

GOODBYE YELLOW BRICK ROAD

Week #1 of a 4-Week "Songs of Life" Series

Sunday, April 23, 2023

Rev. Richard Maraj

Goodbye Yellow Brick Road – Lyrics:

When are you gonna come down?

When are you going to land?

I should have stayed on the farm

I should have listened to my old man

You know you can't hold me forever

I didn't sign up with you

I'm not a present for your friends to open

This boy's too young to be singing the blues

So goodbye yellow brick road where the dogs of society howl

You can't plant me in your penthouse

I'm going back to my plough

Back to the howling old owl in the woods

Hunting the horny back toad

Oh, I've finally decided my future lies

Beyond the yellow brick road

What do you think you'll do then?

I bet that'll shoot down your plane

It'll take you a couple of vodka and tonics to set you on your feet again

Maybe you'll get a replacement

There's plenty like me to be found

Mongrels who ain't got a penny

Sniffing for tidbits like you on the ground

So goodbye yellow brick road where the dogs of society howl

You can't plant me in your penthouse

I'm going back to my plough

Back to the howling old owl in the woods

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Oh, I've finally decided my future lies

I've finally decided my future lies

I've finally decided my future lies

Beyond the yellow brick road

Message:

So how many people ever started down a new road or path in your life? Maybe it was a new job; maybe it was a new career; maybe it was just a new life direction; or taking some new course. And you invested time and energy into it. And the more you did, the more you realized, *"I really don't like this!"*

[Congregation laughs] *"This is not what I want! This is not what I was hoping that would be!"* Anybody have one of those experiences?

How many people ever said, "Yes" to someone because you wanted to please them, but you really wanted to say, "No"? Anybody? And how many people have ever had a hard time getting yourself out of a situation you got yourself stuck in, but it seemed like a good idea at the time, when you did it? Okay.

You know, this kind of reminds me of this astronomer who was on this extended lecture tour, and he just became weary of giving the same exact lecture over and over and over. And he confided to his chauffeur that he was just really tired of giving the same lecture all the time. And the chauffeur expressed that he was getting kind of tired of his job, too -- just driving folks all around -- and he was kind of bored.

And then the astronomer said, *"Hey; I've got a great idea! Since you're kind of bored with yours, and I'm kind of bored with mine, why don't we switch roles for a night. And, you know, the lecture's written word for word; you've heard it hundreds of times yourself. And we're going to a new town where nobody knows where I look like, so it will be great."*

So they both agreed. They switched clothing. And the night comes, and the lecture hall is absolutely full. And then the driver delivers a flawless lecture; I mean, he just rocks it! There's a standing ovation. He is feeling euphoric! He's feeling such joy and incredible confidence in himself.

And then someone in the back of the room asks a question and says, *"Will you please comment on the relative merits of the pulsation instability model and the accretion disk instability model for the explanation of outbursts of cataclysmic variable stars?"* [Congregation laughs]

And so he stayed calm on the outside, but inside his heart is racing. He's pounding. He's thinking, *"How am I going to get out of this? I'm going to get embarrassed!"*

And so he slowly starts to nod his head. And then he said, *"You know, I'm really surprised that you would ask me such a simple and obvious question. And to show you how simple and easy this question is, I'm going to ask my chauffeur to answer it for you."* [Congregation laughs]

So this morning we're going to begin our annual four-week series called "The Songs of Life." You know, music is so incredible! Songs uplift us; they inspire us; they soothe us and heal us and open us; and they help us reflect. Listening to songs: I bet you every one of us has a song that got us through a difficult time. A song that became our personal anthem. A song that really gets our energy up or maybe takes us back to some special memories in our lives.

For the next four weeks, I'm going to pick a famous song and extract from it a spiritual message: a message to help us live our lives in a greater and more joyful way.

Today we're going to look at the song, "Goodbye Yellow Brick Road" by Elton John and written by Bernie Taupin. And it was a 1973 hit; it got to #2 on the charts. And I have to admit: I'm not a particularly huge fan of Elton John, although I think he has a great voice. And I really didn't like this song very much. It sounds kind of melancholy, and I just didn't really like it that much until about three or four months ago when a member of our community emailed me a version by Sarah Bareilles that is absolutely incredible. And I think I probably listened to it for the first time and really absolutely loved it. Do yourself a favor and YouTube it; it is probably one of the best covers I have ever heard.

And it's about the singer, who is really unhappy with the life that they're living ... even though it's filled with fame. Even though it's filled with wealth and glory and celebrity. You know, they're not happy because of the pressures and the demands and feeling used, and the expectations and being shown off. And the person is feeling stuck and miserable, even though it's a life that most people would love to live. Most people would say, *"What?!? Fame, fortune ... and you're not happy?"*

It kind of reminds me of a quote by Jim Carrey. He said, *"I think everybody should get rich and famous so they can see that that's not the answer."* [Congregation murmurs]

You know, the yellow brick road that they're saying goodbye to ... you know, when I first heard it, I was like, *"What? Is this about Oz? Leaving Oz? Like, 'Bye, Tin Man! Bye, Scarecrow!"* [Congregation laughs] But what it really is: the yellow brick road really represents that pathway -- the over arcing route -- that we think will lead us to success and happiness. It represents what we believe is the "good life." What we think will change our lives, like money and power and success. Or what we've been told that we ought to do in our lives.

And it is that thing we have that we really also don't feel a sense of fulfillment about. That we're not excited; that it's really not for us. It's something that used to be good that just no longer serves us, or is no longer right for us. It's a good life -- it looks good! But it's just not ours.

"Goodbye Yellow Brick Road," to me, while it doesn't seem as joyful, it's an empowering and powerful song. It is a heartfelt song about reclaiming your personal power and to live life on your own terms. And to change course -- or to change paths -- if you need to, no matter what anybody else says. It is about living your authentic life.

And so today I want to look at three lessons for living a better life that come from this song, "Goodbye Yellow Brick Road."

The first one is: I think this song shows us that **WE HAVE THE POWER TO CHOOSE OUR LIVES**. Listen to these statements:

Goodbye, yellow brick road.

That's a statement of choice!

I'm going back to my plough.

A statement of choice.

***Oh, I finally decided my future lies
Beyond the yellow brick road.***

A choice! You know, sometimes when we're stuck in our lives and unhappy, we feel trapped and feel like we have no choice. We feel like we have no power. We feel like we have no control over our circumstances. And this song reminds us that, no matter what's going on, you have the power to choose. You have the ability, and you have the responsibility. That even if you've made a previous poor choice; even if it used to work and it doesn't work for you now, the fact is: where you are now, you can make a new choice. You don't have to stay stuck; you don't have to be a victim; you don't have to be used or controlled. You have the power to choose and to reclaim your freedom to live the life you want to live it.

The past does not have to equal the future. Why? Because we have the power to choose! Look at the Bible; it tells us how powerful we are. In the Gospels it says:

"Choose this day whom you will serve."

In Job, it says:

"Decide upon a thing and it will be established for you."

Even when Jesus said:

"Ask and ye shall receive."

To ask is to choose! To ask is to decide. This is how powerful we are! We're never stuck; we're never controlled; we're never powerless. We have the ability to choose.

And I think this song tells us about two powers we have to choose. And the first power is: We have the power to choose to say, "Goodbye." To say "Goodbye" means to choose to let go. To choose to be done. To choose to say, "Stop! No more! That's it!" To say "Goodbye" is to ask ourselves the question: What is it time in my life to let go? What is it time in my life to release or to clear away or to close the door on? What in my life is it time for me to free myself from? And maybe it's a relationship; maybe it is a habit; maybe it is a mindset; or maybe it's some busy-ness or procrastination. I don't know what it is ... But there is something in our lives -- I'll bet everyone of us will be better for if we say "Goodbye" to it; close the door on it and let it go.

You know, we want to have a better life, but the only way to have a better life is to say "Goodbye" to something; to end something; to close the door; to say, "No." You know, in our lives, there are certain words we like to say more than the others, and we think have more power. Like, we think, "Hello!" has more power. But I would tell you -- for a better life -- sometimes "Goodbye" has power. Sometimes we think, "Yes!" has all this great power ... and it does! But sometimes "No!" can be just as powerful for our lives. Sometimes we want to say, "Hey; hold on!" And yes; sometimes that's good. But sometimes powerful words to liberate us could be, "Let go." These are liberators for us that keep us from staying stuck and keep us from reliving a pattern that isn't really working for us. And so "Goodbye" means: It may look good, but it's not for me ... and I'm willing to let it go.

And the second thing I think the song says about our power and our ability to choose is:

I have finally decided my future lies beyond the yellow brick road.

We can decide our future! What is beyond what is going on in our lives; we have that power to choose our vision; our goals; our possibilities and our desires. We get to choose what the future level of happiness and fulfillment and meaning in our lives is.

So my question is: What is your future beyond your current yellow brick road? What does your future look like beyond what the circumstances of your life are for you. See beyond; lift up your spiritual eyes and see to the greater possibilities for yourself. And they are great possibilities!

Robert Browning wrote a long poem; nobody knows it, but there's one line that is famous, and here's the line. He says:

"Ah, a man's reach should exceed his grasp or what's a heaven for?"

And what it's saying is: Reach beyond; dream big; go after your great goals; go after your best life; go after your deepest desires; go after your truest and deepest love. Don't hold back! If God has given us the power to choose and to vision and to see possibilities beyond where we are, look for the greatest and best for what your heart and your life are calling you for and towards.

Scripture says:

"Where there is no vision, the people perish."

That means: Have a vision! Use this great spiritual power of imagination and your mind to create greater images and ideas out there. Jim Carrey was absolutely broke, but he saw beyond his current road to a greater life of greater success. You know that famous thing? He wrote himself a check for \$10 million and six years later he got paid \$6 million or \$10 million for *Dumb and Dumber*. Now, that's got to be some spiritual thing to get paid \$10 million for *Dumb and Dumber*! [Congregation laughs]

Walt Disney could see beyond his current situations, which were bankruptcies several times, to see Disneyland. To see the happiest place on earth before it came. Jay-Z -- even though he got rejected like crazy -- was able to see his great levels of success.

So what can you see for yourself? What lies in your future beyond what is currently here? That's how powerful you are! And that's what this song reminds us.

And the second one this song tells us is to **HANDLE THE OUTER PRESSURES THAT COME WITH LIFE.** "Goodbye Yellow Brick Road" is about dealing with the societal pressures and the expectations of choosing our own path rather than the path that others may choose for us.

And I love that line:

... where the dogs of society howl.

What they're saying in the context of the song is ... The dogs of society are kind of like the rich socialites that are howling for the things that are glitzy, but really superficial ... and praising those things. Or it could represent in our lives who are in our lives, judging us and telling us how to live our lives.

How many people ever had somebody in your life kind of tell you how to live your life? Anybody ever have that? How many people will ever tell other people how to live their lives? [Congregation laughs] You know, in our culture, we kind of do it. And in the song it says:

You can't plant me in your penthouse ...

You can't hold me forever ...

It's got lines showing that, sometimes you want to control people -- and other people want to control us| And sometimes there's a pressure in our lives to conform; a pressure to go along and act in certain ways. From our parents; from our culture; from our friends and our teachers. You know, we care what other people think about us, so we end up going along, from our childhood to adulthood. There isn't just peer pressure; there's adult pressure. There's always life pressure, and "keepin' up with the Jones's." What career we pursue; who we date; who we hang out with. These pressures start early. Did you ever hear these words in your house? "*What will the neighbors think? What will people say if they see you acting that way?*"

Because we care about what people think about us, or what they say about us, or how they judge us by how we look or how we dress or where our kids go to school; how much money we have; or what kind of car that we drive. And we want people to like us! We want to be approved of; we want to fit in. We want to be seen in a good light. And sometimes we end up doing things we don't want to do. things that we don't like; things that don't serve our soul.

I'll bet you right now every single one of us has something that, if we would change or say, or be honest about if we haven't been that way before, or do something different, it would tick off or upset at least one person. That, if we said all the things that we desired, that there would be some people who would shun us or not support us or throw cold water on it and try and get us to not change.

In fact, even if we choose to say, "*Goodbye*" and choose what our future lies, it's not easy to deal with the pressures of what other people think. Because sometimes people don't want us to change, because that means they might have to change. And they'd rather have us stay just the way that we are. The truth is: If you want to go to another level in your life, we've got to deal with other people's opinions, other people's reactions, other people's comments and judgements and not let it stop us from doing what it is that we want to do.

So how do we handle other people's opinions and still pursue what we want? The first one: We've got to accept the fact that everybody is going to have an opinion. And what is that old saying? *"Opinions are like noses; everybody's got one."* [Congregation titters] There's always going to be an opinion. People will always have reactions and opinions and they're not going to be in alignment.

Someone asked a very successful guy, *"Hey, what is the key to success?"* He said, *"I don't know what the key to success is, but I know the key to failure ... and that's trying to please everyone."* Because if we're always trying to please everyone, ultimately everyone won't be happy, and we won't be happy. So the first one is: Accept that people have opinions.

And then the second one is: Don't take it personally. Just because they disagree with us, doesn't mean we need to take it personally or feel bad about ourselves or feel ashamed or feel like we did something wrong. We didn't! Their stuff is their stuff, and we need to let them keep their stuff, but work on our stuff.

And then the third one is: Be true and honest to yourself. What is it that you want? Go a little deeper and ask your heart. Go a little deeper and ask Spirit for guidance: *"What is it I'm supposed to do? What is the guidance I'm supposed to follow?"*

And then the fourth one is: To realize that it's all going to work out. Those people might get their nose out of joint; at some point, they're going to be okay. Everything will be okay. But the question is: Are you going to live your life on your terms? Are you going to be honest with yourself and not take things personally? And be okay with people having opinions?

Because the truth is that, if we just try to live up to people's expectations and approval, we're not living our authentic life; we're living the lives they think we should live. And we're here to live the lives that we are meant to live.

Last one I think the song teaches is about balance: living a balanced life. And here's why I say this. Because Bernie Taupin was interviewed in 2020, and here's what he said. He said:

"I don't believe I was ever turning my back on success or saying I didn't want it. I think I was hoping that maybe there was a happy medium way to exist successfully and also in a tranquil environment."

And so what he's saying: He wanted success, but he just wanted it to be balanced. He was hoping to find that balance. You know what I find interesting? Is the juxtaposition of Oz -- this magical place -- and a farm -- a quiet place. Of that busy life and the quiet life. The penthouse and adoring people and the ploughs and the horny backed toads. Isn't it an interesting juxtaposition? I think what he was trying to do was insert the idea that **WE NEED SOME KIND OF BALANCE IN OUR LIVES**. Not the extremes.

How many people have ever struggled or had a difficult time finding balance in your life? Anybody ever have that? We live in a culture that teaches us to be out of balance. We are in a culture that is obsessed with and praises working long hours and overdoing it. It's almost a badge of honor to say, *"You know what? I worked way into the night."* Or, *"I pulled an all-nighter."* We have this thing where we think that shows commitment and that shows some level of dedication: working long hours.

And the truth is: It is not healthy. It leads to burnout, a lack of productivity. And then, even if we're productive, we're not happy; we're not as healthy. It does not support our sense of well-being. We are also into being busy and multi-tasking and doing and over-booking and packing our calendars ... like that's the best way to live. And we all kind of do that ... and it's not healthy.

I was reading an article about balance, and the article was entitled, "13 Steps to Living a Balanced Life." And I'm thinking, *"Thirteen steps!"* [Congregation laughs] *"My life will be out of balance trying to balance it with 13 steps!"* So I brought it down to three. [Congregation laughs] Here we go:

The first one is to ask ourselves: Where in my life am I out of balance? Is it with sleep? Or exercise? Is it with my diet? Is it with my family time? Or social time? Or relaxation? Or is it with hobbies? Or is it my spiritual time? Am I reading enough to stimulate my mind? Am I nurturing my emotions?

We need to ask ourselves these things. And just pick one thing; don't try to overhaul your life all at once. Pick one thing that will add more balance to your life.

The second thing to live in balance is to do better self-care. We are so not good at self-care. The first things we sacrifice will be sleep, diet, all the things that are important to us. We'll cancel stuff with our family because of work. How well are you taking care of yourself? And again, what is one thing you could do to take better care of yourself?

I wasn't sleeping so great in the last little bit. And I started drinking this warm milk. I have this little frothing machine, and I froth this skim milk, and it gets all bubbly. And I put turmeric and ginger and nutmeg. And it's nasty tasting ... [Congregation laughs] But I know that it works! At least I tell myself it does when I'm drinking it! And somehow it's made a difference. And it may be a simple thing, but we're the temple of the Living God. And sometimes we don't treat our bodies like temples. And so we really need to do a little bit better self-care.

And the last one is to spend our time centered in Spirit. If you want to balance your life, we've got to balance it spiritually first. The more we're centered and grounded and calm in Spirit, the more balanced we are. The more centered and grounded we are, and the more we can actually live it and express it.

My father used to say two phrases very often. The first one was:

"The world is your oyster."

He used to love saying that! There are opportunities out there; the world is your oyster! And the second thing he prayed at dinner every night. He would always say:

"God, give us the peace that passes all human understanding."

And the truth is: Until we get peace, we can't have balance. Until we get peace, the world cannot be as full an oyster for ourselves. And so, balancing ourselves is an important thing to enjoy life and to live life on our own terms.

The Wizard of Oz was written by Frank Baum in 1900. He wrote it as a story for children to bring them joy and also to be victorious against the odds. And the characters all went to Oz -- to Emerald City -- and they all wanted a brain and a heart and courage, and Dorothy wanted to go home. And I loved that the thing was: They had it all along! That's the whole punchline of that!

And this song is saying basically the same thing. Even if your life isn't going great; even if you've made some bad choices, you have the power to choose to say goodbye to something that isn't working, and to choose a future beyond what you're currently experiencing. It tells us you have the power to handle well the opinions of other people. And finally, you have the power to live a more balanced life by simplifying; by doing self-care; and centering yourself in Spirit.

These are great lessons for living, and they come and are inspired by the song, "Goodbye Yellow Brick Road."

God bless you all! [Congregation applauds]

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