

## **ACTION AND DISCIPLINE**

**Week #9 of a 10-Week Series, "Your Spiritual Quest: The Adventure of Your Life!"**

**Rev. Richard Maraj**

**Sunday, March 10, 2024**

*So Bob and Earl were really great friends and they were in their 70s. They'd known each other since they were kids and they shared this common love of baseball when they were young. They ate, drank and slept baseball: always playing, always watching, collecting cards, studying statistics. They love baseball so much that they made a commitment to each other and a promise that, when the first one died, the other one would come back to let the other one know if there was baseball in heaven.*

*So one night, Bob passed away after watching a New York Yankees game where the Yankees won. So he died happy. A few days later his buddy Earl was awakened by the sound of Bob's voice from the beyond. "Bob, is that you?" Earl said. "Of course it's me," said Bob. "This is unbelievable," Earl exclaimed. "So tell me, is there baseball in heaven?"*

*"Well, I got some good news and some bad news," Bob said. "Which do you want first?" He said, "Well, tell me the good news."*

*He said, "Well, the good news is: there is baseball in heaven, Earl." And Earl says, "Oh, that is so wonderful! What could possibly be bad news?" And Bob said, "Well, you're pitching tomorrow night."*

[Congregants laugh] Alright. [Laughs] Alright. So ...

I've got some good news, and I've got some bad news. The good news is: you are a powerful creative spiritual being that can create the life that you desire; that you can fulfill your dreams; that you can achieve great things. The bad news is: you've got to do all the work to make it happen. You've got to take all the steps; take all the time; and put in all the effort needed to manifest it and bring it forth.

So how many people have ever started a project and didn't finish it? [Congregants laugh] How many people got really excited about something you wanted to achieve, only to find out it was way harder work than you thought it would be ... so you gave it up and moved on to something else? And so how many people have ever procrastinated starting something, even when it was something good and you wanted it? Any procrastinators? Okay, about five or six of us out there. [Congregants laugh] Great!

I'm always amazed at us human beings how consistently we procrastinate. How we consistently avoid, resist or put off doing things, especially when they are good for us. They're not always easy, like having a tough conversation, you know, or sometimes going to the gym. Or doing some research and study or making those cold calls. Or even sitting down to take time to meditate. It is amazing how we procrastinate, or how we avoid these things.

And it seems so counterintuitive, not doing things that are good for us. And the thing that is behind all procrastination and avoidance of taking an action and doing the work towards good things is all about fear: the fear of failure; the fear of messing up or looking bad. Also the fear of success. You know, it also includes perfectionism. We won't start if we're perfectionists sometimes. Sometimes it's a matter of low confidence or feeling incapable; or focusing on the negative; or being lazy; or not being able to motivate ourselves to do something that might be a little bit uncomfortable.

You know, as great or powerful beings as we are, having a vision and a clear goal is not enough. Having a positive attitude and good intention is not enough. You know, having a well-developed plan is not enough. You know, every single achievement we have starts as an idea – as in the mind of our thought, our intention -- but the thing that makes it happen is action. Without action, the goals and dreams

remain goals and dreams. The power of taking action is a real game-changer, and it is a huge and important step in the creative process.

Einstein put it this way. He said, "*Nothing happens until something moves.*" Things aren't going to change. Things aren't going to get better until you take some action.

You know, tonight is Oscar night, is it? And in the true tradition of movies, they say "*Lights, camera, action!*" And they could have a great script; they could have great sets and scenery; you could have great actors. But until there is action, the movie can't be created. And the same thing in our lives; our dreams cannot be fulfilled unless you get to that point of action.

This is Week #9 in our 10-week series, "Your Spiritual Quest: The Adventure of Your life." And we are all on an adventure and a spiritual quest. And that quest is to know our oneness with God. And whether you call it achieving the Christ consciousness or self-realization or spiritual awakening or unifying our mind with the mind of God or fulfilling our divine purpose ... every one of us is on a spiritual quest.

Week #1 was called "Bring It On," because sometimes we avoid and run away from things. And if we are here on a spiritual quest, we should say, "Bring It On," because we know everything in our lives will help us in some way.

Week #2 was "Dream Big." Sometimes we play small in life, and it's important to dream big. We live in an abundant universe and we're creators, and dreams help us expand our possibilities.

Week #3 was "Love Large." You know, sometimes we close our hearts off to some people. You know, sometimes we try to love with our hearts half-closed. But the only way to really live and love and feel the fullness of life is to love wholeheartedly; to love large.

Week #4 was "Roll with the Changes." Life is always changing! And it's amazing how we love to resist change. But the fact is: change is a renewing principle of life. It actually helps us adapt and adjust and be flexible and actually become more who we came here to be.

Week #5 was called "Go Deeper." You know, we all meditate and stuff, but do we really go as deep as we can in our meditation practice to seek God with all our hearts? Are we really willing to surrender our lives and open fully to allow the depth and the wisdom and inspiration of the Divine to spring forth from us?

Week #6 was called "Show Up Fully." Asking ourselves, how am I showing up in my life? And the ways we talked about is to be present, to be positive, to be purposeful and to be patient.

And then the following week, Rev. Stacy did, it was "Forgive and Let Go." When we hold on to resentment, it means we're living in the past. And forgiveness frees us from that pain so we could move on to greater things.

Last week, I talked about how life is so much harder when we don't "Appreciate and Celebrate." And it's so much easier and joyful when we take time to appreciate and celebrate all the good in our lives.

Today, I've got a really exciting one for you: "Action and Discipline." I can feel the energy already; I'm so excited! Let's go! [Congregants laugh] Because action and discipline are an important part of every aspect of our lives, including helping us on our spiritual journey to achieve our spiritual quest.

So action is defined as the condition or state of doing something to achieve and aim or effect. I would say without a doubt, action is the thing that takes the ideas, the imaginations and intentions and brings them to life. Action is needed to achieve; action is needed to improve; to have progress and success in our lives.

The Bible says ... What's the first book after the book of the Gospels? It's the book of Acts. So you could know everything in the Gospel, but then it's about acting. It is about putting it into action, into practice. In the book of James it says, *"Don't just be hearers of the word; be doers, and you'll be blessed in your doing."* It's about putting things into motion.

And finally it says, *"Faith without works is dead."* Faith without works is dead. So that means faith with works is alive! That when there is action, that's what action does: it gets the creative energies of life moving. Things begin to shift and change. Things are drawn away. Things are attracted to us. Action helps make things happen.

Thomas Edison is really a great example of the power and the importance of action. He was credited with discovering the electric light bulb. And he wasn't the only one pursuing it. There were other people pursuing it; it's just he put so much action into it that he ended up discovering it first. You know, someone said, *"Hey, what did it feel like to have failed 10,000 times?"* And he said, *"I did not fail 10,000 times. I successfully discovered 10,000 ways that do not work."* [Congregants laugh] And he put in action. And he saw that that action was important.

One of the things I learned from him is that actions show us and teach us and reveal things to us. To say that *"I didn't fail; I successfully discovered a way that doesn't work"* means that, sometimes in your life when you take action, it will show you that that's the right way or it may show you that's the wrong way. It might teach you and lead you to something else and reveal and discover different things. You know, he started with a desire and intention to bring light into people's homes. But it was his relentless action; the relentless experiments that continued and continued until he had that breakthrough. He could have given up. But he chose to keep acting, keep pushing through, and allow the experiments and the actions to teach him and show him and to reveal the answer to him.

Sometimes it's just a little bit more action it takes that makes a difference and makes a quantum leap or a breakthrough. At 211 degrees, water is hot! Really hot! At 212 degrees, it boils. One degree difference between hot and boiling. And sometimes just a little bit more action -- sometimes a little bit more effort, sometimes a little bit more work -- makes the difference between a dream and a dream realized. You know, makes the difference between things going well and having a real breakthrough. That is how important and powerful action is.

How many people have heard of the 10,000-hour rule? You know, started by Ericsson, but kind of made popularized by Malcolm Gladwell. And some people say it's been debunked, but whether it's 10,000 hours or 20,000 hours, it doesn't matter. The principle is still the same. And it says that when you take action with intention over time, that there will be progress and improvement. And it is not just action; it's action with intention. When there is intention beyond the action, the mastery and improvement and success are all possible.

When you take the action of going to the gym with the intention, *"I'm getting stronger; I'm getting more fit; I'm getting more healthy,"* it does you better than just going to the gym. When you're having a tough conversation, having the tough conversation with the intention that, *"I'm building and improving on and nurturing my relationship,"* it makes a difference than just having the tough conversation. You know, when you're doing your job -- just doing your job. But when you do it with the intention that, *"I'm helping people,"* that *"I'm making a positive difference in the world"* magnifies the power of the action. Does that make sense, everybody? I mean, it is a powerful and important thing.

I believe that action with intention uplifts the work we do. It accelerates, and it elevates the quality and the progress that we make. Steven Pressfield, who was born in Trinidad, like myself ... it has nothing to do with this, but I thought I'd mention that. [Congregants laugh] He wrote a book called *The War of Art*. I did it last year. It was about creativity. He's a writer. Something you might recognize that he did was:

he wrote a book called *The Legend of Bagger Vance*. They made a movie of it starring Will Smith. And so here is what he said. He said, "*The answer is simple to procrastination. The answer is simple to finishing projects. The answer is simple to making great achievements. Do the work. Do the work that matters. Do the work and you will learn from the work. You will learn about yourself. Do the work and good things will happen.*"

Taking steps, taking action, doing the work will begin to change and expand yourself and all aspects of what you're doing. The whole idea is: when you work on the work, the work works on you. That you begin to deepen your skill; deepen your insight; and your understanding; and your experience; and your awareness; and your creativity when you do the work. When you wholeheartedly do the work, something begins to change -- even on a consciousness level, not just the physical and mental level.

You know, Don Henley ... and I've mentioned this before, and I think it's such a great thing. He said in an interview that the Eagles, that they were playing their music better 30 years after it was a hit. They played it better 30 years later. Because he was saying, after 30 years of playing each note -- being so tuned in and connected and invested in it -- it almost raises a vibration and an energy in the quality of the experience that they're having and the quality of the experience that the audience is having.

Action is hugely vital and important. And the three things: action with intention; action with a willingness to let the work change you and uplift you and inspire you; and the third one is: with action, let it help you shift from a mindset of fear to love.

Back to Steven Pressfield. He said the thing that stops action -- all action -- is fear. Fear in the form of resistance, procrastination or making excuses. And he says the opposite of fear is love. So the key is to love the work; love the activity; love the challenge; love the experience; love the opportunity that you get to be where you are and do what you're doing. Love is the pure joyous passion of having the chance to take a shot at your dreams and just see how it turns out. And see if magic can happen. And maybe it will when you invest yourself fully in what is within you.

He said the goal and the dream is the thing, but love is the passion that you pour into it while you do the activity to see how it unfolds. And then it becomes a labor of love when we invest our heart and our love into whatever it is that we do.

So I ask you: Where in your life is it time to take action? You know, is it an action for your self-care and for your healing? You know, is it an action calling you to help improve your relationship? For your health? For your unhappiness? For your social life? I mean, what action is calling you? And what action would help improve your life and benefit your life if you were to put something new in motion or keep digging and going deeper in what you're already working on?

Again: action with intention; action with a willingness to allow it to change you and inspire you; and then action that will shift your mindset from fear to love.

And now let's talk about discipline. So I want you to think about discipline and what kind of feelings and thoughts come into your mind. I mean do you get a warm fuzzy feeling and you just feel like smiling because you're goosebumpy all over? [Congregants laugh] I mean, or do you think, "*Whew; discipline. That's hard. That's unpleasant. That's kind of like feels like a burden almost like a punishment*"?

But do you know that discipline is considered one of the greatest personal traits to have to be successful and to live a happy and meaningful life? Because a disciplined mind leads to productivity, efficiency, happiness and success. And an undisciplined mind leads to a lack of focus. It leads to frustration. And it leads to a lack of productivity.

In the book of Proverbs, Chapter 25, Verse 28, it says, *"A man without self-control or self-discipline is like a city that's been broken into and left without any walls."* It means that we become scattered; that we aren't able to be as structured or as productive or as effective or create something greater.

So my question for you is: How disciplined are you? Or maybe a better question is: How disciplined would you like to be? And how important do you value discipline in your life?

Mike Tyson said, *"Discipline is doing what is important to do when you don't feel like doing it."* It is practicing when you don't feel like practicing. It's studying when you don't feel like studying. It's going to the gym when you don't feel like going to the gym. It's doing meditation when you don't feel like doing meditation. It's having that hard conversation when you don't feel like having that hard conversation. It's eating salad and roasted vegetables when you really want to eat a cheeseburger and French fries and a chocolate shake. [Congregants laugh] It is doing the thing that is for your best when you don't feel like doing it.

You know, one of the disciplines that my mom taught me was the importance of mental discipline. That as much as going to the gym and doing all these other things are important, there's a level of discipline that's really powerful, and that is your mental discipline. My mom would always say, *"Richard, guard your mental house."* And she would say, *"Don't let negativity creep in and consume you and take over into worry and fear and doubt. But focus your mind on the good. Focus your mind on God. And when it isn't working, do meditation and bring it back to center. If you're struggling with resenting or holding a grudge, do a meditation on forgiveness. If you want to kick things up and you feel in blasé, do a little gratitude and appreciation session."*

And one of the great tools she would say to create a positive mind is denials and affirmation.

How many people have heard of denials? Okay, a few. And of course, everyone's heard of affirmations. But denials is: when you're struggling with something going on in your mind, it's to be able to step back and say, *"These negative thoughts I'm thinking have no power over me. I am a powerful spiritual being that creates my own life."*

Because sometimes our minds run a little wild! And a denial says, *"Okay, my mind might be going a little crazy now, or I might be feeling unworthy right now, but that has no power over my happiness. That has no power over the quality of life that I have."*

And so mental discipline is a powerful and valuable and important thing.

And one of the things that kind of rings about why we don't like discipline in my opinion, in my opinion ... Because I think it's tied in at some level to the idea of responsibility, I believe. Discipline and responsibility, to me, are pretty tight because we are fully responsible for our own happiness; fully responsible for our own lives; fully responsible for what's working; fully responsible for what's not working. And to accept the responsibility to change it means we need to use discipline to begin to shift our mindset; shift our practices and our actions.

And that level of discipline also includes controlling and being aware of the people and the type of energy we allow into our lives. Anybody have any people or some people in your life that had a lot of negativity and drama? And it was draining hanging out with them? Or anybody ever had a pattern of getting into unhealthy, unproductive and unfulfilling relationships? Anybody?

And so the thing is: if someone enters your life and you have to navigate around them because you're just there -- at work or you're related to them -- it still requires discipline to find a way to center yourself and not let it affect you personally. And that takes discipline: spiritual discipline. But when someone

exits from your life, don't let another one in! [Congregants laugh] And to have the discipline, the discipline to say, *"Whoa! No; that's no more. I'm setting that boundary. I'm not going there anymore."*

Discipline -- mental discipline, physical discipline, spiritual discipline -- is a valuable and powerful trait that we all need to cultivate, develop, and keep practicing. And sometimes, it seems overwhelming: *"Oh, man, I'm just not that disciplined."* No; you are! You've got it in you!

2 Timothy says it, Chapter 1, Verse 7: *"God has not given you a spirit of fear and timidity, but a spirit of power, love, and self-discipline."* Power, love and self-discipline! And that's how important self-discipline is; It's right up there with love! Love's a big boy! Power's a big boy. Self-discipline is huge, too. And the fact is we already have it in us.

*"God has given me a spirit of power, love and self-discipline."*

Let's say that together: [with congregants] *"God has given me a spirit of power, love and self-discipline."* Take a deep breath. No; you've got it in you!

Let's say it again: [with congregants] *"God has given me a spirit of power, love and self-discipline."*

Discipline is a game-changer. Michael Jordan: one of his pet peeves was when people would say things to him like, *"Oh, you're just a natural."* He hated that! Because he felt it dismissed the incredible work ethic and how hard he worked, and the incredible physical and mental discipline that he exercised in practice, as well as in the game.

I believe the three greatest basketball players are Michael Jordan, Kobe Bryant and LeBron James. And the reason is their work ethic that put them over the top. It is their work -- relentless work. LeBron James is 39 years old and is playing as good as the 22-year-olds and better than them! And why? His work ethic and his discipline is phenomenal. It's not just talent; it's the work and the effort and the way we do it with discipline.

So my question for you is: Where in your life would get better if you added a little more discipline? And are you willing to practice some more discipline?

I saw a quote and it says, *"Discipline is the magic power that makes you virtually unstoppable."* Could you imagine if you were as disciplined in every area of your life as much as you would like to be? Whew!

So here are four ways to help us practice. **Number one is: remember that you have a spirit of power, love and self-discipline.** So remember that! *"I have a spirit of power, love and self-discipline."*

Let's say it one more time! [With congregation] *"I have a spirit of power, love and self-discipline."*

**And second is: be supportive of yourself when things don't go well.** When you break it, don't beat yourself up. Don't shame yourself. Be encouraging! You'll get better; next time will work out. Even putting the effort's a good thing. I love you; God loves you; it'll get better, it'll be okay.

**Third one is: celebrate your successes.** Say, *"Hey; wow! I just had the discipline and I went to the gym four days in the row!"* Celebrate that! Celebrate the discipline. *"I had the discipline that I ate only one piece of cake, rather than two or three!"* [Congregants laugh] Celebrate the discipline! Any improvement: celebrate it!

**And finally, think of the benefits.** The truth is: when we think about discipline, we think that it is not an enjoyable experience. But I guarantee you, it's always a beneficial one. Think of the benefits. For those of you doing it: *"I'm getting healthier. I'm getting stronger. I'm feeling a greater connection to God. I'm feeling a greater level of peace and happiness."* That makes it easier to start enjoying the disciplines and doing the things that we need to do.

A student comes into a young professor's office hours and glances down the hall, looks around, then closes the door. And then she looks seductively at the professor and says, "*I would do anything to pass this exam.*" She moves in a little closer, flicks back her hair, bats her eyes a few times, and she said, "*And I mean anything.*"

And the professor says, "*Anything?*" And she says, "*Anything.*"

"*You really mean anything?*"

"*I mean absolutely anything.*" So the professor looks at her and leans into her and whispers to her. And he he says, "*Would you study?*" [Congregants laugh]

That's an oldie, but it was so good I had to tell it again! [Congregants laugh]

Every one of us wants a better life. But the question is: Would you do anything for it? And particularly, would you work for it? Would you invest the energy and the time? And apply the principles and practices to attract and create the very things that you desire?

You know, success in any form --whether it's basketball or writing a book or our spiritual quest practice - all of them requires that we do the work. And believe me, there is magic in the work! A life of happiness, a life of joy, a life of peace and fulfillment and success awaits us all if we are willing to use the power of action and discipline.

God bless you all!

**Copyright 2024 Unity of Phoenix Spiritual Center/Rev. Richard Maraj**