

## SHAKE IT OFF!

Inspired by the Taylor Swift Song

Week #1 of a 5-Week "Songs of Life" Series

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*So this guy dies and he's up at the Pearly Gates and St. Peter says, "So, have you done anything courageous in your life?"*

*And he said "Well, I can think of one thing. "*

*And he said, "What was that?"*

*He said, "Well, I was on this road trip and through the mountains and I saw this biker gang roughing up and being inappropriate and picking on this young woman. And I knew I had to help her. So I got out of the car and I yelled at them to leave her alone, but they didn't listen. So I walked over and to the biggest one with the most tattoos, and I slapped him in the face. I kicked his motorcycle down on the ground. I grabbed his nose ring, ripped it out and threw it on the ground. And I said, 'Now if you don't quit messing around with that girl and taking advantage of her eye, you're going to have to deal with me.'"*

*And St. Peter said, "Wow, that's really, really impressive. When did this happen?"*

*They guy said, "Oh, about two minutes ago." [Congregants laugh]*

Okay. [Laughs] Okay. So ... Alright.

So, how many people have ever felt judged or criticized for a decision you made or how you run your life? Anybody? [Congregants laugh] How many people have ever had someone talk negatively or badly about you? How many people have ever made a decision to get other people's approval, rather than the decision you really wanted to make? And last one: how many people have ever judged or criticized other people for how they live their life or how they make decisions?

You know, I think we all judge. And we all know judging -- being judged -- does not feel good. You know, we feel rejected; we feel belittled; we feel ashamed; devalued. You know, we feel that we've been disrespected and even condemned in some ways.

You know, in Scripture in Matthew 7, it warns in multiple times, "*Do not judge.*" "*Do not judge, lest ye be judged.*"

So my question for you is: How do you react when someone judges or criticizes you? How do you respond and how do you handle it when someone condemns you or speaks negatively of you? I would suggest since we all judge -- and we all are judged -- it would behoove us all to develop a greater skill of how to handle the impact of being judged and criticized and develop some spiritual practices to help us not be as negatively impacted. And to learn not to judge and to let it go and just "shake it off."

Today we begin our annual "Songs of Life" series. I love this series! And I pick famous songs that really inspire a positive spiritual message. Even if it wasn't written for that intention, I believe that in there there is a powerful spiritual message that can help us live our lives in greater ways.

You know, music is such a powerful thing. I bet every one of us has a song that helped get us through a difficult time that became kind of our theme song. We have songs that remind us of being back in high school or when we got married or certain great and wonderful memories. Music is a powerful thing! And that's why I like using it and doing these.

We've used songs -- I've used songs -- by The Beatles and Queen; by Rod Stewart; The Eagles; Adele; Coldplay. And now, today, Taylor Swift. I didn't know any Taylor Swift songs! [Congregants laugh] But I thought it was appropriate to do her one of her songs because she is everywhere! You know, I'm a Kansas City Chiefs fan, and with her dating Travis Kelsey, she was all over every football game. And so, then I got to learn a little bit about her and realized what an amazingly talented human being she is. You know, she's packing the house 72,000 people at her concerts. I mean, she treats her fans well. She is so kind and popular; involved in so many causes, including artists' rights and the empowerment of women. You know, she seems to be so generous. She gave a \$100,000 bonus to the truck drivers who drove all of the stuff for her different concerts. I mean, a pretty amazing individual. Kind and generous, and a hugely successful businesswoman. She's a billionaire at the ripe young age of 34.

She seems absolutely amazing and has amazing followers. I learned they're called Swifties. [Congregants laugh] I thought a Swiftie is that mop you use to clean the floor. [Congregants laugh] And so this is to tell you how little I knew about Taylor Swift.

So what I did, preparing for this, I googled what her hits were. And because I did not know one song, and I heard this one -- and even the title alone said, "*Ah, I think there's a talk in there.*" And you know, this talk kind of shows that -- even as good as you are as a human being, even as great as you are as a professional -- that people can still criticize you. People could still and will say mean things and unkind things in so many different ways. And whether it's out of jealousy or it's to get attention or whatever it is, it's unfortunate that it happens.

She even kicks off the song:

***I stay out too late***

***Got nothing in my brain***

***That's what the people say***

***I go on too many dates***

***I can't make them stay***

***At least, that's what the people say***

In an interview, she was asked about writing the song and how it was really a response to how you handle the negativity of judgment that people can sometimes throw at you. She wrote this. She said, "*The feeling of humiliation is the same when a girl has a rumor spread about her in school that isn't true. It's the same shame I feel when checking out at a grocery store and I read crazy headlines about myself. Rather than writing a song that was kind of victim-based, I decided to write a song that was joyful, and to give people a way to cope with whatever knots of ridiculousness that life is doling out to us, and to do it and make us feel like we want to dance.*"

And I love that! Because what she is saying is that, even though it is painful to be judged, we do not have to let it get the best of us. That we can still keep our joy. We can keep our happiness in spite of it: not let the negativity get us down. We can keep -- even though the negativity is there -- we can actually have a positive outcome from that experience by facing it with a positivity and a great outlook. And to realize we always have a choice of how we choose to respond.

So, today's talk is from Taylor's 2014 hit, "Shake It Off."

And so the first thing we want to do to be able to shake it off and not let these things impact us is **UNDERSTANDING AND COMPASSION**. And so, why is it that we judge? There really is only one reason, but I'd like to give you five. [Congregants laugh]

And the first one is that, at some level, we think we're superior, smarter, better than other people. That we know more! We know more how to live. We know more about them. And so, that's the first one. It's a kind of an egocentric mindset of life: that we know better than everybody else and we know more.

The second one is: it, in some way, temporarily makes us feel a little bit of a hit of a high. It makes us feel good that we could judge people; that we could say, *"That's not good enough"* and be critical of things.

And the third one – which is really the only one -- is: the reason that we criticize and judge other people is because, at some level, we don't feel that we're enough. That we don't feel whole, complete and lacking in anything. We don't feel that we are fully and unconditionally loved.

The fourth one is that judging other people is kind of a way to protect ourselves from having to deal with the own bit of emptiness and sadness and feeling of unworthiness within ourselves.

And then the fifth one is that we have a kind of limited view about life: that there's only one pie and it's small, and there's not enough for everyone. So when someone gets a piece of pie that I feel like I don't get some, that I want to attack them. That I want to judge them; that I want to have some kind of reaction towards them.

And what happens is when ... Because we judge in this way, a couple of things happen. The first one is: we take it really personally and we get hurt and feel really wounded. The second one is: we want to attack back and judge them, which unfortunately keeps that cycle of continuing to judge ourselves, and judge one another.

And so the beginning of understanding judging, and how to not let it affect us, is to realize that everybody does that. She even says it:

***Player's got to play, play, play***

***Haters got to hate, hate, hate***

***Fakers got to fake, fake, fake***

And she's saying that, you know, that people -- all people -- say and do things that aren't really kind. And it isn't just haters and do-gooders, it's, like, all of us, you know, do good and all of us, you know, bring out some less than ideal things. How many people have ever shown up in a way that was a bit judgy, unkind and unloving? Anybody ever? You know, all of us have been haters and fakers. I mean, all of us have done that!

And the interesting thing is: is to understand that it's just a part of the human dynamic of learning and a part of our spiritual school and how we grow and unfold spiritually. You know, it's a part of that human folly and human drama.

Tell me if you can identify -- and we all can! -- with these words of Paul. He said, *"My own behavior baffles me! I find myself doing things I know I should not do and not doing things I know I should."* How many people can relate to that? [Congregants laugh] You know, and that's the part of it. We know we shouldn't judge, but we do. We know we shouldn't hold on to resentment, but we do. You know, we know we should be in service, but yet we sometimes withhold. There are all kinds of things about being a human being, and a part of the spiritual journey is that sometimes we don't do things that are in the highest and best.

But Paul continues, and this is where the hopeful, wonderful stuff comes. He said, *"Do not conform to the patterns of this world."* So don't get stuck there. But he said, *"Be transformed by the renewing of your mind."* That by renewing our mind, that we can actually change and transform and rise to a higher

level of love and joy and fulfillment and spiritual awareness. And so the first thing it's going to take is a level of understanding and compassion.

In the book of Proverbs, Chapter 4, Verse 7, it says, *"In all you're getting, get understanding."* That one of the most important things for us to not be impacted by negativity and criticism is to develop some understanding. To get an understanding heart, an understanding mind.

King Solomon: he did not ask for riches; he didn't ask for anything. He wanted understanding. *"God, give me an understanding heart. Let me see with spiritual insight and wisdom and understanding and compassion so I don't just judge things at a surface level. I can see and understand things at a deeper level."*

You know, when Jesus said, *"Do not judge by appearance; judge by righteous judgment."* Don't just look at the outer and think you've got it all figured out. Go a little deeper to get spiritual insight and spiritual wisdom and understanding.

How many people remember who Ryan White was? Everybody? And so this young man contracted AIDS in 1984. He was 12 years old. And one of the things is: he just wanted to be normal. And he wanted to go to school, but they wouldn't let him go to school, because they thought that kids would get infected and so on. And so he was trying to fight for his right. While he's dying, he's trying to fight for his right just to go to school. He just wanted to go to school. And parents were angry; people were upset. I mean, school boards. There were all kinds of conflict; it was all over the news, all kinds of stuff. I mean, bad enough that the kid's going through this -- of dying of AIDS -- but having to struggle just to want to go to school.

And so he was on the Phil Donahue show, and Phil Donahue asked him a very direct question. He said, *"How does it feel being hated by so many people?"* And he -- I think he was 15 at the time -- said this. He said, *"Well, I don't think they really hate me. I think they're just afraid. It's really about fear. They're just afraid of something different. Even though the doctors say it's not a risk, you know, they're still afraid. And I understand: it's fear, not hate."*

And here this young man in this situation -- dying, being hated. and denied the right to go to school, the only thing he really wanted to help be normal -- gave such insight and understanding of what was really going on. It would have been easy to attack; easy to fight back' easy to have called names. Instead, he chose understanding and compassion. And because he chose understanding and compassion, he didn't take it personally. That he was able to just accept and see it as it was, and realize it was really their stuff. That it wasn't his stuff, and he didn't have to let it pull him down.

You know, that Scripture says, *"Judge lest ye be judged. For the measure you judge by will be the measure that you are judged."* And so, what it is really saying is: if you put out energy of judgment, of negativity, of criticism, of hatred, that's the energy that comes back to us. And that's why it's, over and over, do not judge. Don't put that kind of energy out into the universe, because it'll come back to us.

And it kind of reminds me of the line that Jesus said: *"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."* It's that, when we judge one another, we don't realize what we're doing. We're putting that energy out there, and it's going to come back into our lives.

Jesus -- in the Book of Matthew -- said, *"You have heard it said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' Well, I tell you: love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Do not even tax collectors do that?"*

I think that's a bit judgy on tax collectors, but I'm just saying. [Congregants laugh]

[Continuing Scripture] *"And if you greet only the people you know, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."* And so, what this is saying is that a part of our spiritual work is not just to love the people we love; we know how to do that. We can do that well. The question is: How well do we love everyone, including the people that we judge or the people that judge us? Including the people that we agree with and the people we don't agree with? Are we willing to expand our hearts enough to love everyone? And if we do, it begins with understanding and compassion: for ourselves, our human condition and experience, so we can expand our hearts and greater love.

When it says, *"be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect,"* it means keep giving love no matter what you get back. Keep expressing love. And the foundation of it, I believe, is: we have to have understanding and compassion. Because that gives us the opportunity and the foundation to send out love; to send out peace; to send out good wishes to those individuals that challenge us. To send it out not just to the people we like and love, but to everyone.

And I think understanding and compassion is also a foundation that -- if we need to forgive or release and let it go -- releasing and letting go and forgiving is easier when there's a foundation of understanding and compassion beneath it.

I read an article and it said, *"Judging others has nothing to do with those we are judging. It just has to do with us."* The only work we need to do when it comes to being judged by others is the work we do on ourselves. Even though there's a little part of us that thinks, *"If that person will just fix themselves, this relationship and life will be so much better."* I know it's very tempting for all of us as human beings, but the truth is: we will always get further and have greater progress when we choose to work on ourselves and look at our reaction to judgment and to choose understanding; to choose compassion; and to choose sending them love.

So the second thing to help us build a foundation for shaking it off is to **FOCUS ON THE ROAD, NOT ON THE WALL**. How many people know who Mario Andretti is? He's one of the most successful race car drivers ever, and especially having a range of different types of races that he drove in. He is one of two drivers in history that won Formula One, IndyCar, the World Sports Car Championship and NASCAR. And he was asked in an interview, *"What's the key for success that you would tell new drivers or any drivers?"* And he said, *"It would be this: don't look at the wall. Your car goes where your eyes go. Focus on the road, not on the wall."* He said, *"This is an important lesson for new drivers going at 200 miles an hour. Focus on the road ahead of you. Focus on what is in front of you. If you look at the wall, you'll hit it."*

And so, in the same way this is a formula for race car driving, I believe it's also the same in how do you handle judgment? How do you handle criticism and negativity? Because they, in themselves, are a wall. And the question is, if you keep looking at the wall, we're going to run into negativity and upset and doubt and fear. And what we really need to do is to focus on what's in front of us; focus on the road. To focus on the good; focus on the positive; focus on what it is we want to create in our lives. Because when we focus on the road -- like he's saying, he said -- you drive better, you drive faster, you drive safer, you tend to be more efficient and effective, and have a better time. And so it's an important thing for us to focus on the good, focus on the positive.

I love that, in this song, she focuses even with that judgment. She says:

***I never miss a beat***

***I'm lightening on my feet***

You know, she says:

***But I keep on cruising***

***Can't stop, won't stop grooving***

So she is about looking at the road! And, to me, looking on the road is focusing your mind on a few things: focusing on God; focusing on the good; and focusing on your goals. You know, it's focusing on God within; focusing on the good that's here now; and focusing on the goals of where you want to be in the future.

You know, in Isaiah 26, Verse 3, it says, "*He will keep you in perfect peace whose mind has stayed upon Thee.*" And it is saying that, when your mind is focused on God -- when your mind is focused on good -- that amazing things will happen in our lives. That's what we will attract more of. We don't need to focus on the wall; we need to focus on the road. That's even when there's criticism and negativity, we need to close our minds to it by focusing and recommitting on the kind of life we want to live; the kind of person that we want to be; the kind of things we want to create.

So the second point is: don't focus on the wall -- on the negativity and the judgment. Refocus your commitment on looking at the road: what is before you and the good that you want to create in your life.

And the final thing for the foundation to shake it off is to **BE TRUE TO YOURSELF; TO BE YOUR BEST SELF ANYWAY.** This point is captured beautifully by Mother Teresa. It is a poem that you've probably heard before, but it is powerful and relevant to all of us. It is called "Anyway":

*People are often unreasonable, illogical and self-centered:  
Forgive them anyway.*

*If you are kind, people may accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives;  
Be kind anyway.*

*If you are successful, you will win some unfaithful friends and some genuine enemies:  
Succeed anyway.*

*If you are honest and frank, people may cheat you;  
Be honest and frank anyway.*

*What you spend years building, someone could destroy overnight;  
Build anyway.*

*If you find serenity and happiness, they may be jealous;  
Be happy anyway.*

*The good you do today will often be forgotten tomorrow;  
Do good anyway.*

*The best you have to give may never be enough;  
Give your best anyway.*

*In the final analysis, it is between you and God;  
It was never between you and them anyway.*

And so that's one of the things: we're here to live our best life. It doesn't matter what other people say. We shouldn't let negativity or criticism, you know, stop us from being who God called us here to be. To be true to ourselves and honoring ourselves and be our best selves and live our best life.

And this song is really saying: don't let anything stop you from being you. Don't let anything stop you from sharing your gift and your love and your joy and your beauty. Don't let anything shut you down for the great and magnificent being that you have been called here to be; and the incredible life you've been called here to live; and the difference that you've been called here to make.

*A farmer's donkey fell down a well. And the donkey was there for hours just crying out. And then the farmer kept thinking, "What is it that I could do that's so deep down in the well?" And he's an old donkey and I need to cover up that well anyway. So maybe the best thing I could do for the donkey is just to bury it in the well.*

*And so he called over a bunch of his friends and neighbors, and they all grabbed shovels and started shoveling dirt into the bottom of the well. And at first, the donkey was kind of moaning and crying out, because he could tell what was happening. And then, after some shovels, they didn't hear anything, and they thought something was a matter with the donkey.*

*But they noticed as they shoveled in and the dirt landed on the donkey's back, it would shake it off and step up. More dirt; shake it off and step up. Shake it off; and step up. And he kept shaking it off and stepping it up 'til he was equal with the height of the well and just ran off happily. [Congregants laugh and applaud]*

And the message is: in life, we're going to have some dirt shoveled on ourselves. Some self-inflicted, some just by the part of life, some by people who don't support or believe in us. And the question is: Are we willing to keep shaking it off and stepping up? Shaking it off and stepping up? And using all the things that are tough and challenging in our lives to keep shaking it off and stepping up?

You know, anytime we feel people are being critical or judging us, and we feel the world is against us, we need to: 1) Use understanding and compassion and be willing to send them love. B) We need to focus on the road, not on the wall; on the positive. To focus on the good; to focus on God; to focus on our goals. C) And finally, we need to be true to ourselves. To be our best selves and live our best life anyway. Because it is between God and us. It's not between us and anyone else; just between God and us.

And that, to me, is the message in this incredible song, "Shake It Off." God bless you all!

### **"Shake It Off" Song Lyrics**

*I stay out too late*

*Got nothing in my brain*

*That's what people say, mm-mm*

*That's what people say, mm-mm*

*I go on too many dates*

*But I can't make 'em stay*

*At least that's what people say, mm-mm*

*That's what people say, mm-mm*

*But I keep cruisin'*

*Can't stop, won't stop movin'*

*It's like I got this music in my mind*

*Sayin' it's gonna be alright*

*'Cause the players gonna play, play, play, play, play*

*And the haters gonna hate, hate, hate, hate, hate*

*Baby, I'm just gonna shake, shake, shake, shake, shake  
I shake it off, I shake it off  
Heartbreakers gonna break, break, break, break, break  
And the fakers gonna fake, fake, fake, fake, fake  
Baby, I'm just gonna shake, shake, shake, shake, shake  
I shake it off, I shake it off*

*I never miss a beat  
I'm lightnin' on my feet  
And that's what they don't see, mm-mm  
That's what they don't see, mm-mm*

*I'm dancin' on my own  
I make the moves up as I go  
And that's what they don't know, mm-mm  
That's what they don't know, mm-mm*

*But I keep cruisin'  
Can't stop, won't stop groovin'  
It's like I got this music in my mind  
Sayin' it's gonna be alright*

*'Cause the players gonna play, play, play, play, play  
And the haters gonna hate, hate, hate, hate, hate  
Baby, I'm just gonna shake, shake, shake, shake, shake  
I shake it off, I shake it off*

*Heartbreakers gonna break, break, break, break, break  
And the fakers gonna fake, fake, fake, fake, fake  
Baby, I'm just gonna shake, shake, shake, shake, shake  
I shake it off, I shake it off*

*Shake it off, I shake it off  
I, I, I shake it off, I shake it off  
I, I, I shake it off, I shake it off  
I, I, I shake it off, I shake it off*

*Hey, hey, hey  
Just think, while you've been gettin' down and out about the liars  
And the dirty, dirty cheats of the world  
You could've been gettin' down to this sick beat*

*My ex-man brought his new girlfriend  
She's like, "Oh good grief!" but I'm just gonna shake  
And to the fella over there with the really good hair  
Won't you come on over, baby? We can shake, shake, shake*

*'Cause the players gonna play, play, play, play, play  
And the haters gonna hate, hate, hate, hate, hate  
Baby, I'm just gonna shake, shake, shake, shake, shake  
I shake it off, I shake it off  
Heartbreakers gonna break, break, break, break, break (mmm)  
And the fakers gonna fake, fake, fake, fake, fake*



*Baby, I'm just gonna shake, shake, shake, shake, shake  
I shake it off, I shake it off*

*Shake it off, I shake it off  
I, I, I shake it off, I shake it off  
I, I, I shake it off, I shake it off  
I, I, I shake it off (yeah), I shake it off*

*Shake it off, I shake it off  
I, I, I shake it off, I shake it off (you got to)  
I, I, I shake it off, I shake it off  
I, I, I shake it off, I shake it off*

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