brake of your life, and to ask: What would it look like tonight if you were willing to be your fullest, best self? And can you imagine that, in you, is more God than you've ever lived before? And that Godness -- that goodness -- wants to be fully expressed!

And if you do this, there will always be people who tell you that you are too much. Like, do you all have a favorite person that regularly tells you that you're too much? Right? Who says, *"Just tone it down a bit!"* Like, *"Just don't be bringing all that stuff in here; just turn yourself down!"*

And I want you to see that we have to make this choice over and over again. Are we going to believe in the power of God that is within us and bring our full self into the moment? Or are we going to fit in the little boxes of others?

"I am audaciously me!"

Will you say that with me? [With congregation]: *"I am audaciously me!"*

One more time like you mean it! [With congregation]: *"I am audaciously me!"*

One more time with your big voice! [With congregation]: *"I am audaciously me!"*

And I want you to feel the joy of that!

2 Corinthians 3:12 says, *"Since we have such a faith, we are called to be bold."*

Like, that's what it means to me to be in spiritual community is: If you have such a faith -- if you believe that you're created in the image and likeness of God; if you believe that, with God all things are possible -- we're called into such a faith to be bold with our lives! Not to do it in a small, little way that doesn't glorify God, but to live it in a bigger, more dynamic, more powerful way that allows us to really see how much life is within us.

So as you look at this new year, what would a bigger faith call you to do? To live audaciously, how would you live this year? Would you be afraid of the past? Would you be afraid of mistakes? Would you be afraid? Or would you be willing to go forth and to do that which you've never done before?

1 Timothy 7 says, *"For God did not give you a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, love and self-control."*

So here's nine things I want you to look at as we play with this idea this year of living an audacious life. And you know I was sick last week. I had to give this talk. Because this talk, for me, really sets up this year. And I wanted you to be open and receptive to another level of living this year. So let me give you these nine things.

First one is: **IDENTIFY WHAT YOU WANT OUT OF YOUR LIFE.** Sometimes that's harder than we think. If you have to tell yourself the truth, what do you really want from life? If you scrape away all the nonsense and all the craziness, and you get to the heart of the matter -- to the truth of the truth; your soul's longing; your soul's desire -- what is it that you truly want from your life? And instead of

dismissing that, would you be intrigued by that? Is there a faith in you that's great enough that you could actually know what it is that you want, and allow yourself to have it?

Point number two: **REMOVE THE AUTO-PILOT.** Observe the patterns and disrupt the routines. Stop doing what is no longer working. Have more fun. Do it differently. Make it joyful. Life is more than work, work, work until you die. So everything that has become trite and rote and routine ... Would you be willing to unplug that and challenge yourself every day to that which looks audaciously wonderful for you?

Three: **EXPLORE.** Explore new friends. Explore new activities. Explore new restaurants. Get lost; have adventures. Trust that the activity of God, if you explore -- if you do the unknown -- will allow you to be safe and allow you to move forward in the greatest possible way.

Four: **SAY 'NO' TO UNINVITED DEMANDS ON YOUR TIME AND YOUR ENERGY.** You know, the only thing that we really have in life to create every level of our life is two things: Our "Yes" and our "No." And with our "Yes" and our "No," we literally create everything in our life. Everything in our life depends on what we say "Yes" to and what we say "No" to. And through the power of our "Yes" and our "No," we actually cultivate and create every aspect of our life!

And I think that sometimes we say "Yes" too easily! We are too quick to say "Yes" to things that literally aren't ours to do. And in our culture, saying "No" is a little harder, because sometimes we have to say "No" to people we love and care about when we know it's not ours to do. That saying "Yes" and "No" are literally the only tools that we have to transform our life; to build a new life; to make a greater life. All we have to do is say "Yes" to new things; "Yes" to possibilities; "Yes" to those desires of our heart; and "No" to everything else!

"Well, Richard, you can't say 'No' to everything. Like, there's obligations. And you have responsibilities. And people will get their feelings hurt. And you have all these things that you have to say 'Yes' to that you don't really want to."

Nobody really wants to! But we say "Yes" anyway. And then we find out sometimes that we don't have the energy to do the things that are the most important to us, because we said "Yes" to all the things that don't really matter! And over and over and over again, we have to be very wise with our "Yes" and our "No." Because that's all we have. Everything comes down to how you execute your "Yes" and your "No." And we love to be able to say "Yes." But sometimes the most appropriate response is "No."

How many of you like to hear "No" from others? [Congregation laughs] Not one hand goes up, right? We never want to hear "No" from the people we love; the people we care about! We never want to hear "No"; we just want to say, *"Yes, Richard! Whatever you want, I want! And let's do it together!"* And we love that! We love the joy of being able to scoot down the aisle together in our Yes-ness. [Congregation laughs] But sometimes the most appropriate response is *"No. No, thank you. No! It's not mine."*

Because we're just convinced that if we say "No," we're going to be all alone and nobody's ever going to love us again. But our "Yes" and our "No" is literally all we have.

So point five: **SAY 'YES' TO THE THINGS THAT YOU REALLY WANT TO DO.** Follow your curiosity. Feed your passion. Don't let a lack of money or time or know-how keep you from doing things that you've never done before, because you will figure it out along the way.

Six: **STOP WAITING FOR SOMEONE TO GIVE YOU PERMISSION.** [Laughs] In fact, I'll do it for you right now. You now have permission throughout this entire year to do whatever you want to do. Can I say that one more time? You now have permission throughout this entire year to do whatever the heck you want to do, and you can say, *"My minister said I could do whatever the heck I want to do, and I feel that I*

have a responsibility in that." For the church -- for the last 2,000 years -- the dominant thing is, "No." True? So I have to stand for a bigger "Yes."

So if you want to live a happier life, "Yes!" If you want to make a change in your life, "Yes!" If you want to do that which you've never done before, "Yes!" Because over and over, God did not bring you into the world to do that which has already been done. God brought you into the world to do that which hasn't been done yet, but we're waiting for you to do it.

Seven: **STOP WITH THE EXCUSES.** Don't blame your parents; your siblings; your government; your gender; your race. It is now up to you, and you get to do it.

Eight: **LIVE UP TO YOUR OWN EXPECTATIONS, NOT THE EXPECTATIONS OF OTHERS.**

And my ninth point is: **LEARN TO LISTEN TO YOUR OWN VOICE AND IGNORE THE OUTER VOICES OF OTHERS.** Now, do you have to ignore them? [Half-heartedly]: Noo. [Congregation laughs] But does your voice get priority over all the other voices? Is your voice the most important voice for you to listen to? Does God speak through you -- through your voice? Yes! Yes!!!

So you ready for your homework? Okay; so here we go! I want you this year to create one thing that you've never created before. One thing. I want you to create one thing in your life that you've never created before that would completely entertain and satisfy your soul. I want you to say "Yes" to that which you've never allowed yourself to say "Yes" to and see where Spirit would take you this year.

Because I believe that, if you're still here, you're not done. Right? If God is still giving you breath -- if God's got your heart still beating -- you're not complete. And I want you to be about the thing this year that would be the most important to your soul. And say "Yes" to that. And I don't care what it is! I don't care how outrageous it seems; how fun it seems; how crazy it seems. I want you to say "Yes" to your soul of creating the next, most amazing thing. And say it in a way that's audaciously you.

Because this is where it gets fun! You don't have to do it for me; I don't have to do it for you. We're doing it and, as we're doing it, each one of us is lifted higher. Because as you see somebody truly living, over and over, again it inspires us to live. When we someone going for their best life, it awakens that in all of us. Like, this is it! The only way we truly transform the world is when each one of us has the courage to live our best life and allow others to do the same.

You ready? I want you to get your pinky swear out.

"This year ..."

Together! [Congregation] *"This year ..."*

"This year I'm willing ..."

[Congregation]: *"I'm willing ..."*

"To live an audacious life."

[Congregation]: *"To live an audacious life."*

"This year ..."

[Congregation]: *"I'm willing ..."*

"To live an audacious life."

[Congregation]: *"To live an audacious life."*

One more time! *"This year ..."*

[Congregation]: *"This year ..."*

"I'm willing ..."

[Congregation]: *"I'm willing ..."*

"To live an audacious life."

[Congregation]: *"To live an audacious life."*

Amen? [Congregation]: *"Amen!"*

Pray with me:

I want you to open your mind, your heart, your soul to the activity of God. That there's only one presence and one power -- one God, one Spirit -- moving through all of us. And today we take off the brakes and we allow ourselves to live. Not the old life -- not the small life -- but truly the life of God. To put our faith to work. And to live our biggest life. In the name and through the power of the Living Christ, we give thanks. And so it is. Amen.

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