

# UNLEASHING THE GENIUS WITHIN YOU

Final Week of a 2-Week Series

Sunday, September 24, 2023

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*So this out-of-work actor gets a call from his agent. He says, "I've got a gig for you. And it's just one line."*

*And the actor says, "What's the line?"*

*He said, "The line is 'Hark! I hear the cannons roar!'"*

*And the actor says, "Well, I've got that."*

*[The agent] says, "But here's the catch, though. It's a last-minute fill-in; the show begins in two hours. It's all the way across town. There won't be enough time for a rehearsal. You've just got to get there as fast as possible; get into costume and make-up. Because those are the first lines of the entire play: 'Hark! I hear the cannons roar!'"*

*The actor jumps into a cab and he hasn't acted for awhile, so he starts practicing. [Said with several intonations] "Hark! I hear the cannons roar! Hark! I hear the cannons roar! Hark! I hear the cannons roar!" He's practicing "Hark! I hear the cannons roar!" over and over again.*

*And they get to the theater five minutes before the show. The security guard says, "Are you 'Hark! I hear the cannons roar!'"*

*He said, "Yes! I am 'Hark! I hear the cannons roar!'"*

*He said, "They're waiting for you upstairs; get up there quick!"*

*So he gets up there while they're doing costume and make-up. "Hark! I hear the cannons roar!" He's still practicing. "Hark! I hear the cannons roar!"*

*He gets to the stage manager, and she said, "You're just here! Ten seconds; you're on!"*

*And so he gets on stage, the curtain opens, spotlight focused on him. And then hears this "Ka-boom!" And he turns around and he says, "My God! What was that noise?"*

[Congregation laughs]

Okay ... Not at the usual high quality of jokes you're accustomed to, but .... you know! [Congregation laughs]

So one of my all-time favorite quotes is by a friend of mine, a Canadian named Bob Koehler. And he said in this quote: *"On the day you were born, you were given the opportunity of a lifetime. So what are you doing with your opportunity of a lifetime?"*

And one of the reasons I love that quote is because it causes us to pause and think and reflect and consider how we are living our lives. And this is the best way for me to live my life? Is this the best way to bring out the very best in myself? I also like the quote because it makes us realize we really do have the opportunity of a lifetime. That this is a precious and incredible gift -- to live our lives.

So my question is: What do you like about how you're living your life? What is it that you'd like to change about how you're living your life? What would you like to do differently? What would you like to do better? What is it that you'd like to achieve? What you'd like to create? What would make your life more meaningful and fulfilling than it is right now?

And whatever the answers are for you in those questions, the truth is: You have got it in you to achieve and bring that forth.

You know, our affirmation for the last two weeks has been, "*I am a genius! The wisdom and intelligence of God is within me.*"

Let's say that together: [with congregation] "*I am a genius! The wisdom and intelligence of God is within me.*"

How many people would admit that saying, "*I am a genius*" doesn't exactly feel as comfortable ... it might feel a stretch and maybe not true? Anybody acknowledge that at all? Three people do ... thank you! [Congregation laughs]

And I think one of the reasons is that, in our culture, the word "genius" is saved for rare and very few individuals like Einstein; like Mozart; like Helen Keller; and like Shakespeare. And if you're not in that few, then you are not a genius!

And the second reason is: In our culture, we kind of teach people that we're not enough. You know, that we're not worthy. We're not tall enough; we're not smart enough; we're not think enough. We're not all these things enough. We would feel more comfortable calling ourselves a knucklehead than calling ourselves a genius. That is how conditioned we have been to think so much far less of ourselves.

And finally, it's that we don't always know how to use our mind and our spiritual power to bring forth the very best in ourselves.

Interesting thing: Einstein and several people that we would consider geniuses all say that we're all geniuses! Michael Gleb, in his book, *How to Think Like Da Vinci* -- where he evaluated all the greatest geniuses and said Da Vinci's the greatest one -- said we are all geniuses. It's just that some of us just don't know how to apply and use our mind in a way that can bring forth the genius and brilliance that is already within us.

Everybody isn't meant to be a Da Vinci, and isn't. But every one of us has our unique gifts and talents and greatness and ability to make a difference in this world. And yet, we don't always use it.

You know, genius ... really, when you think about it, comes down to how well do we bring forth and allow the goodness and uniqueness of God that is in us to come forth and live, and to be fully expressed in our lives.

The reason Da Vinci was chosen as the greatest is because of his mindset: how he thought and saw life. And there is what they call "the seven Da Vincian principles of genius," because [those principles] can really help fulfill and bring forth the genius within ourselves.

Last week we looked at the first two Da Vincian genius principles, and today we'll look at the next five. I'll review last week's, as well.

The first one to bring forth genius is to **DEVELOP AND CULTIVATE A CURIOUS MIND**. A great mind is a curious mind. Because it is curiosity that springs forth learning and discovering and growing and exploring. It is our curiosity that helps us use our imagination. It is curiosity that helps us to expand our awareness and open our minds to the unlimited possibilities of good in life.

You know, the first thing for geniuses is to have a curious mind. How curious are you about your life? And what could work and what could be different? And what could improve?

When Jesus said, "*To enter the kingdom of heaven, you must become as a child,*" it is because children have a curious mind. It's open; it's creative; it thinks of possibilities; it wants to explore everything and

discover everything. And so we have to get back to that childlike state of curiosity and wonder, and be fascinated and awed about this incredible life that we have, and the beauty that is all around us.

And we could do that by play; by art; by creativity. And one of them to explore curiosity is by the quality of the questions that we ask. Jesus said, *"Ask and ye shall receive."* But what kind of questions are you asking?

We ask questions out of two things: frustration or fascination. Questions of frustration are questions like, *"Why me? Why do I always get the short end of the stick? Why don't things ever work out for me?"* And what happens with those questions is that we end up attracting more of the things that we don't want.

Now questions of fascination are about curiosity and possibility. Like, *"How can I experience more joy and love in my relationship? What is it I need to let go so I can feel a greater sense of inner peace and joy? What can I do to increase my income by 50%?"* Or whatever it is that we want to do ...

Socrates said that there's wisdom in all of us, and the key to bringing it out is questions. What are the kind of questions you're asking life; asking God; and asking yourself? Because those are the things that can bring forth the genius. But it requires a mind of curiosity that will help us bring forth the greatness and genius in us.

The second thing was to **ENLIVEN YOUR EXPERIENCES THROUGH YOUR SENSES**. You know, sometimes we are so preoccupied, so busy, so in a rush running around like chickens with our heads cut off trying to find the life that we want that we sometimes miss the life we have. Sometimes we eat so fast we don't even taste our food!

I remember once at Unity Village when I was in seminary, I was late. I was going so fast, and I got in from my residence to the chapel and someone said, *"What's the temperature like outside?"* I said, *"I have no idea."* [Congregation laughs] Anybody ever be in a conversation and you're not even hearing the words?

Sometimes we aren't even there; we're going through the motions of life trying to find these great life ... but we're missing the one that we've got now. And the way to do that is to enliven our lives through our senses. Smell and taste and touch and feel what's really going on in our lives. And what we need to do is slow down and we need to be fully present. Because the more present and engaged we are, the more enriched and the more alive we will feel with what's going on in our lives. It is only then we can live life more abundantly, like we all desire.

The third principle of genius is to **EMBRACE THE UNKNOWN**. We all know life is full of uncertainty. There's so many things that we do not know in our lives. And the uncertainty of life sometimes triggers us to become afraid and we become anxious. And part of the reason we become afraid and anxious with the unknown is because our brains are actually built to predict things and to make patterns and connections so we can plan and prepare how to handle those things. So uncertainty messes things up a little bit, and we start freaking out in our thinking. And we go to a fear of the unknown.

You know, we actually get stuck because our brains want to know; it feels more comfortable knowing. And don't we always want to know everything? Have all our ducks in a row before we move forward? How many people would admit that you've been a little bit afraid of the unknown? And sometimes the unknown feels a little scary and negative?

The amazing thing about it is that we assume that [says in a dramatic, deep voice] "the unknown" is scary. Who said? The unknown could equally be good! In fact, it could be great! It could be amazing! But yet, we label it -- "the unknown" -- as being scary. And that's just not the truth.

Leonardo Da Vinci had an amazing ability to welcome uncertainty and ambiguity. And because he allowed it, he was able to unlock realms of knowledge and creativity ... whether it was with a problem; or a goal; or a desire, he was okay not knowing everything. In fact, he was calm and relaxed.

He had three approaches. He would say, *"It's okay for me to not know everything. Something good can come out of this unknown. And even if it wasn't something perfect, I could handle it."* Now, wouldn't just taking the unknown into your life just make you feel more relaxed? More at peace?

When you think about it, we all have to handle the unknown in our lives; we all have to handle uncertainty. The question is: What is your relationship with the uncertainty? What is your relationship with the unknown? And can you bring it to a place where you can find peace? Where you can create an inner space so that you can find creativity and inspiration and open yourself to be okay, even when things aren't perfect. To be okay when things aren't great.

How many people have a hard time to get test results? Or waiting to hear what the interview said? Or waiting to find out what your boss meant when he said [in a deep voice] *"We need to have a talk"*? [Congregation laughs]

I mean, we all find a little bit of stress. And that's where we have to exercise our faith. And especially trust. When it says, *"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not into your own understanding, but in all ways acknowledge Him and He will make straight your path."* Whatever it is that's going on, can you just trust that God's got you? God loves you! God supports you!

And then the second one is to believe the other Scripture that says, *"All things work together for good."* That even if this moment isn't perfect, can you trust that ultimately it is going to be good?

And the third one: Again, how good are you at waiting? Scripture says, *"They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they will mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not grow weary; they shall walk and not faint."* There is something powerful and spiritual about being able to trust and believe it will be okay to the point that it's okay if you wait, and it's okay if you don't know.

And so that's a powerful and important thing for our genius to come through: How well do you handle the unknown? And can you embrace it and welcome it, knowing that it's okay to not know. Something good can happen from this unknown. And even if it didn't, you and God can handle it.

The fourth thing for bringing forth our genius is to **RECOGNIZE AND APPRECIATE THE CONNECTEDNESS OF ALL LIFE**. Da Vinci absolutely believed that everything was connected. That there was an interconnection of all things. And when we see life from a place of connectedness, we can recognize patterns -- connections. We can see harmonies. And we can get into the flow of life. Everything is connected and it is through that connection and oneness that we can really bring forth brilliance.

Jesus spoke of that connectedness about himself when he said, *"The Father and I are one."* That God and I are connected; God and I are one. I am one with the Father; one with the Source.

And Jesus prayed, like, five times a day. So he kept connecting and reconnecting on a consistent basis, which was a demonstration of how we should be doing it, as well: to stay connected, stay grounded, stay centered and anchored.

Jesus even said, when the disciples said, *"How should we pray?"* He said, *"Pray like this: 'Our Father,'"* That is one of the most unifying statement: That there is one Source; one God -- and it's our Father. My Father and all of ours Father ... meaning that we are all connected. I'm connected to God, and we are all connected to one another.

Because life can distract us. Life can pull us away in different parts. Most of the time, when we turn to prayer, isn't it because we feel disconnected? We feel fragmented? And prayer unifies us. It brings us back to center. It brings us back to the Source.

So one of the important things for genius is to take time to connect. To calm and center yourself in the oneness with God; in the oneness with the very Source that makes all things possible.

At my class last week, "Unity Basics," someone asked me what to do when you're having a rough time, and how do you stay grounded? And I said what you should do is: throughout the day, have a one-minute meditation while you follow your breath, and you relax and you just remember God loves you. Or you remember that God is peace. Even if you're sitting at your desk, for one minute before you work just quietly calm and connect and anchor yourself with God.

You know, every time I turn on my microwave -- I've said it many times! -- I hit that microwave for a minute; I'm meditating for a minute. When I watch sports, during the commercial I pause and I meditate. If the game's boring, I'll stop the game and I'll meditate. [Congregation laughs] Because sometimes I need it more.

You know, another one you could do: You could meditate while you're walking. You could even meditate for a minute if you're at a red light. And don't worry, because if it turns green, the person behind you will remind you that the light's green! [Congregation laughs] And if I'm waiting at a doctor's appointment, I'm doing a little meditation.

People always talk about meditating for 20 minutes and 30 minutes. I believe a one-minute meditation several times through the day actually helps me stay more anchored and connected. And that, when I meditate for 10, 15, 20 minutes, I actually can go deeper because of those one minutes here and there. I don't think we value small moments of connection -- small moments of thinking about it. Notice again: Jesus prayed five times a day. He prayed throughout the day. And it takes that for us to anchor and feel that connection. But to connect with the kingdom of God within is the greatest thing we can do to open ourselves to allow the genius within to come forth.

The fifth one's a short one, but it's an important one. Da Vinci believed that his mind performed better when his body was being taken care of. He believed that **CULTIVATING GRACE AND BALANCE** through fitness; eating well; walking; and stretching were an important element of having your mind be as sharp and creative as it can be.

The Bible tells us our body is the temple of the Living God. I want you to think about how you treat your body. And are you treating it like the temple of the Living God? How many people would agree that you could probably improve and have a healthier diet than the one that you've got? Or the one that you've usually got? How many people would agree that you could probably exercise more often and more consistently? How many people would agree that you could probably get better quality sleep or more sleep than you're getting? And how many people would agree that you could probably hydrate and drink more water?

The temple of the Living God would probably require us being a little better in our self-care: nurturing our bodies and taking care of them. Because these body temples are the vehicle through which we experience life. And to have a sharper mind, we need to take care of our bodies.

So what's one thing you could do to take care of your physical temple, your physical being? It could be walking; it could be yoga; it could be pickle ball; it could be whatever you want it to be! What could you do? Even stretching! I mean, whatever it is, do something with your body to help your mind and the genius in you to come forth.

The six one is to **STRIVE FOR EXCELLENCE**. One of the things Da Vinci was really about was being dedicated to his craft and improving himself towards mastery in his work. And the amazing thing: He was masterful in multiple disciplines! He was an architect; he was an artist; a sculptor; an inventor; a scientist. He was a military engineer. Somebody once said, *"The only genius worth anything is the genius of hard work."* And I think there's a lot of truth in that.

Striving for excellence is something he did. Working on self-improvement and mastery. Here's what he said. He said, *"People of genius do the most when they work the least."* Because he said when we fill our minds with, *"We have to do this and it's got to be perfect,"* we don't allow the genius to come forth. We don't allow the goodness and the creativity in us to come forth as well.

Striving for excellence, here's the four things he did. Number one: He had an intention to strive for excellence. Number two: He invested himself fully in the work he did with a great work ethic. Number three: He had a consistent desire for improving and mastering. And then finally: He was patient. He paid attention to details. And he persevered.

You know, it took him four years to paint the "Mona Lisa." It took him three years to paint "The Last Supper." And it is because he spent more time sometimes contemplating than painting. Because he absolutely wanted the emotions that each of the characters were feeling to come through in a powerful and clear way. And so he had to go within to be able to bring that outside of himself.

Kahlil Gibran said, *"The work that we all do is love made visible."* That when we put our passion and our spirit into whatever we do, it blesses us; it blesses others; and it blesses our community and our world.

There's a beautiful line in Proverbs 22, and it says, *"See the man who is diligent in his work; he shall stand before kings."* All the work and effort we put into the work we do -- especially when our heart and our love and our joy and our striving for excellence is a part of it -- absolutely makes a difference in this world. That we shall stand before kings. We open ourselves more to God and to life and to helping one another.

So where in your life are you, and would you like to, strive for excellence? Where in your life are you working on, and would like to work on, self-improvement? Where in your life are you working on, and would like to work on, mastery? Because the truth is: The more we strive for excellence, the more we can bring out our goodness; our greatness; and our genius.

And the last one is to **LEAVE A LASTING LEGACY**: to leave a legacy and to make a difference in this world. Mark Twain said that the two most important days in your life -- the first one is the day you were born. The second one is the day you figure out why. [Congregation murmurs]

Every one of us is here for a purpose. And I don't know what yours is exactly, but I do know what is yours generally, because it's all of ours: We are all here to make a difference in some way. We are all here to bring light and love, to bring some healing, some joy and encouragement to some people, to many people, to even one person! That is a life well lived.

And the legacy carries on more than we realize. Da Vinci lived 570 years ago! And his extendable ladder and some of the other things that we invented, and people's love of "The Last Supper" and "Mona Lisa" are still there! It still has a huge impact!

And I don't think we all realize the impact that our lives have. And we think it's always about achievement and stuff ... but sometimes it's just about our kindness and our smile and our generosity. Or our laughter. We touch people know than we even realize. It touches the people now, but there is a lasting impact.

I can remember people who said two words of encouragement to me and, 10 or 20 years later, still thank them in my head and are grateful to them. Because we make a difference. Our words; our encouragement; our joy; our smile absolutely makes a difference.

South African artist Marlene Dumas said, *"Painting doesn't freeze time. It circulates and recycles like a wheel that turns. Painting is a very slow art. It doesn't travel with the speed of light. That is why dead painters shine so bright."* [Congregation laughs] I love that quote!

And what it's really saying -- and Da Vinci's life, as well -- the things you do, you will not realize how long it'll last. What ripples it will have in people's lives that you don't even know. And it is by you showing up your best, and you bringing forth the genius in you. That does good now, and it sends ripples of goodness that will bless more lives and countless lives than you even know.

So here's what Steven Pressfield said in his book, *The War of Art*. He said, *"God has endowed each of us with our own unique genius to achieve the life He intended for us to live and the difference that we are here to make."*

So my question is: What legacy do you want to leave for your family? What is the legacy you want to leave for your friends? For your church? For your community? And for our world?

In 1987, the Irish Band, U2, had a hit called "I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For." Anybody know that song? Everybody know that song? And I loved the song, but I always thought it was kind of a sad song, a disappointing song. Searching, and you still haven't found what you're looking for. It sounded like a bit of a letdown.

And then I heard Bono, the lead singer, in an interview. And someone was saying, *"What's that song about? It sounds kind of negative and sad."* And he said, *"No! It's actually a good song! It's a hopeful song! It's an optimistic song! To always know there's still something out there to strive for. There's still more to achieve. There's still more success to be had. There's still more opportunity."* And he said, *"That's a good thing! It's not a sad thing."*

*"I still haven't found what I'm looking for"* means that there's still more! There's still more we can create and experience and share!

Pablo Casals, the great cellist, was still in his 80's practicing daily intensely. And they said, *"Why are you still practicing so intensely in your 80's?"* He said, *"Because I think I can get better!"* [Congregation laughs]

There is so much! And it's talking about the nature of life: The unlimited uniqueness and greatness of life will always have more for you to experience. Whatever age or stage you are in your life, no matter what you have achieved, there's still more to improve. Still more to strive more. Still more to experience. Still more to enjoy!

Let each of us take the time to reflect on the way that we're living our lives. And let's each of us make a commitment to use this opportunity of a lifetime that has been given to us to unleash the genius within us.

God bless you all! [Congregants applauds]

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