

FAITH AND SELF-WORTH

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

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So, I just want to start with a shout out to the Unity of Rockford, Illinois, who has been using our Sunday services as a part of their ministry for a number of years. They've had, like, board members come down to visit, and they send us cards and offerings and tithes. They feel like a part of our ministry. Can we hear it for Unity of Rockford, Illinois, please? [Congregants applaud] Woo!

So, these three men were hiking out in the forest, and they came upon this raging, violent river that was just really powerful. And they needed to get across. And the first man thought he would pray. So, he prayed, "God, please; give me the strength to cross the river." And poof! He had really big muscular arms and strong legs. And it took him two hours; he almost drowned a couple of times ... but he made it safely to the other side.

Then the other guy saw that, and he prayed himself. He said, "Please, God; give me the strength and the tools to cross the river." And poof! He had big and strong arms and legs, as well, and he had a rowboat. It took him an hour and a half; he almost flipped over a couple of times. But he finally safely made it across the other side.

And then so the third guy seeing what happened, he prayed as well. And he prayed, "God, please give me the strength, the tools, and the intelligence to cross the river." And poof! He turned into a woman ...
[Congregants laugh]

She looked at the map, saw there was a bridge a hundred yards upstream, walked to it and crossed the river. [Congregants laugh and cheer]

Okay; okay. [Laughs] Alright. Woo! You didn't have to clap that much But ... [Laughs]

You know, in life every one of us ... we've got rivers to cross. We have got challenges to face. We have got goals and dreams that we want to achieve, you know. And we have the strength and the tools and the intelligence. And the level of our success in all areas of our lives really comes down to: How well do we use our power and our practices and our resources to reach our goals? To make a difference? And to fulfill our purpose?

Over the last 10 weeks, we have been looking at a variety of different spiritual practices and resources that we need to fulfill our purpose. Today we wrap up our 10-week series called "Your Spiritual Quest: The Adventure of Your Life." Because the truth is: we're all on a spiritual quest. Every one of us is on a spiritual journey -- and that is to unify our minds with the mind of God and know our oneness with the Divine.

And whether you call it self-realization or achieving the Christ consciousness or enlightenment or a spiritual awakening, every one of us is here for that reason. Everything in each of our lives is there to support us and help us achieve this spiritual quest.

Week #1 was called "Bring It On." And that was because sometimes we don't face things. Sometimes we want to run away from things. And, you know, that was to remind us to face and embrace everything in our lives, because everything in our lives is there to help us achieve this spiritual quest.

The second week was called "Dream Big." Because sometimes we play small. And the truth is that we are creators. We live in an abundant universe and our creative powers are enhanced by us having big dreams, because they open us up to greater possibilities for our lives.

Week #3 was called "Love Large." You know, sometimes we close our hearts off to certain people. Sometimes even ones we love, we have our hearts half closed. And the thing is if we want to know the fullness of life, we have to know the fullness of love. And we need to open our hearts wide to love more fully, to love more freely: others and God and, especially, ourselves.

Week #4 was called "Roll with the Changes." You know, life is always changing. But the funny thing is that we often resist all the changes in our lives. We don't want to change. We resist, we lament, we dislike them. And yet, changes are the renewing principle of life. And they help us adjust and open ourselves to new and different dimensions of ourselves. So we need to roll with the changes to achieve our spiritual quest.

Week #5 was called "Go Deeper." Every one of us prays and meditates, but do we really go as deep as we can go? Are we willing to go deeper and just surrender more fully and seek God more deeply to know the deeper levels of insight and wisdom and God's peace and love that are within us? But we need to go deeper to experience that fullness.

You know, Week #6 was called "Show Up Fully." You know, because sometimes we don't always show up as fully in different areas of our lives. And the different ways where we've got to show up is to be present; to be positive; to be purposeful; and to be patient. Sometimes we want to force and rush things, but the truth is: sometimes we've got to show up and be a little more patient to show up fully.

Week #7 Rev. Stacy did, and it was about forgiveness. "Forgive and Let Go," it was called. And it was just emphasizing the point that, when we hold onto resentment and bitterness and blame, we always keep ourselves stuck in the past. Forgiveness is the gift of freedom that liberates and helps us move on to experience greater joys and happiness in our lives.

Week #8 was called "Celebrate and Appreciate." That life is tough and infinitely tougher when we don't take time to celebrate and appreciate. And it's infinitely easier when we take time to appreciate and celebrate all the good in our lives.

And last week we did "Action and Discipline." No matter how clear our vision might be, no matter how good our attitude might be, no matter how good our plan might be, our dreams will not be fulfilled unless we put them into action. Unless we're willing to do the work. Einstein said, "*Nothing happens until something moves.*" Our dreams will only stay dreams unless we bring some action and work and energy to start moving things in our lives.

And we talked about discipline, as well. Discipline is about doing all the things we need to do when we need to do them. Could you imagine how powerful you'd be if you were disciplined and did all the things you need to do when you needed to do them? We'd be powerhouses! And so discipline is an important spiritual practice.

And then the last two things that we're going to talk about today on our spiritual quest is faith -- the power and the importance of faith -- and the power and the importance of our own self-worth.

So let's start with **FAITH**. So what is faith? In Hebrews 11, Verse 1, here's what it says: "*Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. By faith, we understand that the worlds were prepared by the Word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible.*"

And to me, that Scripture says three things. The first one: it says it's "the assurance of things hoped for; it's the conviction of things not seen." Faith is a hope-filled belief of knowing that there is something greater and more than what we're currently experiencing in our lives. Faith is a knowing that there is more good; that there are more possibilities; that things will work out for the best, even if we can't see it now. Faith is the belief that that is absolutely the truth: that more good things will unfold for us.

The second aspect of it – of this Scripture: it shows that faith is the absolute foundation of all creation. All creation begins with faith. Faith is a prerequisite for achieving our goals. It's a prerequisite for overcoming challenges and difficulties. It's a prerequisite for healing and transformation.

And finally, I love what Charles Fillmore said. This is the dimension he added to faith. He said, *"Faith is the perceiving power of the mind linked with the power to shape substance."* What he's saying here is: faith is more than just knowing that something will work out, knowing that there's more. He said faith is also our ability to help shape what that "more" and that "good" looks like. That we, with our faith, can shape the good that we are calling from God. And it could be to have success in our work, to have healing in our relationships and our family. It could be inner peace or a greater level of health and happiness. It could be to be a better leader or a partner or to improve our golf game. It could be whatever it is. I mean, that's how powerful it is!

Through our faith, we can call forth anything: *"Whatever we ask in prayer, and believe that you've received it, and it will be yours."* You know, Jesus went as far as saying that faith can actually move mountains! That whatever obstacles or challenges, it is faith: faith is the thing that can help remove it.

You know, I always found it interesting after Jesus healed people, here are the words that he would say. He would say, *"Your faith has made you well."* He said, *"It is done unto you according to your faith."* Notice, he didn't say, *"Hey, look what I did for you!"* [Congregants laugh] He actually was saying look what you did for you. *"It is done unto you according to your faith."*

This is how powerful and this is how vital and important faith is as a spiritual practice in our lives. And we all know; we've all heard people talk about faith and how important it is. We were able to say, *"Hey, have faith! Keep the faith! Hold on to your faith! Live by faith! Walk in faith! Take a leap of faith!"* I mean, we hear all this stuff. Why? Because that's how valuable and important faith is in our lives.

How many people would agree that faith is a powerful and vital spiritual practice? Absolutely! And how many people have had a time where you absolutely are filled with faith? You felt so connected to God, you knew, no matter what happened, that you could work through and everything would work well? Everybody? And how many people have had a time where you've lost your faith? Anybody ever feel like you've lost your faith?

There is a huge difference between feeling filled with faith and feeling that we've lost our faith. When we're filled with faith, we know we have the assurance that everything's going to be okay. We have the power to know that we can create and transform and move. But when we've lost our faith, we tend to feel despair and hopelessness, thinking that life isn't going to get any better than this.

I think one of the most powerful and important things we are here to do is to build our faith, because it is the foundation of our spiritual life. It is the foundation of happiness and achievement and fulfillment.

Charles Fillmore puts it this way. He says, *"Faith is the strength of the soul inside, and lost is the man without it."* Without faith we are lost. But with it, we feel the strength of Spirit; the strength of our soul; the strength of the unlimited possibilities of good for our lives.

A Cherokee elder was teaching his grandson about life. And he said to him, *"A fight is going on inside of me. It is a terrible fight between two wolves. One is evil and negative, and the other one is good and positive and loving."* He said, *"This fight is also going on in you. This fight goes on in everyone."* And the little boy ponders and considers for a bit. And then he says to his grandfather, *"But grandfather, which of the wolves will win?"* And the grandfather says, *"The one you feed the most."*

And so the question is: How much are you feeding your faith? And how much are you feeding your fear? You know, every time we hold thoughts of negativity or worry or doubt or anxiety -- every time we hold

thoughts of jealousy or lack or scarcity -- we're feeding our fear. We're feeding the negativity. And it's important for us to feed our faith.

You know, they always talk about faith like a mustard seed. You know, a mustard seed is, like, literally one of the smallest seeds possible. And we always hear like, *"Oh, I just need faith like a mustard seed."* It's not that. It's actually -- the reason it's faith like the mustard seed is -- because the mustard seed is so small, but it grows into one of the largest bushes. That's what is great about the mustard seed.

And the lesson for us is: we need to grow our faith. Wherever our faith might be today, are we willing to grow it? Are we willing to feed that faith and have it expand and grow more and more? Because in Scripture it says when it grows into this big bush, it's able to support life. Birds can come and perch in it. So much life can be supported by this faith. And so what it's saying is: when we grow our faith -- when we feed our faith -- it will be able to sustain us more in our lives. We're not as rocked or shaken when things happen that aren't perfect, because our faith keeps us grounded. It keeps ourselves centered. You know, it keeps ourselves more spiritually and emotionally stable.

You know, when we grow our faith -- the more faith we have -- the more belief we have that we can achieve our goals and dreams. The more belief we have that solutions will come; there will be an answer to this. I mean, the more that we have faith, the more alive we are ... the more curious and playful; the more we're willing to take some risks and go after our dreams. The more we build that foundation of faith, the more life can be expressed and experienced in us and through us.

So here are some ways: five ways to feed our faith; to grow our faith.

And the first one is to **KEEP YOUR MIND ON GOD** as much as possible. Keep your mind on God regularly. And whether it's being still or just feeling and desiring to experience the presence and power of God ... Or it is just to do a mantra like, *"God is love. God is love. God is love"* or *"God is right here, right now"* ... All of these simple little ways of meditating, of praying, of keeping your mind focused on God, immersing your mind in the mind of God; you know what it does? It makes us feel connected to our soul. It makes us feel a sense of oneness with God and with Spirit. And this is something that needs to be done a number of times a day -- consistently every day.

The second one to feed our faith -- to grow our faith -- is to **UTILIZE THE POWER OF AFFIRMATIONS.** *"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."*

Together: [with congregation] *"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."*

One more time: [with congregation] *"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."*

How about: *"My life is abundantly blessed"?*

Together: [with congregation] *"My life is abundantly blessed."*

Again: [with congregation] *"My life is abundantly blessed."*

One more time: [with congregation] *"My life is abundantly blessed."* Take a deep breath.

There's something powerful about the spoken word; we all know it.

The third one: How many people read the *Daily Word*? Anybody read the *Daily Word*? So the third one is to **READ A LITTLE INSPIRATIONAL THING EVERY DAY.** Isn't it amazing how it's only a couple of paragraphs, but it just puts a whole new mindset and perspective reading something inspirational; reading something positive that uplifts.

And the fourth one is to **WRITE A GRATITUDE LIST**. Ten things: any time in the morning, at night, during the day. Write them. Are you noticing? There's meditation; then there's speaking the word; then there's reading the word; and then there is writing it.

And then the last one is an important one, and that is **GO TO CHURCH REGULARLY**. [Congregants laugh] Now, I'm not just saying that because it's a fabulous place, and I think it's a good idea. There are studies that show that, when you are part of a faith community, you have a greater sense of well-being. And you feel a sense of connection; you feel a sense of belonging. That, when we are part of a faith community, we develop friends; we feel that we're cared for; we feel that we are important and valued as a part of the community.

And so the important thing is: these five things all help deepen and maintain and grow our connection and our faith in God. And so it's a very important thing for us to do it -- and do it on a regular basis.

One thing I've discovered is: there's no such thing as spiritual cruise control. [Congregants laugh] You can't just get to this level of spirituality and then you cruise. No! It's every single day. Otherwise, you remember, sometimes we can lose our faith. So we need to not only maintain, but keep building our faith; keep building our faith every single day. In the same way you eat every day; you sleep every day; you exercise every day; meditation and growing our faith and connecting with God should be an everyday absolute necessity for a happy and fulfilling life.

As we grow our faith, we expand our consciousness, and we build a strong foundation of faith and spirituality and a connection with God.

The second one is a sense of **SELF-WORTH** and feeling worthy.

How many people ever had a time in your life where you felt like you weren't enough? Anybody ever felt that? That you weren't tall enough, good enough, smart enough, all the enough-ness? Sometimes we have those experiences.

When Jesus said, *"It is the Father's good pleasure to give us the kingdom,"* you know, he was saying that God gives freely. It is the Father's good pleasure to give. That God is giving you freely. God is giving you abundantly. God is not withholding anything from you.

So if it's the Father's good pleasure to give us the kingdom, what do you think is the thing that limits the amount of good that we experience in our lives? And I would suggest it is the level of worthiness that we feel. It is how much love we feel we're worthy of, or how much success or happiness we think we can really handle.

And I think that that is a huge and important thing for us. We might live in an abundant universe, but if we're coming through a mindset of lack and feeling unworthy, we're not going to be able to enjoy, attract or allow all that good in and through our lives. Because the more we feel unworthy, the less we are able to open ourselves to receive. The more we do feel worthy, the more likely we are to open ourselves to receive more good. Does that make sense, everybody?

Gay Hendricks has a concept called "the ULP." I love it, because it really explains things well for us. He says that every one of us suffers from a ULP: an upper limit problem. Because we have a set idea of a certain amount of happiness or success or love that we are worthy of. It's there in us.

And if it goes up ... let's say love. Let's say we have an upper limit of how much love we think we could have. And let's say we get more love than we can handle. You know what happens? We get a little overwhelmed and we sabotage. We undermine. We'll push love away until it drops. And we mess up a bit until it drops to a level that we feel comfortable with. Does that make sense?

Every one of us has an upper limit problem. And the way to raise the upper limit is to increase our level of worthiness: to feel worthy of more love; to feel worthy of more happiness and more success and more greatness.

You know, sometimes we will not allow ourselves to move higher in those areas. And the only way to do it is by feeling worthy. Every one of us has an upper limit problem. And the only way to do it is by feeling worthy.

Everyone, let's take a deep breath. Close your eyes for a minute. And I want you to think of the level of love in all areas of your life. And the question you want to ask yourself is: Are you willing to allow yourself to experience more love? And to allow yourself to feel more worthy of love in either a relationship or all your relationships? Are you willing to raise that upper limit?

And so I just want you to think about love and take a deep breath. Just open your heart to allow yourself to receive more love than you have ever allowed yourself to receive, and to feel more worthy of a profound and deep experience of love in all your relationships than you ever have before. One more deep breath. Expand your worthiness and raise your upper limit of how much love is in your life.

Let's do one more. Think about your level of happiness. Deep breath. So how happy are you? And what is your upper limit that you have placed on yourself on your level of happiness? And are you willing to raise that upper limit by allowing yourself to feel worthy of feeling happy and joyful and fulfilled in your life? Take a deep breath. As best as you can, expand your heart and your mind and your awareness to allow yourself to be worthy of feeling happy. One more deep breath. And just open your eyes.

And I would say one of the most important things for us to work on is our own self-worth. Because I absolutely believe it is the single greatest indicator of how much love and joy and happiness and success we allow into our lives.

So here are four ways that we could increase our worthiness -- to increase our upper limit. And I would say it's 100 % an inside job!

The first one is **SELF-LOVE**. You know, God ... We are created ... We are children of God; God's beloved. You know, God absolutely loves us. God made us. We are said that we are the light of the world. We're the temple of the living God. We've been created in the image and likeness God; children of God. And if God could love us so much, could we maybe expand that love for ourselves, as well? To cherish ourselves and appreciate ourselves, and love ourselves up as beautiful, incredible children of God? Not having to prove anything, just as we are: to love ourselves right here and right now, no matter what.

The second one is **SELF-COMPASSION**. Let me ask you a question. How do you treat yourself when you mess up or don't do as well as you think you should? I hear a lot of silence, so I'll just, us ... [Congregants laugh]

One of the things that they're showing about people succeeding, and what's important in helping us move on after mistakes, is being kinder and more gentle and understanding of ourselves. We actually perform better and bounce back better from difficult situations than beating ourselves and shaming ourselves and putting ourselves down. So how much compassion are you willing to show to yourself when you aren't doing as great as you would like to? Because it is a huge and vital thing in increasing our self-worth.

And what about **SELF-ACCEPTANCE?** Is there any part of you that you have a hard time accepting of yourself, your life, your decisions? Sometimes we can go right to a place of feeling ashamed or feeling embarrassed. You know, sometimes about our body or what we've done or not done in our lives. Or we got an education or not. Or if we got divorced or not. I mean, it's amazing how we can reject ourselves

so quickly and have a hard time accepting ourselves. And whether it's our nose or our eyes; or our thighs; or our scars; or whatever it is ... it's can you just love and accept you right the way you are? Right there?

And then the last one is **SELF-CARE**. I think one of the greatest indicators of self-love and self-worth is how well we take care of ourselves. It's stunning how quickly we are willing to not eat well ... You know, not get enough sleep; work ourselves -- our fingers -- to the bone; and not take care of ourselves. And it's such an important thing.

And the thing is: You are absolutely worthy of the work that's needed to love yourself, to accept yourself, to have compassion for yourself, and to take better care for yourself.

Alan Cohen said, *"The first and foremost responsibility we all have is to love ourselves."* Because we are the vehicle through which life and love and goodness comes, and unless we are willing to open ourselves to love, we cannot be as open channel to bring more light in our relationships, in our lives, and in our world.

My question for you is: What is one area you'd like to increase your upper limit? And would you be willing to do some work in that one area to allow yourself to feel a greater level of self-worth? And to realize that you're enough; to realize that you're absolutely lovable; and you're absolutely worthy of the fullness and the goodness of life?

Three construction workers are eating lunch. And the first guy says, "My wife makes the best sandwiches ever. Like today, I got a roast beef sandwich with horseradish on a homemade bun. Ahhhh." And then the next guy says, "Well, my wife makes a great sandwich, too. Today, I've got pesto with chicken and lettuce and tomatoes on sourdough bread. It's fabulous!" And then the third guy said, "Oh God, I got another peanut butter sandwich. I hate peanut butter sandwiches. Can't stand peanut butter sandwiches!"

Next day the first guy: "Hey! I got ham and cheese! What a great sandwich!" Second guy: "Meatball sub; what a great sandwich!" Third guy's like, "Oh no; I'm so sick and tired of peanut butter; more and more peanut butter."

So this goes on for a week. Two guys bragging about how good their sandwiches are; the third guy's, whining and complaining that all he gets is peanut butter. And then the first guy says to him, "Hey, why don't you just ask your wife to make you a different sandwich? Why don't you ask your wife to make a better sandwich." And the guy says, "Wife?" He said, "I don't have a wife! I make my own sandwiches." [Laughs along with congregation]

And the reality is: in life, we're all making our own sandwiches. We're all making our own lives by our choices, by our decisions, by our thoughts, by our actions. All the previous things we talked about in the previous weeks ... we're the ones making our sandwiches. We're the ones who decide all these principles and how well we use them and apply them in our lives. We're the ones who decide if we build and grow and feed our faith, or if we feed our fear. We're the ones that decide our own self-worth, and if we're going to raise our upper limit or keep it there by the amount of love that we give to ourselves.

I really believe that faith is the foundation: the foundation of creation; the foundation of our spiritual life; the foundation of greater possibilities. And self-worth is the key that opens the door to greater abundance and goodness.

You know, these last two are the great practices that will help us fulfill our spiritual quests and help every one of us enjoy the adventure of our lives.

God bless you all! [Congregants applaud]

Alright. Everybody, you can have your card or you can look up on this screen. And let's affirm our final 10th-week affirmation together:

"I have faith that God loves me and has a plan to prosper me. I deserve a life of peace, health, prosperity, love, and happiness. I, [Richard Maraj], follow my spiritual quest and enjoy the adventure of my life."

Whooh! All right. [Congregants applaud]

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