

BRING IT ON!

Week #1 of a 10-Week Series, "Your Spiritual Quest: The Adventure of Your Life!"

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So, how many people have ever run away from a problem? Anybody ever run away from a problem? And how many people have ever done everything you could to avoid an uncomfortable or difficult conversation, no matter how important it was? And how many people know what you want? You talk about it; you think you've even planned about it, but you really haven't gotten after it, and done everything needed to succeed? Anybody?

You know, it is amazing how sometimes -- as human beings who want so many great and wonderful things -- how cautious and tentatively we can live. How carefully, how passively, even apologetically we can live. And the truth and the fact is that the people in the world who achieve great things, who change the world, are those who live boldly.

Emily Dickinson said, "*Fortune befriends the bold.*" You know, there's a book called, *The Single Woman: Life, Love, and a Dash of Sass*. [Congregants laugh] And the author, Mandy Hale, says that life is not meant to be lived perfectly, but it is meant to be lived **boldly**. The fact is: if we really want greater success and improvement and to reach greater levels of heights in all areas of our lives, we need to be bold. We need to live more boldly.

How many people have at least one air in your life you know would be improved if you lived a little more boldly? Anybody?

You know, I read an article and it said that boldness is a superpower, because it activates our desire, determination, our excitement and enthusiasm and focus to achieve the things we want in our lives. You know, I really believe that living boldly is like saying to life, "*Bring it on! Bring. It. On!*" You know, saying "Bring it on: is like telling life, "*Hey, I want to live; I want to learn; I want to grow; I want to create; I want to overcome. I am ready to face it all and I'm ready to taste the sweetness of life. I'm ready to bring out the best in myself. Bring it on!*"

You know, whether we realize it or not, every one of us here is on a spiritual journey. Every one of us is here on a spiritual quest. It is for the unfoldment of our soul; it is for the full development and the awareness of our oneness with God. It is to connect with our Source. It is to have a spiritual awakening -- and what Yogananda says -- to have self-realization, which is to unify with the omnipresence of the Divine and unify our nature in God's nature.

I think we've all heard that expression: "*We are spiritual beings having a human experience.*" Everybody heard that? But by the way, we live so cautiously and tentatively, it's like we're spiritual beings trying to avoid a human experience. [Congregation laughs] You know, sometimes there are parts of our lives that we just want to skip! We just want to move along, gloss over as easily as we can.

You know, life is spiritual; it is a powerful spiritual experience, but we get so caught up in the appearances -- in the physical realm and how we experience our senses -- that we put more value, attention and time on the physical and less on the spiritual.

2 Corinthians 4, Verse 18 says, "*Look not to the things that are seen, but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.*"

Hebrews 11-3 says, "*By faith, we understand that the worlds were framed by the Word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.*"

Today we're going to start a 10-week series called, **"Your Spiritual Quest: The Adventure of Your Life."** And the truth is that the purpose -- Paramahansa Yogananda said -- the purpose of life is to find God. But he said you could also say the purpose of life is to find happiness, because God is happiness. You could say the purpose of life is to find love, because God is love. You could say the purpose of life is to find peace, because God is peace. You could say the purpose of life is to find bliss, because God is bliss.

Every one of us is on a spiritual quest: a mission; a journey for us to seek and search for something significant. To go on an adventure for a higher purpose. Our life is a spiritual quest -- a spiritual adventure -- for a higher purpose. And it is for the unfoldment of our souls; for the advancement of our souls; for the development of our souls.

Life is just not just about our job and our house and our car and our activities and our relationships. It is for a higher level of spirituality: to know our oneness with the Divine. To unify our lives with the oneness of God, and to use the adventure of our lives -- and all the experiences in it -- to help us fulfill our spiritual goal, our spiritual purpose.

So today we're going to look at four things we can do to live more boldly and to say to life, "Bring it On!"

And the first one is to **SEEK GOD BOLDLY**. How many people would like to live a more spiritually-centered life? A more God-directed life?

Emmett Fox says prayer is the greatest energy a human being can create and cultivate and engage in with our minds. Prayer is a practice of unifying our mind with the Mind of God. That's why Paul said, *"Let the same mind that was in Christ Jesus be in you."* Our work -- to seek God boldly -- is to unify our mind with the Mind of God.

You know, Jesus sought God boldly through prayer, praying consistently; praying daily; praying faithfully, knowing that God was fully available and accessible. And he also said: when we pray, we should pray starting with the words, *"Our Father,"* and that we should pray boldly by unifying ourselves with God, and knowing that we are one with all people. Prayer is the thing that opens our hearts to feel our connection with Spirit; to feel a sense of peace; to feel the wisdom and the infinite Intelligence of God.

How many people would say that you absolutely believe in the power of God to connect with God; for healing; for guidance; for all things? We all do! How many people have ever been too busy to pray? [Congregation titters] How many people don't have enough time to pray? How many people ever forget to pray? So I would say maybe we don't believe it in -- or are seeking it -- as boldly as we want to.

Somebody once said that they were too busy to pray and Deepak [Chopra] said, *"If you're too busy to pray once a day, pray twice a day!"* [Congregation laughs] That's being bold!

So here are some passages that show us how to seek God more boldly.

Jesus said, *"Seek ye first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you."* Seek God first. And he's saying: Make this a priority in your life ... such a priority that you take consistent, regular time daily in your life to be still. To center your heart and your mind on God, and to sit in the silence. Seek ye first; make prayer and make God a priority in your life.

Sometimes we use prayer as a last resort. When we're desperate and can't think of anything else, *"Let's pray!"* But it should be the first cause. At every goal or dream, or every problem or challenge, go to God first. Go to God first. Seek God boldly by making God a priority.

And the second Scripture is: *"If you seek me, you will find me if you seek me with all your heart."* So make God a priority, but also seek God sincerely. Not just for a pay-off of what you want to get, but for

the beauty of experiencing the peaceful presence and feeling and energy of the Divine. To just seek that alone begins to open things up in so many ways.

Seek God as a priority -- putting God first. Seek God sincerely. And seek God consistently.

Jesus prayed in the morning; in the afternoon; the evening; the night. Pray consistently. That's how you seek God more boldly. That's how we make the adventure of our lives support our spiritual quest.

C.S. Lewis, the great Christian writer, said, *"I pray because I can't help myself! The need and desire for God flows through me day and night."* And he said, *"The thing about prayer is that it doesn't change God; it changes me."* That's the thing about prayer: It changes us. When we turn to prayer, it changes and gives us peace. When we turn to prayer, we feel more grounded and centered. When we turn to God in prayer, we open our hearts to feel more love and compassion. When we turn to prayer, we open ourselves for insight and wisdom and understanding. Prayer is a great investment that has a really high pay-off if we take time to do it boldly ... to set it as our priority, to be sincere and to be consistent.

You know, I believe not praying is like having a million dollars in the bank, but never withdrawing anything, but instead choosing to starve and be hungry. It is the greatest resource we have and, yet, we underutilize it. Not praying is like choosing to struggle; choosing to remain stuck in pain ... where seeking God opens the possibility for life and love and joy and healing and abundance in all areas.

So the first way on our spiritual quest is to seek God boldly.

The second one is to **CLAIM OUR SPIRITUAL POWER BOLDLY**. Jesus said, *"You are the light of the world."* We are told in Genesis, *"You are created in the image and likeness of God."* I mean, think about that! You are created with the same Creative Intelligence and Power that made the sun and the stars and the ocean and the mountains and giraffes and elephants. [Congregants laugh] And hummingbirds! All of that! That same Intelligence that made this incredible world made you.

Have you ever stopped to think about how incredible and amazing the creations of God are? And have you ever stopped to consider how creative and amazing you are?

You are an expression of the Divine! You are wondrously made! You are God's beloved child, blessed and endowed with gifts and talents and abilities and so many great things! It is so sad and unfortunate that we would quickly call ourselves *"losers"* or *"pathetic"* or *"a hot mess"* or *"knuckleheads"* or *"victims"* or *"powerless"* than we would call ourselves an amazing spiritual being.

Sometimes we think it's arrogant or narcissistic or selfish. But calling ourselves *"a child of God"*; calling ourselves *"a powerful spiritual being"*; saying *"we're the temple of the Living God"* ... you know what that is? It's the truth! It is the truth!!! And accepting and living and embodying the truth is a vital and important thing for all of us. To say, *"I am a child of God"*; to say, *"I'm a powerful spiritual being"* ... and that's the truth!

As Paul said, *"I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me."* We are amazing beings! And the more we connect with it, the more we'll drop thinking less of ourselves -- thinking that we're unworthy - and begin to lift ourselves to the higher level of believing we're amazing spiritual beings.

2 Timothy says, *"God has not given you a spirit of fear and timidity, but a spirit of power, love and self-discipline."*

"I have a spirit of power, love and self-discipline."

Together: [with congregation] *"I have a spirit of power, love and self-discipline."*

Whether things are going bad or things are going good, I have a spirit of power, love and self-discipline. Whether it's the morning or the evening; or if the Cardinals win or lose! [Congregants laugh] You are a powerful spiritual being! You have a spirit of power, love and self-discipline no matter what's going on!

Jesus owned his spiritual magnificence. He knew he was a son of the Living God. And he didn't do it in a cocky, loud way; he had a calm confidence of accepting and claiming the truth of who he is and the truth of his nature. And that is something we need to boldly do -- is to claim and own within ourselves our true divine nature as powerful spiritual beings.

The third thing that we need to do boldly is to **EMBRACE ALL THAT IS IN OUR LIVES**. We need to embrace it.

How many people have ever wanted to switch lives with someone else? Take somebody else's -- or at least a portion of -- their life you would like to switch out? How many people have at least one problem in your life that, if you could, you would snap your fingers and make it disappear instantly? Anybody have that?

You know, it is absolutely amazing that we always just want the good stuff, not the not-so-good stuff. Sometimes we have to realize that every single thing in our lives is there for a reason. And everything that is in our lives is there to lift us; to learn; to teach; to grow into the highest and fullest expression of God that we came here to be.

Everything in our lives! Yes, even your boss who you can't stand is there in your life for a reason. [Congregants laugh] Even your dysfunctional family; they are in your life for a reason. Whatever you're struggling with; it's in your life for a reason. Pleasant or not, it's not against us; it's actually for us. It's supporting our growth. It's supporting our awareness. It's helping and deepening our faith. It's helping us set boundaries. It's helping us learn how to enjoy our lives more fully.

Because every one of us came here to learn something; to heal something; to let go of something; to forgive something; to discover something. Every one of us came here to share gifts and talents and abilities and make a difference. Everyone came to open our hearts to love more. Every one of us came here to accept something and to forgive something; to achieve something. And it's important to embrace all that is in our life -- because it is meant to be there -- and not waste our time complaining or comparing. That robs us from so much of the energy we could utilize to gain all the good stuff we're supposed to gain from those other experiences.

Everything in your life is there to teach you; to help you; and to bless you. And whether it is your relationship, or whether it's meditation; or whether it is nature; or it is money; or animals; or your conflict; or your struggle ... Or music or science; or the economy; or church ... Everything in your life is there to help you. The question is: Are you willing to embrace it and allow it to help lift you to greater heights?

Every one of us has to go through whatever we need to go through. So it's important not to just run away from it or try and push it away. Someone once said, "*Until you face it with grace, it will always show up in your face.*" [Congregants laugh] It's the spiritual, "*You can run, but you can't hide.*"

And if it's there to bless our lives and teach us, why not use it to lift us up?

You know when a butterfly is coming out of the cocoon, for it to come out, it has to push with its wings until it cracks the cocoon open to free itself. And that pushing of it to open a way to break through takes a struggle. It takes a lot of effort. But if you were to open that cocoon to let it out and free it, and make it not struggle, it would not be able to fly. It is the struggle of pushing with the wings that drives the

blood of all levels of the wings to give the wings the strength to not only break out of the cocoon, but to help it fly.

The fact is: we're all in a cocoon at times that feels restrictive. And it's a struggle! But it's precisely the struggle and the process of turning inward spiritually that helps us break through it and lifts us to higher heights and higher levels.

I was at physical therapy this week and there was a sign in the room. And it said, *"The struggle you are feeling today is helping you develop the strength you need for tomorrow."* [Congregants murmur] And so the struggle we're all facing right now is helping strengthen us for what we need for tomorrow. It is helping blessing us and showing us and leading us and guiding us to the fulfillment and unfolding of the life we are here to live and the work that we are here to do.

And when I say *"embrace everything,"* sometimes we always think, *"Oh, it's the not-so-good things."* But sometimes we have a hard time embracing greater levels of love. Sometimes we have a hard time welcoming and embracing greater levels of success and leadership and responsibility. Sometimes we have a hard time accepting more abundance. So we need to embrace **all** the things in our lives: the difficult and challenging things, but welcoming the love and the support that comes that we sometimes shut down and push away.

To **all** of it, we need to say, *"Bring it on!"* To **all** of it, we need to say, *"I welcome this; this is an important part of my life and my journey that's trying to help me; to lift me up to a higher place."*

Mystic Joseph Campbell said we think we're looking for the meaning of life, but we're not. What we're looking for is an experience of being fully alive. And the only way to experience being fully alive is to embrace **everything** in our lives, knowing it is specifically there for us: to teach us; to heal us; to uplift us; to grow us; and to help us to unfold into the fullness of the amazing beings we are.

Last one is to **STEP OUT OF OUR COMFORT ZONE BOLDLY**. You remember when there was a storm, and Jesus called Peter, and he stepped out of the boat? And the storm's going wild? And at first, he's able to stand on water. And while he's looking at the Christ, he stands on the water. But then he shifts his attention to the crisis, and he freaks out and he starts sinking, and he has to get back in the boat.

And the thing about it: you might have thought that was a failure, but it wasn't. Because he was willing to take a chance and risk and step out of the boat of his comfort. And anytime we do that -- even if it doesn't work out perfectly -- guess what? It grows us and teaches us and expands us to the point that Peter -- Jesus said, *"You are the rock upon I will build my church."* Because he built on his faith; he was willing to stretch it. He was willing to expand; he was willing to put himself out there. And he grew to greater heights.

You know, it's easy to stay comfortable. It's easy to not take a chance. It's easy to not risk. It's easy to stay in our comfort zone. It's easy to not push ourselves or put ourselves out there. But as John Shedd said, *"Ships are safe in the harbor, but is that what ships are made for?"* You're safe by not trying, but is that why you were made? To just stay home or hide or not ever put yourself out there?

How many people are *Star Trek* fans? *Star Trek* fans, you remember this? *"These are the voyages of the Starship Enterprise. Its five-year mission: to explore strange, new worlds; to seek out new life and new civilizations; to boldly go where no man has gone before."*

And so my question for you is: What place do you want to boldly go that you've never been before? What is something beyond your grasp that, if you gave yourself permission to risk, you'd be willing to go after? What new life and new possibilities, new loves, new journeys, more joys -- that if you had the

courage, and were willing to step out of the comfort zone that you're in, would you be willing to try? What levels of exhilaration and excitement lie out there for you if you're willing to just take a chance?

And it could be simple; maybe your risk might be going back to school. Maybe it's letting something go and starting something new. Maybe it's starting your own business. Maybe it's writing a book. Maybe it's taking a cooking class or a dance class or an archery class. I mean, maybe it is to be more vulnerable to your beloved. Maybe it's being more honest with ourselves. Going to places that we haven't allowed ourselves to go. Maybe it is to move and start again somewhere else. Maybe it is to become a docent; work at an art museum. Or maybe it is to go mountain biking. Or maybe it's to take a hike, like Rev. Jimmie said, with our group and meet some new people.

You know Oscar Meyer wieners? Right now they're trying to hire 12 drivers, starting in June, for one year to drive around in the 27-foot hotdog-mobile for \$35,000 a year, and be a "hot dog ambassador"? Can you imagine driving the hotdog-mobile for a year? If you had the free time, I'm saying! Wouldn't it be kind of a cool experience?

Maybe learning to juggle. Or maybe piano lessons. Maybe learning to speak Spanish or French. Maybe dying your hair purple. [Congregants laugh] I don't know what it is! The point I'm trying to make is: there's a whole bunch of stuff out there in this world for us to do. The question is: Are you willing to take a chance and be bold? And step out of your comfort zone and just try it? I guarantee you, even if you don't like it, it'll expand you. You'll learn more; you'll grow more; you'll discover; you'll meet more people. And you'll feel more alive!

Helen Keller said, "*Life is either a daring adventure or nothing at all.*" And what she's saying is that, unless you live your life boldly and you're willing to take a chance, then you're not really living. The greatest risk in life is to not risk at all! Because to not take a risk means you're not feeling joy; or exhilaration; or excitement; or happiness; or fulfillment.

This week, let's be bold on the adventure of life by seeking God boldly; by claiming our spiritual power boldly; by embracing all that's before us boldly; and by stepping out of our comfort zone boldly.

We're going to close now by affirming that affirmation on the card. Where it says "*I,*" you're going to say your name. [Congregants laugh] Alright; nice and slowly, with feeling and intention. Together:

"My life is a spiritual quest. I am here to fulfill my soul's purpose. I welcome all experiences, opportunities, blessings and challenges as an important part of the adventure of my life. I, [Richard Maraj], choose to face and embrace all that is mine by living boldly, joyously and lovingly. To all that is meant to be for me, BRING IT ON!"

God bless you all!

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