

## LOVE LARGE!

Week #3 of a 10-Week Series, "Your Spiritual Quest: The Adventure of Your Life!"

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So how many people have ever had someone in your life -- whether a co-worker, a neighbor, in-law, family member -- that irritated and annoyed you so much it was hard to be around them sometimes? Anybody? How many people have ever closed your heart off to someone and consciously withheld your love to them? Anybody? And how many people have ever beat yourself up or were really brutal -- and even unkind -- to yourself because you messed up something? Anybody ever do that?

So today we're going to talk about love. And the message is entitled "LOVE LARGE," because sometimes I think we love small; sometimes I think we love sparingly; cautiously; conditionally; and sometimes even reluctantly. Sometimes when we've been hurt, we try to love with our heart half closed. And today is about love in large, about opening our hearts and loving fully: loving freely, loving joyously, loving generously.

I want you to think about the level of love in all areas of your life right now. And I ask you: What would it take for you to open yourself to experience more love in your life and in all your relationships? What would it take for you to let more love in and to receive more love? What would it take for you to let more love in and to receive more love in your life? What would it take for you to let more love in and to receive more love in your life? for you to express and share and give more love?

You know, we all want love. Love is one of the basic fundamentals of life. I'll put it right up there with air, water and food. We are absolutely hardwired and built -- have a built-in need -- for love: to feel cared for, to feel cherished, to feel supported, to feel valued and appreciated. To be nurtured, to feel a sense of belonging, a sense of connection, a sense of closeness and intimacy. And not just to feel it, but to give care; to give love; to nurture. You know, to share and to feel and have others feel connected and safe with us.

You know, the beauty and the challenge of understanding love is because it comes in all forms and shapes and sizes. We think of it in different ways. Think, "*I love ice cream.*" You know, "*I love the Phoenix Suns.*" You know, we say, "*Love is about give and take.*" Love can be patient and kind. They say, "*Tough love.*" They're all kinds of love. We can feel love physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. So we know it's valuable and important, but it's always sometimes tough to define exactly what love is. But we know that it's hugely vital and important. You know,

In Corinthians in the Bible, it says that you can have all the money in the world; you can have all the knowledge in the world. But if you do not have love, you have nothing.

You know, the greatest commandment is to love God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength. We are told that God is love. [Scripture says]: "*Faith, hope and love: these three remain. And the greatest of these is love.*" Jesus said, "*You will know my disciples by how they love one another.*" And Paul said, "*Love is the fulfilling of the law.*"

However you define it and think about it, there's no question that love is the greatest thing and the most important thing in our lives. And if we want our lives to get better -- if we want our lives to have more meaning and feel more fulfilled -- it is absolutely vital that we work on love and opening our hearts to love large.

We are in Week #3 of our 10-week kickoff series to the year, and it's called "Your Spiritual Quest, The Adventure of Your Life." The fact is, every one of us is on a spiritual quest, whether we realize it or not.

Every one of us is seeking to unify our mind with the mind of God. Everyone is seeking to know our oneness with the Divine; our oneness with Spirit; and to know the fullness of our divine nature. Paul put it this way; he said, "Let the same mind that was in Christ Jesus be in you." To develop that Christ consciousness.

Week #1 it was called "Bring it On!" And that's because sometimes we shy away and even run away from aspects of our lives. And the truth is: if we're on a spiritual quest, that means any and everything in our lives is there for our higher purpose to serve us, to help us and support us. We like to say everything happens for a reason -- and it does! -- but we must face it and embrace it to welcome it to help us in our spiritual quest.

Last week, the title was "Dream Big," because we are here to live abundantly and we live in an abundant universe. We are creators, and we can create unlimited possibilities for our lives, but that means we need to not play small; we need to dream big.

And today we're going to talk about love, to "LOVE LARGE."

You know, love isn't easy. I'll bet every one of us has had times where we don't feel as much love as we'd like to feel in our lives. We don't experience as much love as we'd like to experience. I bet sometimes you have felt like you've lost that love and feeling. [Congregants laugh]

And you thought, you know, I'm all out of love. And you feel like a victim of love, or you're experiencing tainted love. [Congregants laugh] And you think love hurts because love is a battlefield. [Congregants laugh] You know? And you feel lost in love, because you're addicted to love. [Congregants laugh] And you think to yourself I want to know what love is. [Congregants laugh] That crazy little thing called love. [Congregants laugh] And we know that there's a higher love we're looking for endless love but what I've come to realize is you can't hurry love ... and it ultimately it comes down to realizing all you need is love. [Congregants laugh and applaud] Alright ...

So we need love, but it isn't always easy. But you know one of the greatest things that stops love? Of experiencing love? Anybody in a word? It is judgment. Have you ever been judged harshly? Anybody ever judge you? How did that feel? Anybody ever judge others? Anybody ever judge yourself?

When we judge ourselves; when we judge others; even when we judge life, we absolutely diminish and damage the level of the experience of love. I would say, really, judgment in relationships erodes the trust and feeling safe. You know, it erodes, feeling cared for. And it builds walls and distance and disconnect. And we lose our level of closeness because of judgment. When we are judged, we feel anxious; we feel tense; we sometimes feel unworthy and even defensive. Judgment, I could say, is something that could really make us feel that we've lost that loving feeling.

And it's not as simple as it sounds, because we are designed to judge: to judge our environment to see if we're safe. Every day we judge in different ways. We're driving on the highway, we have to judge the distance of that car ahead of us, and to check the other lane to judge if we can change lanes safely. I judge when I look at food that's been sitting in my fridge for a week and a half, and wonder, is it safe for me to eat that food? [Congregants laugh] You know, I have to judge when someone gives me a bid to fix my roof -- to judge, is this reasonable, and can I afford this? We have to judge in various areas every day of our lives to stay safe and to live as successful as we can.

But unfortunately, we have taken the original use of having to judge to see if we're safe, and we have expanded it to include things -- just that we like or dislike -- that we just judge. You know, sometimes we judge people for how they live their own lives, and it has nothing to do with us being safe or not. We just judge them. Sometimes we judge how people look, how they dress, how they talk, how they eat, how they raise their children, what kind of car they drive, or what they do for a living. *"Can you believe she*

wore those shoes with that outfit?" [Congregants laugh] That has nothing to do with our own safety and well-being.

And so we, in a way, have turned judging from a survival instinct to a recreational activity. And so it comes in many forms. And sometimes we don't want to ... you know, we want to rationalize our own judging. But it comes in forms of complaining, comparing, criticizing, condemning others. And here's the threshold that it crosses is: we begin to lose our own peace of mind because we're so busy judging what other people are doing. We get irritated, agitated because of the way they're living or what they're doing or what they are not doing.

An interesting thing: it is so pervasive! We are all, I believe, equal opportunity judges. We judge our family members; we judge our friends, politicians, the government. We judge people on TV. We judge coaches. We judge players, athletes, for how they're playing or how they're not playing as well.

And the investment that we have in this: there's a payoff for us. It's temporary, but it's a payoff. It's that it helps us feel good. You know, by putting someone down or thinking we know more than others, we feel more superior. And it really, in some ways, covers up something that's missing in our lives ... some area that we feel empty or we feel insecure in or about. Judging as really a sign that something's missing in us and we don't feel a level of love or a level of wholeness. And when it says in Scripture, "*You are whole, complete, and lacking in nothing,*" – is that, when we do, then we would give others permission to live their lives that we didn't want to live it. And give ourselves permission to live our lives without judging or putting ourselves down.

Scripture says, "*Judge not lest ye be judged.*" So when we judge others, that's energy that we're actually bringing back that is impacting us. If we really want to love large -- if we want to open our hearts to love more -- one of the things we need to do is to judge less. And it's not easy because, again, we have to judge every day on a number of things. But we need to look at that threshold: Is that affecting my safety? Is that really from my business or for my well-being? And we need to just pay attention to words like "should" or "could"; or if we condescend or compare; or refer to them as some kind of name that's derogatory. We need to pay attention, because that's not for our highest and best. That is not our nature. That is not going to bring us joy and lasting peace, happiness and fulfillment.

And so we're going to look at three things to help us reduce the amount of judgment and how to increase the level of love so we can love large.

And so the first one is to **LOVE GOD**. That is the greatest commandment: to love God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength. That commandment is to love God: love the Creator; love the Source; love the creative intelligence in whose image and likeness we have been created. And we have been told that God is love. God isn't loving; God is the very core and essence and nature of love itself!

And for us to love God, we must understand and be aware of how much God loves us. I mean, do you realize how much God loves you?!? God loves you completely, wholly, and unconditionally. And do you know what the greatest evidence of God's love for you is? Of God's love for all of us is? It's that you're here! God loves you so much that He brought you here! That you are alive! You know that God is; and you is; and you is a part of the is-ness of the allness of God! [Congregants laugh]

That is the truth! Here's a quote I found from a book called *The White Book* by Ramtha. It's a channeled material, but it's really fabulous. It says, "*The clear truth of God's love for you is that God made you. That you are here, and God gave you gifts and God gave you powers, and God gave you the free will to create and become whatever it is that you choose to bring forth that is in your soul.*" How much does God love you? That you are here and you get to choose your own thoughts and ideas and situations. You get to decide the kind of life you're going to have! You're going to decide if you're going to be thankful or

grateful or possible! You get to decide whether to love or hate. You get to decide if you're positive or negative. You get to decide if you pray or you don't pray. God loves you so much, God has given you everything and says, "*Go ahead; create whatever it is that you want.*" That is how loved we are by God.

And so would it be not an easy thing to love back that God, that Essence, that Spirit of Love that brought us here? And once we realize that love, what are we going to do with that love when we realize how loved we are and how much we love God?

Now, in that Scripture, it says to love God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength. So to understand the awareness of how God loves us, that is with our mind and our strength. But let's turn now to "*love with your heart and your soul.*" Because it's one thing with your thought. This is about bringing it down to the feeling nature. To literally feel and experience the love of God in our hearts.

You know, when it say, "*Be still and know that I am God,*" we could change that slightly to say, "*Be still and know that I am Love.*" And could you imagine meditating every day, opening your heart, and just saying, "Be still and know that I am Love." To be filled with that Divine Love; to be filled with that loving Intelligence that created us and brought us here and has given us the opportunity of a lifetime to live this great life. To choose and create whatever we want. To open our hearts to all of that.

And that is the foundation of love: that God is love, and it is God's love for us and our love for God that makes it possible to open our hearts to love large.

The second one is to **LOVE OTHERS**. That is the second commandment: to love others as ourselves. We'll talk about "as ourselves" in a second. In 1 John Chapter 4, Verse 16, it says, "*You have known and believed that God loves us. God is love, and those who live in God's love, God lives in you and you live in God.*" And so, to know God is to see God in ourselves, but to truly know God is to see God in ourselves and see God in everyone else, as well! You know, to love God is to love God in us and love God in all people.

And notice it says love others. And it means love all others ... not just some others. [Congregants laugh] Not just the others that we like, but the others that we sometimes have a hard time liking. You know, people -- relationships -- are the toughest thing! That's the greatest proving ground of a demonstration of love: is looking at our relationships. And they're not always easy. I saw this "Ziggy" cartoon years ago. and it still rings a bell. It says, "*I love life; it's just the people I can't stand.*" [Congregants laugh]

We've got to work on our relationships. We've got to work on our relationships with people! Because people ... they're everywhere! [Congregants laugh] They're everywhere; you can't get away from them! So we may as well do that spiritual work.

And when it comes to working about our relationships, one size does not fit all. There are different dynamics to relationships. Therefore, they require different tools in how we apply to create that connection and nurture it. And I'll get back to that list in a second. But here are three things we can do -- three steps of what we can do -- to love others and to love large in our relationships.

The first one is to be an awareness at all times and remind ourselves that we are all children of God. We're all brothers and sisters. The Spirit of God is just as much in every single person as it is with ourselves. We're all children of God. We're all worthy of love, and we all deserve another chance.

And secondly, is to set an intention to embody love: to be the embodiment of Divine Love; to open our hearts to everyone without judgment.

And the third one is to use all forms of love to deepen our connection and our relationship with others. Here's what I think are all forms of love: I think honesty is a form of love. I think being vulnerable is a form of love. I think patience is a form of love and acceptance is a form of love. Having a positive

attitude and speaking positive words is a form of love. Compassion is a form of love. Appreciation is a form of love. Forgiveness is a form of love.

So I ask you: Where in your life are you loving small? What relationship? And where in your life are you being called to love large? To open your heart and to love from a deeper and more profound place?

I had a colleague in seminary. We would do these circles of sharing where we were. And in the beginning of it, I shared that I was there, but I didn't really want to be a minister. And that maybe I might go back to being a professional speaker after I finished, but I felt guided enough that I came here. And then another person shared and said, "*How dare you be so cavalier about being a minister? I've worked my 'whatever' to get here.*" And, um, so that energy didn't feel good. [Congregants laugh]

But we were in class for two years and, you know, all it took was some patience and time. And over that, sometimes these walls come down. And, in fact, we became close! And when I see him at a conference or anything, he's one of the people I love to see and smile. And one size doesn't fit all. Sometimes it takes different aspects of life for our relationships to feel deeper and feel that connection.

I ask you: What relationship would improve the level of love by you being more honest and vulnerable? What relationship is calling you to maybe exercise more patience and more acceptance? What relationship of yours would improve with love if you had a more positive attitude and spoke more positive words? What relationship would get better if you expressed more compassion? What relationship would get better if you expressed more appreciation? What relationship would get better if you practiced more forgiveness?

And so, I truly believe that there are all kinds of aspects of love and spiritual tools for us to use, but we need to be present and engaged with where we are and where they are, and which of these appropriate tools to use to help us to express and feel greater love in our relationship and to love larger in our relationships.

And the second practice for this -- to love others -- is just send love. Sometimes we don't think it's powerful and important, but send love! Like, think of somebody right now that you're struggling within your life. And can you just send them love? Can you just send them a blessing of peace and joy and love? And I'll tell you, just opening your heart to send that absolutely will make a difference to them and to ourselves. And, over time, miraculous things will come. And, at a minimum, it'll bring us peace when we think about them. And instead of just triggering upset energy, we'll be okay with them and just be able to wish them well.

You know, Divine Love is unconditional; it's unlimited; and it's inexhaustible. You can send love to as many people as you can: people you're struggling with, family members. I mean, if a fire truck goes by, send a prayer of love to them – to the first responders, to whatever family they're going towards. We have a powerful gift to send an energy of love out to the Universe: to anyone and to everyone.

Love isn't easy. It takes effort. It takes intention. It takes work. But it's well worth it because love, as Paul said, is the fulfilling of the law. Love is the thing that makes a life fulfilling, even though it's not always easy.

*A husband and wife were married for 60 years, and had no secrets except one. The wife made her husband commit to never opening a shoe box that she had in her closet. And then she was on her death bed and she gave him permission to go get the shoe box. He opened the shoe box and found a crocheted doll and \$95,000 in cash. The wife says, "My mother told me the secret to a happy marriage was to know never argue." And she explained, "Instead of arguing, you should keep quiet, smile, and crochet a doll." The husband was so moved – profoundly. He couldn't believe it that in all their 60 years together, there was only one doll, which meant she was only mad at him once! And then he said, "What is all that*

money?" And she said, "Oh, that's the money I made from selling all the dolls." [Laughs along with congregants]

Now, the last step to love large is to **LOVE YOURSELF**. You know, in our culture we've been so conditioned to think loving yourself is like a bad thing. You know: it's selfish, it's egotistical, it's narcissistic. But Alan Cohen, the great spiritual teacher, said that loving yourself is your first and foremost responsibility. Because you are the channel through which God loves and through which God's loves comes. And if you don't love yourself, cherish and appreciate yourself, and care for yourself, you cannot be as big a channel for love for others.

You know, loving ourselves is a key to pit happiness and our well-being and our peace of mind, but it's also the springboard for us having healthy and better relationships with others, and being able to share love with others.

The three things about loving yourself – it's self-love based on two things: self-acceptance and self-compassion. You know, sometimes we have a hard time accepting ourselves: accepting our bodies; or accepting our situations; or our personality; or how tall we are. Whatever it is ... We have a hard time accepting things about ourselves. We fight so much about wishing we were different than we were that we miss out on the opportunity of what a wondrous and unique gift that our uniqueness is that God has given us. And the more we can find acceptance -- the more we make peace with who we are -- we can actually enjoy and be proud of the gifts we bring and the beauty that we contribute to the world.

And the second one is to have self-compassion. Everyone's going to mess up, but beating ourselves up is not the path to happiness and success. To have compassion to ourselves -- to be understanding and more gentle and supportive of ourselves -- actually helps us grow more and learn more from the struggles in different times than pounding and beating ourselves up.

Love is a great healer. Love transforms. And in the form of self-acceptance and self-compassion, it is powerful and vital for ourselves and for the people in our lives. You know, when we have self-love, self-acceptance and self-compassion, that means there's more love and more acceptance and more compassion that we can give to others.

The word "heaven" comes from the word that means expansion: that the idea of heaven is about an expanding experience ... you know, to expand your faith, to expand your joy, to expand your compassion and generosity; that's heaven. Heaven is expanding your heart to love and love more fully; to love more freely; and to love more deeply.

The word "hell" actually means to be blind. And it means when we close our eyes and close our hearts, that's hell. And heaven is opening our hearts to love more and to love more deeply. You know, we have the power to create heaven by consciously opening our hearts to love deeply and to love more profoundly. Because love is the greatest commandment. Love is our highest calling. The question is: Are you willing to love and love large?

We're going to affirm this week's affirmation. Pull your cards out; it'll appear up on the screen. And let us affirm it together:

*"God is love. Love is the greatest power and my highest calling. I, [Richard Maraj], choose not to withhold God's love, but to share it freely with myself and everyone I meet. I open my heart to live and LOVE LARGE."*

God bless you all! [Congregants whoop and applaud]