

FINDING PEACE

Week #2 of a 9-week series, "Finding Yourself"

May 10, 2023

Rev. Richard Rogers

Have you noticed that your values have changed as you've matured? Anybody? Like, when I was a younger man, I wanted action. I wanted to shake things up. I wanted to make things happen. I wanted to be busy. I wanted to be kind of a pain in people's side. [Congregation laughs] Right? And even when I was a minister, you know ... there was a part of me that ... I heard a rabbi once say that our job was to comfort the afflicted to afflict the comfortable. [Congregation laughs] Right? And I really believe at some level that was ... Like, there was a part of me that just wanted action and movement and busy-ness.

And as I've matured, I believe that peace has become more important. And it's an interesting thing that, when you're living your life from a place of busy-ness, the cost is that you don't really know peace. Right? Because you have to stay busy! And you can't slow down too much. And you've got to keep moving, keep making things happen, keep poking people ... or whatever you're doing, you just have to keep after it.

But there's a point where you realize peace is good. And that peace is a different path.

See, you can move at 90 miles an hour, but you don't always have peace at 90 miles an hour. That there's a peace that comes when you actually feel the presence of God.

You know, I think there's something that happens to us where we have to kind of decide at a point in our lives: Do we want to continue to be in service to our ego? Or have we reached the point where we want to be in service to God? And if we're still going to be in service to our ego, then it makes sense to just keep moving and being busy and doing all the things. And living out of your personality and being cute or charming or whatever your schtick is. And we keep doing that.

But there's a point where we realize that, *"I don't want to be in service to my ego any more. I really want something deeper. I want something more meaningful. I want something more godly."* And then we begin to ask the question: *"What would it really look like if I was in service to the Spirit of God instead of my ego?"* And then things start readjusting.

Today I want to talk to all of us who are anxious. Because it is the number one mental health issue in our country. Twenty-one percent of adults in the U.S. will experience some level of anxiety disorder over the course of their life. It comes out to 42.5 million people feel some level of anxiety. And all that we've been through over the last several years in our country, there's a heightened level of anxiety in our world today.

And I believe that it's a spiritual problem. And I think that to move to a level of peace requires a spiritual solution. And that, for most of us, there's a level where we're afraid to slow down. Because we're not sure what would happen. We've been in service to our ego; we've been in service to our mind. We've been in the busy-ness of our life for so long that it's like, *"Who would I be if I wasn't that active?"*

And that's what I really want to dive into tonight. Because last week I started a series on "Finding." And I really believe that, as spiritual beings, our work is to find the glory of God within us.

Jesus said, *"Ask ... knock ... seek, and ye will find."* And that, within us, is this level of God -- this level of goodness; this level of glory -- that's amazing. But we have to kind of stop the busy-ness and quiet the busy-ness, or at least decide that we're going to move the focus off of the busy-ness in our life and really begin to deeply focus on that which is within us.

And I believe that the byproduct is peace. I believe the byproduct for all of us for doing our spiritual work is peace. And that, every time we're feeling anxious and afraid, there's this opportunity to know more God; to experience more God. And not the God "out there," but the God of our own soul; the God of our own being-ness; the God that just absolutely unconditionally loves us. And that, every time we're anxious or fearful or worrying, I believe it's because the focus is external and we have to learn to move the focus back to ourselves; back to internal.

Jesus said this in Matthew 11:

"Come to me , all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

And when we read that Scripture, we think in the beginning that he's talking about all of us who feel overworked or depleted from all the activities of life. And then about halfway through that Scripture, we realize it just changed. He's not talking about really being overworked; he's talking about that place where we don't feel rest. Where we don't feel at ease. And then we realize he's really talking about our own soul. That when we are so busy with life, that our soul doesn't find the rest that we long for; that we crave; that we need.

So tonight, I want you to take a deep breath. And I want you to go deeper into yourself. And I want you to see the place where you have stopped your inner journey. And I want you to take one step deeper into your connection with God. And the way that we know that we're doing that is because, for some of us, the place that we're the most worried about our life -- or the events of our life ... Where we feel most anxious is really an inner journey to say, *"Could I discover more God in me instead of worrying about that? Could I actually turn that situation over to a Power greater than myself, and really have peace right there?"*

Because I don't believe that we were meant to live afraid. And most of us say, *"Well, I'm not really afraid, I'm just anxious."* [Shrugs and rolls his eyes] Well, you know ... There's kind of a continuum: mildly anxious to extremely freaked out. [Congregation laughs] Right? But it's all the same game, right? It's level of awareness: How aware are you of how freaked you are? And that's a spiritual term; I think Moses said it, right? When he was talking about wandering in the wilderness: *"All you who are freaked out."* [Congregation laughs]

So there's a level of peace, but we have to actually have a deeper relationship with God to get there. We have to really practice what it looks like to turn something over to God and let it go. Because if you can't turn it over, there is no peace! Because if you don't turn it over, you're the only one that's left working on that problem.

[Laughs] I have wonderful in-laws. And there's this story that is told about my in-laws where my mother-in-law was worried. And she was fretting. Isn't that a great term: fretting? And my father-in-law said to her, *"I'll stay up and worry so you can go to bed."* [Congregation laughs] And so she thought that was the sweetest thing she'd ever heard, right? That he was going to stay up and worry for her so she could go to bed. And about halfway up the stairs, she turned back and said, *"You're not really going to worry!"* [Congregation laughs] And she marched back down the stairs and plugged herself back in her chair and started worrying again! Because there's no point in worrying if you don't do it right! [Congregation laughs] Right?

So over and over again, we have these moments where we have to decide.

Saint Francis de Sales said this:

"Never be in a hurry; do everything quietly with a calm spirit. Do not lose your inner peace for anything whatsoever, even if your whole world seems upset."

See, I want you to see that the upset in the world right now is absolutely here for your spiritual benefit. And the idea is: The more the world gets upset, the more the world needs you to be a calm, centered, godly presence. Because if the world is upset, and your hair is on fire, you're not being helpful. [Congregation laughs] Right? But when the world is upset, and you can just look somebody in the eye and say to them, *"It's going to be okay,"* because there's something in your soul that knows that that's true!

And sometimes we just need somebody to take our hand and look us straight in the eye and say, *"It's going to be okay."* And we say, *"Well, how do you know that?" "I just do."* Like, it's been okay! It will be okay again! And us being anxious and afraid and running around with our hair on fire is not helping the planet heal!

The Dalai Lama said it this way:

"Do not let the behavior of others destroy your inner peace."

Ralph Waldo Emerson said:

"Nobody can bring you peace but yourself."

And Lao Tzu said it this way:

"If you are depressed, you are living in the past; if you are anxious, you are living in the future; if you are at peace, you are living in the present moment."

And that's what I want you to really look at. I want you to see that your peace is part of your spiritual journey. It's part of your spiritual maturity to actually believe that God is at work in your life. And if God is at work in your life, it is all going to be okay.

But our mind races with, *"But how? How's this all going to work out? When's this all going to work out? But I want it to go this way! I want my life to fit this way!"*

And it's like, okay; so part of our spiritual journey is knowing what to hang on to and what to let go of. What we hang on to is God! What we let go of is the details. That as we learn to separate those two jobs.

In every moment, what do you need to hang on to? *"Oh! I need to hang on to God!"* What do you need to let go? *"I need to let go of all the details. I need to let go of my attachment to this situation working out this way or let way and trust that there's always a third way."* There's the way you're afraid it's going to happen. There's the way you want it to happen. But the third way is the way of peace: It's the way God wants it to happen.

And if you allow your life to be organized and guided and directed by a Higher Power -- by the level of goodness that God is; by universal love; by the love that God has for you -- you get to know profound peace. It's like you get it all! And peace, too!

But when our mind needs to be dominant; when our mind needs to figure it out, there is no peace. Because there's things that your mind just cannot understand. There's things that your ego cannot figure out that God can get done in a moment.

Summer Sanders, the Olympic gold medalist, said this:

"To be a champion, I think you have to see the big picture."

In *Psychology Today* -- there's this quote that I want to share with you:

"Have you ever been to a memorial service and heard someone say, 'This really puts things in perspective'? Usually what is meant by that statement is that, instead of 'being caught up in the rat race' or 'sweating over the little details and stuff of life,' it's far more meaningful to focus on the more critical priorities in life. You may leave the service with a sense of heightened awareness before you gradually fall back into the hecticness of life.

But instead of letting that higher wisdom fade away, you could keep it in the forefront of your thoughts. In life we are often bogged down by the 'little things' that we don't realize are insignificant to the greater scheme of things. Most of us have the little annoyances that we can't remember after a day or a week or a month ... But instead, dwell on the more important things: your higher values, your higher desires."

You know, Richard Carlson -- in his book, *Don't Sweat the Small Stuff* -- said:

"Ask yourself the question: 'Will this matter to me a year from now?'"

Like, how many of us can even remember what we worried about last week? Like, our ego has this unbelievable ability to forget how upset we get about things when they get worked out. And it's like: What if we just don't go down that path? What if we just decide to hang on to God and let go of the details and live in a profound peace?

"I trust God with this!"

Will you say that with me? [With congregation]: *"I trust God with us."*

Now ... So everybody has at least one thing that you're kind of worried about, right? Everybody has at least one thing? I want you to see that one thing. And it could be a loved one; it could be your finances; it could be a health issue; or it could be a medical test that you have coming up. Or it could be whatever it is, right? And I want you to say to yourself, *"I trust God with this."*

Together: [with congregation] *"I trust God with this."*

Now, you know that you actually do it when there's a high level of peace. Now, you know you're just saying words when it's like, *"Hmmpff. I'm not doing that! God's old; God's tired. You know, I'm going to take it back, because I'm young and I'm fresh and I can do a better job."*

And the reality is, over and over again, this is our path to peace: Hold on to God; let go of all the details. And that actually builds our level of faith. That every time we can hold on to God and let go of the details, our faith is actually deepened. It becomes more profound.

One of the things I've come to see over and over again is that most people don't come to a deeper level of peace in their life until they begin to meditate regularly. I really think that, every time they prescribe any anti-anxiety medication, they should make people go to a meditation course. Because one of the things that happens when we're meditating regularly is that we learn to quiet our mind. When we learn to quiet our mind, 90% of the conflict in your life goes quiet.

Because your mind is generating the problem so that your ego can solve it! And you don't actually have to play the whole game! You can just quiet your mind.

The other thing that meditation allows for us is to have a connection with something deeper and bigger than our own personality. Every time we go into meditation and we connect with that full presence and power of God, it creates a level of peace within us. That our mind becomes quiet and our inner life goes deeper into ourselves.

So tonight, would you be willing -- every time you notice that you're even getting slightly anxious -- to give it to God? Seriously! Just put it in a God can. Write it down; put it in a little container and say, "*This is my God can. God, take care of it!*" And over and over again, just feel the freedom of that.

So tonight, I have seven things that I want you to play with. Seven ideas that I believe will enhance our level of peace.

The first one is **LIVE IN THE MOMENT**. You know, the whole purpose of mindfulness meditation is to bring us back to our breath; bring us back to the moment. And when we come into the moment -- if we stay in the moment -- everything you need is provided. In the moment is every possibility. So come in the moment; stay in the moment; live in the moment; live in the present. Focus on your breath; move into the moment.

Two: **PRIORITIZE THE THINGS THAT ARE REALLY THE MOST IMPORTANT TO YOU**. You know, that's where our values come in. Every time we really know what's important to us, life gets easier. When we make a list of tasks and priorities that we can actually get the most important thing done, and we're not worried about cleaning out the vegetable drawer in our refrigerator. I know there's things growing in there. [Congregation laughs] Right? But it's not the highest priority of most days.

Three -- and this is one that spiritual people have a hard time with. And that's: **ACCEPT LIMITATIONS**. See, spiritual people -- we hate limitations! Because we believe that, as spiritual beings, there shouldn't be any limitations! That we should be able to do and have and be anything! And at some level, that's true; your spirit is unlimited. But your physical body is not! And we're living in both worlds. We are living in a physical world where there are limitations, and we're living in a spiritual world where there are no limitations. Like, if you really believe that there are no limitations, then stand in front of a bus. [Congregation laughs] There's a limitation there! The bus will win! Right? There are limitations to who we are as physical beings. And yet, we have this spirit that is immense and amazing. And both have to co-exist together.

Four: **EXERCISE**.

Five: **TAKE BREAKS**. Stop; quiet your mind. Take a deep breath. Allow yourself to relax.

Six: **PRACTICE RELAXATION TECHNIQUES**. Meditate. Breathe deeply. Reduce the stress.

Seven: **GET ENOUGH SLEEP**. How many of you notice that, when you don't get enough rest; when you don't eat well; when you're not exercising, that everything gets a little bit more funka-licious? [Congregation laughs] Okay; that's another word Moses used in the Old Testament. [Congregation laughs]

So, you ready? I want you to have a deep, profound experience of God. I do! And I want you to have that experience of God in the midst of all the busy-ness of your life. And the way that we do that is that we hold on to God and we let go of the busy-ness. And we feel a level of peace that is pretty attractive; it's like we just feel our blood pressure coming down and we feel relaxed. We feel poised.

And there's still stuff happening; there's still ... the world is still upset. But we notice that we're not. And we just get to a deeply calm, centered place because we're spending time every day in prayer and meditation with God.

And we realize that that's why we came. We came into a three-dimensional world to be distracted by all the stuff, but to know God in the midst of it. And to know God in the midst of all the busy-ness is peace. But it is also profound freedom.

Tonight, I want you to look at what you're worried about. Where are you anxious? Where are you afraid? Where are you upset? Where are you worried that the world is going to fall into a hole and never get out? And right there, would you be willing to trust God and to turn it over completely to God and feel a deeper level of peace right there?

Can you see that, as you live in greater peace -- just by showing up in peace -- people around you are going to relax?

You know, there's all kinds of studies that show that, when somebody is profoundly happy, there's a three-connection effect for happiness. So if somebody is happy, not only are they happy, but everyone they know gets happier. And everyone they know gets happier. And it actually goes out three levels. It's actually three levels of happiness from one person being happier! Well, that's because we're all connected!

Now, I want you to see that same thing applies for peace. As you become more peaceful, everyone in your life is also going to become more peaceful. And not only are they going to become more peaceful, but it's going to go out one more level: they're going to become more peaceful. And it's actually going to go out one more level and they're going to become more peaceful.

So Jesus said:

"If I be lifted up, I draw all people unto me."

Because he knew we were all connected. That every time you find peace, you change the world -- 100%. You change your neighborhood; you change everything.

If you watch the news, they do not want you to be at peace. [Congregation laughs] True? Because if you're not scared, you're not watching the news! Right?

So, if you move to peace, the whole planet moves to peace.

Will you pray with me?

I want you to take a deep breath, and I want you to feel the presence of God that's within you and all around you. And today, I want you to risk letting God truly be in charge of your life so that you get to peace. And turning everything over -- every thought; every idea; every want; every need -- turning it over to God so you can know a deep, profound peace.

Tonight, we hold on to God. And we let everything else go. We hold on to God, and we feel God's infinite love for us. And we let everything else go. In the name and through the power of the Living Christ, we give thanks. And so it is. Amen.

Copyright 2023 Unity of Phoenix Spiritual Center/Rev. Richard Rogers