

FINDING LOVE

Final Week of the 9-week series, "Finding Yourself"

June 28, 2023

Rev. Richard Rogers

Alright. So my question for you tonight is: Have you found love? Wow. Big response. [Congregation laughs] Big energy in the room. "Yow! Woo! That's me!" Right?

I'm not sure most people have found love. That's my premise. You know, I've been doing this nine-week series on "Finding." We've talked about finding power; beauty; peace; love; forgiveness; whatever. And today I want to finish with what I think is the most important. Because if we don't find love, nothing else makes sense. It doesn't make sense! Live doesn't make sense. If we don't find love, we never feel settled. We never feel at peace. We never feel deeply touched. If we don't find love, it is a problem.

And the problem is that most of us are trying to find a relationship. And a relationship is different from love. See, and I want you to just imagine this. [Gestures an imaginary lane] Imagine this is a relationship. Right here. [Gestures another imaginary lane parallel to the other] Imagine this is love, right here. They're close; they're not the same! And we get this so confused!

Because most of us think that we have to have this [gestures to the relationship lane] to get this [gestures to the love lane]. And I want you to see tonight that this [love lane] is what our soul needs. This is what we hunger and thirst for, is love.

Now, when those two things come together, it's fabulous! But when you have a relationship problem, and you go to work on your relationship problem, one of the things that rarely happens is a discussion of love. Right? Because what we're doing is we're working on the relationship: Do you leave the underwear on the floor? Do you put the cap on the toothpaste? We work on the relationship issues and people still aren't feeling loved. And so you can have your underwear exactly where it belongs and your partner will still not feel loved.

So we have to find love. It is a need for every soul to find love. We have to master love. And what I want you to see is that love is an inside experience. Relationship is an outside experience. It's "out here"; we have relationships with each other. It's "out here." But love is an inside experience, and we have to find love first. And love is before relationship; it is after relationship. Love is greater than relationship. Because love stems and was created in God. And love has to come first.

And if there's a problem in your relationship, I want to challenge you tonight to ask yourself: Is love present? Am I feeling loved? And not to be mad at the relationship if you're not feeling loved, but to get right with love first. Because if you get right with love, relationships are so much easier! But when you're not right with love, then every little thing has to be perfect or we get upset.

I want to share the words from a song from the '70s: Elton John's "Love Song." And I want you just to hear the words -- the lyrics -- to this song:

*The words I have to say
May well be simple but they're true
Until you give your love
There's nothing more that we can do

Love is the opening door
Love is what we came here for
No one could offer you more*

*Do you know what I mean?
Have your eyes really seen?*

*You say it's very hard
To leave behind the life we knew
But there's no other way
And now it's really up to you*

*Love is the key we must turn
Truth is the flame we must burn
Freedom the lesson we must learn
You know what I mean
Have your eyes really seen?*

*Love is the opening door
Love is what we came here for
No one could offer you more
Do you know what I mean?
Have your eyes really seen?"*

See, there's this challenge -- this opportunity. Like, we have to find love if everything in our life is going to make sense. Because what happens is: We look for relationship, hoping that that relationship will give us enough love. And if it comes close, we think it's not bad! Like, it's not bad! It's within the realm. "I'm getting enough love from this."

But what I want you to see is that your soul needs a profound level of love to be truly satisfied with life. Like, one of the things that happens -- that we've been reported happens when people have a near-death experience -- is ... One of the experiences that they have is that they enter into this tube of light and the overall experience is a profound experience of love.

So I believe that we come in with love; we go out with love; and yet, the 30, 50, 80, 100 years we spend here, we don't get enough! And yet, if it's available on the other side, can you imagine it has to be available on this side?!?

So I want us to master love. Because we get mad when we don't get enough. And we want to be in a relationship where somebody is taking full responsibility for loving us. And have you ever been ... [Laughs] Have you ever been disappointed? [Congregation laughs] That the person you were in relationship with is not doing a good job loving you? Have you ever gotten disappointed? Have you ever gotten angry? Have you ever gotten upset that the person you're in relationship with is kind of ... I can't even think of the word. Not good at it? [Congregation laughs] Because all the other words that are going through my head I just can't say on a Wednesday night. [Congregation laughs] Right?

And we get so angry that they're terrible at loving us. And they're not really terrible. But when we haven't mastered it, we get in relationship with people who often haven't mastered it.

And tonight what I want to be about is you mastering love. Because I believe that the purpose of the relationship -- really, deep down -- the purpose of a relationship is to find somebody that you're willing to give them all your love. And it's not really about finding somebody who loves you and meets all of your needs. It's like somebody that you find so adorable that you're willing to love them with all that you are. That you're willing to love them in a bigger, greater, more wonderful way.

But for you to do that, you have to have mastered love so that you're full. Because when you're not full, we start withholding love.

Now, can everybody think of one person, one situation, one moment where you've been withholding love? We've got three honest people, right? [Congregation laughs] And what I want you to see tonight is: When we withhold love, it's because our soul is not full. And when we're truly full -- when the infinite love of God is just filling us up -- we don't withhold love. We just give it freely, because we've mastered it. We know how to replenish our soul. We know how to get more of it!

And so every time we're withholding love, the problem isn't that they're sucking it out of it. The problem is that we haven't learned to replenish.

There are three sources of love, true? God; self; and others. That's it! There's only three ways to get loved. You either go to God; you go to yourself; or you go to others. That's it! The entire universe is based on those three avenues for you to get 100% of your love needs. You either go to God; you go to yourself; or you go to others. And many of us are just trying to go without. And that's not a system that works! Because we get cranky! We do! We get cranky when we don't get enough love!

So if we only have three sources of love, I want to talk today about: How do we get more love so that we can actually find the love that we want? Can we play the Oprah/Maya Angelou clip?

Oprah: You say words are things, and that they're so powerful. So what words do you turn to for comfort?

Maya Angelou: Love. And again, see, I don't mean ... I think love is that condition in the human spirit so profound that it allows us to forgive.

Oprah: Um hmmm.

Maya Angelou: And it may be the energy which keeps the stars in the firmament.

Oprah: Yes!

Maya Angelou: I'm not sure. It may be the energy that keeps the blood running smoothly through our veins. I'm not sure. But it's something beyond the explanation. It can be used for anything you can't explain ... any good thing you can't explain.

Oprah: Absolutely!

Maya Angelou: Yes, ma'am.

Oprah: Where do you go for solace, for comfort? Are there books that you read? When Maya Angelou needs comforting, what do you use?

Maya Angelou: I'm a student of Unity. And there's a book ...

Oprah: The Unity church?

Maya Angelou: Unity church.

Oprah: Um hmmm.

[Oprah narrating video clip]: Maya first discovered the Unity church in her 20s, after her voice coach and mentor, Fred Wilkerson, invited her to a service there. Founded in 1889, Unity is a Christian movement that emphasizes affirmative prayer and education as a path to spirituality.

Maya Angelou: I took a course in Unity about two years ago online. Not to become a member or minister, but just to understand more deeply. There's a book called "Lessons in Truth."

Oprah: Wow.

Maya Angelou: And in the book, there's a line which is, "God loves me." And when I came to read it to my then-mentor, Frederick Wilkerson -- the late Frederick Wilkerson -- I read, "God loves me." And he said, "Read it again." I said, "God loves me." He said, "Read it again. Read it again!" And finally, I said, "GOD. LOVES ME." [Becomes overcome with emotion] It still humbles me. [Speaking through tears] That this Force which made leaves and fleas and stars and rivers and you loves me. Me, Maya Angelou! It's amazing! I can do anything! And do it well! Any good thing, I can do it! That's why I'm who I am. Yes; because God loves me, and I'm amazed at it! And grateful for it!"

[Congregation applauds] Isn't that fabulous? Okay. So for Maya Angelou, was the idea that God loves her -- was that an intellectual understanding? Or was she having an experience of God loving her? It was an experience! Right?

So when we have the concept that God loves us, it is not helpful. Well, it's better than thinking that God hates us! [Congregation titters] Right? But it's not soul satisfying.

So let's say it together: [with congregation] *"God loves me."*

God loves me!

Now, that is an intellectual understanding. Until it gets all the way into your heart, and you really feel it, it's not transformative. But when you experience that God loves me, it's a game-changer! And most of us are not experiencing it.

There's this quote from C.S. Lewis. And in it -- it's during World War II. And the quote is based on the Scripture, *"You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect,"* from Matthew 5:48.

And I want to read his response to an interview that he had:

"The command 'Be ye perfect' is not idealistic gas. Nor is it a command to do the impossible. He is going to make us into creatures that can obey that command. He said (in the Bible) that we were "gods" ...

In Scripture it says we are gods ...

"... and He is going to make good His word. If we let Him -- for we can prevent Him, if we choose -- He will make the feeblest and filthiest of us into a god or goddess, a dazzling, radiant, immortal creature, pulsating all through with such energy and joy and wisdom and love as we cannot no imagine, a bright stainless mirror which reflects back to God perfectly ... His own boundless power and delight and goodness. The process will be long and, in parts, very painful; but that is what we are in for. Nothing less. He meant it when He said, 'Ye are gods.'"

That's a big statement! And we can't get there if we don't believe that God profoundly loves us!

"God loves me."

Together: [with congregation] *"God loves me."*

And it has to move from an intellectual understanding until it is an experience that we feel in our hearts.

St. Augustine said:

"God loves each of us as if we were his only one."

Norman Vincent Peale said:

"God loves you. He wants you to succeed. And he wants you to be your best."

Rick Warren said:

"God's love is like an ocean. You can see its beginning, but not its end."

Mother Teresa said:

"When you know how much God is in love with you, then you can only live your life in that radiance of love."

And I want you to truly see that many times we haven't really owned the truth that God loves us. And without that basic truth -- without that foundational truth -- nothing in our life makes sense. If you were raised with a scary, punishing God, it impacts us. It limits us. It distorts life.

God loves you! God created you. God thinks you're adorable! [Congregation laughs] God loves you!

Now, does God also see when you fall? When you trip? When you make mistakes? Yes! But God never stops loving you! God loves you! That's the first premise of the entire universe: is that God loves you!

The second is like that one. It says that we are called to love ourselves at the level that God loves us!

Now, what's the difference between narcissistic love and spiritual love? Narcissistic love says, *"I never make mistakes. I'm perfect in every way. Aren't I wonderful?"* Right?

How many of you have ever gone more than an hour without making a mistake? [Congregation laughs] Right? So the hardest part about self-love is being able to hold our mistakes and love ourselves anyway. Because true self-love does not deny the way that we have fallen; the way that we make mistakes; the way that we mess up from time to time. But it says, *"Even in our mistakes, I am worthy of loving myself."*

And that's the hardest part! Because in self-love, you have to hold both! You have to hold the times when you fall and your greatness in the same moment. Because self-love requires that you see yourself completely; honestly; totally, without exceptions. And you love yourself anyway, because that's the way that God loves you.

God loves you, even though we fall! Even though we make mistakes! And self-love requires that we love ourselves at that level. That we look at ourselves in the mirror and can see the times when we've fallen, and yet our heart is wide open to ourselves.

So we need God-love. We need self-love. And we need the love of others. We do!

We need the love of others, but the love of others is only meaningful if we're radically honest with them. See, if you only think I'm amazing [laughs], you have not talked to my wife. [Congregation laughs] Can I get an *"Amen"*? Right? If you just think I'm all that and a bag of nuts, then you don't really know me! To honestly love me, you have to know my strengths and my weaknesses. You have to know the times when I've mastered something, and the times when I fail at it. Because to love someone and not know the radical truth of who they are ... it doesn't feel honest. It doesn't feel legit. That, if we want people to love us, they have to know us.

Now, I believe that if you have three or four people that love you -- truly love you -- you are very rich. But those three or four people have to know you deeply. They have to know your strengths; they have to know when you fall; they have to know you. Because when they say, *"I love you,"* but they know the whole story, it actually means something! If you just lift somebody up to a pedestal and say, *"Oh, they're perfect in every way, and I love them because they're so perfect,"* you don't know them! We have to be able to see one another's strengths and their weaknesses, and choose to love them anyway.

Most of us did not get unconditional love growing up. We got a version where we were loved when we did it right: when we cleaned our room; when we got good grades. We got a version of that love. That's

not the love I'm talking about today! I'm talking about a level of love where you can be radically honest with who you are and get loved every way. And I'm not talking about trying to do that with a thousand people. I'm talking about doing that with less than a handful of people who really know you. Who you could call at 3 o'clock in the morning and say, *"This is what's going on for me,"* and they would still take your call. And they would say, *"Richard, I know, and I love you right there."* And that's all they need to say is, *"I know, and I love you right there."*

That's love! And that love fills us and heals us and lifts us higher. And that love allows us to be generous with love in all of our relationships.

Today, I want you to explore love. Not to try to fix or change your relationships. I want you to know how deeply and profoundly God loves you. I want you to be able to look in yourself -- truly, honestly who you are: your strengths and your weaknesses -- and say, *"I love me. I love me! I know I'm not perfect; everybody knows I'm not perfect! But I love me!"*

And then I want you to have two or three or four people in your life who know pretty much everything about you and love you anyway. Who you could call at any time, day or night, and say, *"This is what's going on for me. Do you love me right here?"* And they say, *"Of course I do!"* That's what changes the game!

Because when we have that level of love in our life, everything gets easier. Everything is better!

"God loves me."

Together: [with congregation] *"God loves me."*

One more time like we mean it: [with congregation] *"God loves me!"*

"I love me."

Together: [with congregation] *"I love me."*

One more time: [with congregation] *"I love me."*

"Others love me."

Together: [with congregation] *"Others love me."*

[Laughs] Now, do you need to take a vote? [Congregation laughs] Does at least 50% of the room have to really love you before you're lovable? No! I'm talking about two or three people who have stood with you; who have been with you; that know you and love you no matter what. Because when we have that level of love in our life, our life is radically different.

We live in a world where people are angry now. And if you want to know what's wrong with our kids: They're not feeling loved! I mean, why would a kid walk into a school and shoot another kid if they felt loved? It would never happen! Because if they feel loved, they're not going to be destructive! And when they don't feel loved, they get so angry they want to take everybody out. We literally have our kids hurting our kids because they don't feel loved! And they don't have the sophistication that we adults have by just drinking away our problems. [Congregation laughs] Right? We get more sophisticated; we just get more sophisticated in our addiction, so we don't have to feel the pain that we have in not feeling loved.

And tonight, what if we change the game? What if, tonight, you get to feel profoundly loved? Instead of working on your relationships, what if -- for a week; a month; a year -- you took on mastering love until you felt God's profound love for you? Until you could see yourself, with your mistakes and your

strengths, and say, "*I love me*"? And you have two or three people in your life that you knew that, no matter what was going on in your life, they would stand with you in love, and that you could feel that?

We have to change our world. We have to find love! If we don't find love, it's just painful. If we do -- and as we find love -- everything in our life gets better.

Together: "*God loves me.*"

Together: [with congregation] "*God loves me.*"

Will you pray with me?

I invite you to open your mind, your heart, your soul to feel God's love for you. That from the moment that you were created, God has loved you. God has loved you with an infinite, unconditional love. And that you can love you! You don't have to be perfect. You don't have to be spectacular. That you can love yourself just the way you are! With all your heart, with all your mind, you can love you! And you can have a small group of people around you who know you and love you anyway. And we can actually change the world through love.

And as we find love -- we truly, deeply find love -- everything in our life gets better. So 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