

INNER ECOLOGY

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So tonight I want to talk about the inner and the outer. I want to talk about inner ecology. I want to talk about our relationships. And I want to talk about moving the planet forward.

So the question that I have for you tonight is: Do you believe there's a connection between what's going on within you and the outer world? How many want to vote yes? How many want to vote, "*Oh, I hope not!*" [Congregation laughs] Right?

Because this is a tough one! Right? Because this premise says that there's a connection between what's going on within you and what's going on all around you. For many of us, this is one of our first spiritual insights: the idea that there's a connection between what's going on within me and the way that I experience the world. That's a huge shift!

Because how many of you have ever been in a situation that you absolutely wanted to say, "*I had no part in creating this!*"? [Congregation laughs] Like, has anybody ever looked at your own family and thought, "*Oh, no! These are not my people!*" [Congregation laughs] Right? And you look at them and you go, "*Oh; holy moly! There must have been a stork that missed or something right here ... because these are not my people!*" Right?

And this idea that our inner life impacts our external world ... I think it is oftentimes our first spiritual insight. But it's often hard to get our arms around that one. The idea that, when I hold on to fear within me, that I tend to experience a world that is scary. That when I hold on to lack within me, I tend to experience a world of lack. That when I feel unlovable on the inside, I experience people who aren't always kind or nice.

And we just resist this so often! You know, we want to use it; we want to believe it when it's to our advantage. But when we don't like the way the world is looking, we want to tap out ... like, "*This isn't my deal; it's all you people that have made this mess.*" Right? And the reality is: Until we can really fully embrace the idea that my inner beliefs -- my inner experience; who I am -- has to be reflected outside of me. And that's what the principle's called: It's called the Law of Reflection. It says whoever you are, you're going to see that over and over again outside of you so that you can see it so often until you're willing to change it.

And it's actually an act of love on the part of the Universe to say, "*You can't heal what you can't see.*" And that our job for each other is to reflect over and over again who you are so that you can both be amazed at how amazing you are ... and amazed at how weird we can be. [Congregation laughs] Because for most of us, those live right next door to each other!

Have you ever been surprised by how weird you are? [Congregation laughs] Like, it's stunning sometimes what comes out of my mouth! That one moment I can lift people up with my words, and the next moment it's like, "*That's not becoming of a child of God!*" Right?

And the whole idea is: As you believe, you see it. It's done unto you. Jesus said in Matthew 18:13 -- when the centurion came to Jesus and asked him to heal his servant -- he said:

"Go and it will be done unto you as you have believed." And the servant was healed at that very moment."

And I want you to really hear the power of that! That the centurion -- the warrior -- came and said:

"I want you to pray; I want you to heal him."

And Jesus offered to go with him to where the servant was, and he said, "You don't have to go! Just speak the word! And if you speak the word, it will be done!"

And Jesus said, "I've never seen such a level of faith!"

To know that's how it works, and it was done.

So if the Law of Reflection is going to work, we actually need to be in three-dimensional form. Now I want you to hear this, because this is kind of weird but it's true. So if you want to reflect what you're doing; what you're being; what you're thinking; what you're believing, you need things around you to reflect that back to you. If you don't see the reflection, you don't have the opportunity to change or to learn; to grow; to expand.

So if I took you a million miles out into space, if it's a spiritual law would it still apply? Does gravity still exist even a million miles away? Yes! It's just very little. So the Law of Reflection works when you're a million miles out into space.

Now, if you're a million miles out into space, how far away is everything? Millions and millions of miles! We know that when Venus and Earth are on opposite sides of the sun, they're 160 million miles away from one another. At this time, Mercury is orbiting distance from the Earth is about 33 million miles from Earth. And we can still see it in the night sky! Right? But when you're millions -- and I'm going to get to my point! When you're millions of miles away, the Law of Reflection still works, but the time it takes to get to the reflection is so long it's not helpful. Right? It's just not helpful!

So you're being who you're being, but by the time your being that bounces off whatever's close enough to reflect back, it's so small, and it's taken so long, you've moved on! You can't actually see yourself.

But when we come into three-dimensional form, we're all bumping against each other all the time! Everything's up close!

How many of you have ever had -- when you were a kid -- maybe had a rock polisher? Anybody know what I mean by a rock polisher? Rock polisher: you put in all these rocks, or all these semi-precious stones, or whatever, and you just turn it on and let 'em go. And then a month later, you pull them out and they're all shinier! They're prettier!

And that's life on this planet! God drops all seven billion -- is it billion? -- seven billion on this planet; spins the Earth ... [Congregation laughs] And the idea is that -- at the end of 70, 80, 90, a hundred years ... however long you're here -- right? The idea is that you're going to come out the other side more polished than when you got here.

Now some of you I know have a level of resistance. [Congregation laughs] Right? But the idea is that we reflect off of each other so that you can see what you believe; you can see how you're being; and you can see, *"Wow! That's not really attractive. It really doesn't make sense for me to believe that any more. I don't like a life where I live in fear. I don't like a life where I lived believing there's not enough to go around. Like, I don't like a life where I believe that I'm profoundly broken."*

Because when you see that over and over again, you realize that it doesn't work; it doesn't make sense; it's not helpful. But you need to see it over and over being reflected by person after person. And to think, *"I'm going to change that belief. I don't want to keep holding that."*

So the definition -- and why I'm sharing this -- is that the definition of ecology is: The branch of biology that deals with relationships organisms one to another and their physical surrounding. That really sounds like a spiritual relationship to me! The definition of spirituality ... Spirituality involves a recognition of a feeling or a sense or a belief that there's something greater than myself; something

more to being human than just sensory experience. And the greater whole of which we are all a part of we call cosmic or divine in nature.

Do the idea is that we're having this relationship, and this relationship is actually here to create a greater experience for all. That us all being together, right? And that's why I believe that spiritual community is so powerful! Because I believe that, by bringing us all together, we can all go higher than we could do on our own.

And one of the great challenges in spiritual thinking -- and one of the changes over the last several thousand years -- is that we no longer see the physical world as distinct or separate from the spiritual world. That we see the spiritual world and the physical world as all reflections of God.

But to change the ecology, we have to focus on changing the individual. You can't change a person's environment until they feel worthy of living in a greater world.

How many of you are old enough -- you don't have to raise your hand. [Congregation laughs] But remember a time where ... I remember, as a kid, going to my grandparents', who lived in Los Angeles. And we knew that -- even if we went on an afternoon; if you went after church -- we knew that before we left on Sunday night, our eyes were going to burn. And that our throats would burn. Because in the late '60s, there was so much smog in LA that it hurt to be there.

Some of us came from the Midwest and remember in 1969 the Rouge River in Detroit, Michigan, caught on fire. That was a sight! To see a river burning because there was so much oil and so many chemicals in the river; it actually lit on fire and burned for nine hours! Now how many of us would want to drink that? Right?

And some of us remember ... Remember when Texas had the slogan, "Don't Mess With Texas"? And it was about: Don't litter in the state of Texas. And it was a novel thought! Like, it was a novel thought not to just throw your trash out the window when you were driving from Dallas to Houston. It's like, "Well, I don't want it!" Right? And it was a change in mindset. But we had to believe that we were worthy of living in a world where you could actually breathe. Where that wasn't thought to be abnormal.

You know, Earth Day started in April 22, 1970. And it was really about changing the mindset: that we could live in harmony. That we could live on the planet. That you could actually drink the water and breathe the air. And it was safe to grow things in the ground.

And I remember in seminary, one of my pet peeves ... Do you have a pet peeve? One of my pet peeves -- just one of them! One of my pet peeves is people littering; I've always had a hard time with littering. It just is my grrrrrr. It's my thing.

And I remember driving on this country road and this family threw their fast food wrappers and trash right out the window. And grrrrrrrr! So I drove a little faster [congregation laughs] to explain to them what perfect children of God they were, right? [Congregation laughs] I thought we had to have a little moment of understanding that they were a perfect child of God.

And I got caught up to the car and my heart just broke. The car was a mess; they were a mess. It looked like the kids hadn't had a bath in a month. I mean, it was a mess! And everything in me wanted to yell at them. I did! I wanted to just, just scream my rage. And it's like, "*I can't. I can't be one more person that made them wrong. I can't be one more person that put them down.*" I just couldn't do it. So I slowed down; turned around; went back; picked up their trash; and threw it away.

Because we can't change the world until we change the people that live in the world: To believe that we actually deserve to live in a world that works; that is beautiful; that is gorgeous; that is healthy and whole. And that's an appropriate choice for all of us.

Ezra Taft Benson said this ... And the first time I read this was in *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. But it was such a powerful quote!

"The Lord works from the inside out. The world works from the outside in. The world would take people out of the slums. Christ would take the slums out of people, and then they would take themselves out of the slums.

The world would mold men by changing their environment. The Christ changes men, who then change their environment. The world would shape human behavior, but Christ can change human nature."

I truly believe that, to change the world, we have to change ourselves! And as religious people -- as spiritual people -- we also have to look at the history that we've come out of. If we look at the Old Testament and look at Genesis 28, we hear words. And if we just read them from a superficial attitude, it's troubling. In Genesis 28:

"God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moves upon this earth.'"

In Numbers 32:

"And the land shall be subdued before the Lord: then afterward ye shall return, and be guiltless before the Lord, and before Israel; and this land shall be your possession before your Lord."

This idea that we are here to subdue; to control; to manipulate is problematic, at best! Because it doesn't talk to us about acknowledging living in harmony with the natural world. To see the natural world as God's greatest gift to us! That we are here to live in harmony; to live in balance. And our job is not to subdue it but it's to heal it. And we're a part of that.

And there's actually people who are doing that; who are being a part of the transformation of our planet. One of those individuals that I've come across this year is David Bamberger. David Bamberger is: He sought to buy the worst piece of ranch land in the Hill Country of Texas. He wanted to buy the most crummiest, beat up piece of land that nobody else wanted to see if he could transform it. He bought 5,500 acres.

And he hired a man to come out and drill wells on his property. They drilled nine different wells; all of them were dry. All dry wells. And one of the persons -- the person that was doing the well -- came across one of the wells ... there was a 40-foot aquifer. A cave. And he said, *"That's supposed to have water in it, but it's completely dry."* And he could tell by the drill; it just went straight down 40 feet. And he said, *"I don't know how far it goes out, but it's at least 40 feet deep."* But he said, *"It's completely dry."*

And [Bamberger] bought the land, and the first thing he did was: He removed all the ash junipers. For acres and acres and acres, he removed all the ash junipers. And instead of that, he replanted native grass.

Within two-and-a-half years, the first spring began to bubble up. And now there's a constant -- 4,300 gallons of water per day -- flow that literally come out of the ground because he changed the environment. He changed it! He now teaches classes and he truly believes that we have the ability to move our planet back to the Kingdom! And, in fact, he calls his ranch Selah, which in Hebrew means to refer to a voluntary and intentional pause to reflect.

And I really -- on this time when we celebrate Earth Day -- I really believe that that's our job: Is to pause and reflect on how we are to live in harmony with our environment. Like, can you imagine just replacing trees with natural grass and the whole ecosystem comes alive?

You know, one of the movies that I watched recently is called *Kiss the Ground*. And you can go to kissthegroundmovie.com. And it reveals that, by replenishing our world's soil, we can completely and rapidly stabilize the Earth's climate; restore the lost ecosystem. That the soil is our way of actually collecting all the carbon that has now been released into our environment. And as we replenish our soil ... soil -- and our soul! [Congregation laughs] It actually changes! That it's our greatest hope of moving the needle into a world where we're not suffocating. And it's amazing!

In Africa right now there's a movement called "The Great Green Wall." And what they're trying to do by 2030 is to take Sub-Saharan desert and get it to grow. And the idea is: They want to create 400,000 square miles of replenishing the soil that things grow again and it's not a Dust Bowl.

See, for many of us, we ... And when we look at traditional farming right now -- or our conventional farming -- the idea is to pump as much chemicals as we can into it to get it to produce. And what this movement is about is allowing the soil to become naturally healthy again. And it's incredible! And it's happening all over the world! That we have the ability to heal our planet by taking care of the dirt that we stand on!

Now, that's a pretty amazing thought, is that: If we're going to be healthy, the planet has to be healthy. Is that a novel thought, right? If we're going to be healthy, the planet has to be healthy! And as we change that -- as we begin to invest in nutritious earth that has living, growing things in it that produce healthy crops and cattle and animals -- it all works!

So you ready for your homework?

I don't know how many acres of land you own. [Congregation laughs] Right? I don't know if you have an extra 5,500 acres somewhere that you're not talking about. Maybe you do, right? But I want us to look, as a planet, for what each one of us can do to move the needle forward. Because -- for me, anyway -- I was so blown away that healthy dirt saves our planet. Like, that was such a radical thought for me! That just healthy dirt can heal our whole planet! That when the earth is alive, we live our best life. We grow things that are sustainable and life-giving. We breathe greater air and water. Everything works better when the soil is good!

But for years, we've been sucking the life out of it and wondering why does ... How many of you have heard of the Dust Bowl? Remember the Dust Bowl? What happened with the Dust Bowl is that we overfarmed the same crops over and over again until there was nothing left. There was no nutrition left in the soil. And it created a big problem. And we see in Sub-Sahara Desert in Africa -- and we see it over and over again -- that when we don't put energy into the dirt, it doesn't work.

So here's your homework. You ready? I want you to prayerfully consider what the possibility is of you making a new choice with your life; with your family; with your economy; with your dollars on how we invest in our planet. Because we really do have the power to decide what happens; what comes next. In little ways, in big ways, we can make new choices. And I would invite you to prayerfully consider making the healing of the planet part of your spiritual life. Praying for the planet; giving thanks for the planet; rejoicing in the planet; making new choices for the planet so that we get to heal and move forward. Are you willing?

Take a breath and let's pray:

I invite you to open your mind, your heart, your soul to the activity of God. That we are in a relationship: we're in a relationship with God; we're in a relationship with each other; and we're in a relationship with our planet. And what we do matters! And the choices we make matter! And we hold the vision of living in a planet that is fully alive. It's not just a rock spinning through space. It's our home. It is life-giving. It is sacred. And tonight we give thanks for our planet and all that it is. And the responsibility we have to nurture it; to heal it; to give thanks for it. So in the name and through the power of the Living Christ, we give thanks. And so it is. Amen.

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