

FREEDOM FROM YOUR MIND

Week #1 of a 5-Week Series, "The Power of NOW"

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When I was in my first ministry in Raleigh, North Carolina, a congregant came up to me and he said, "Do you know the best time to plant a tree?" And I said, "No." And he said, "Twenty years ago!" [Congregants laugh] And he said, "But the next best time to plant a tree is now."

Then, two months later, I was traveling and I was at Heathrow Airport. I was going from France through Heathrow here, to Phoenix. And there was an advertisement for a watch company and it said, "Wherever you are in the world, it is now."

And then, two or three months later, someone gave me a book by Eckhart Tolle called *The Power of Now*.

And each of these incidents remind me of the fact that is true for all of us: that now is the greatest power that we have. Now is the greatest thing that we have. Now is the greatest time to plant a tree. Now is the best time to love. Now is the best time to forgive. Now is the best time to change. Now is the best time to take a risk and take a chance on ourselves and our dreams.

You know, the power of now is not just about the power of the present; it is also about the power of peace; the power of purpose; the power of possibilities; the power of presence.

So today, we're going to start a five-week series on the book, *The Power of Now*. And it's subtitled, "A Guide to Spiritual Enlightenment." *The Power of Now: A Guide to Spiritual Enlightenment*.

And enlightenment can sound as sound scary and intimidating. It sounds very esoteric. It sounds very mystical and mysterious and unattainable. But the truth is, enlightenment is very much attainable. You know, enlightenment is our feeling of oneness with the Intelligence and the Eternal Presence that is within us; that is beyond us; and underlies all experience.

You know, Eckhart Tolle said that the power of now is so powerful, he said we should all make the power of now the focus of our lives. We should make the power of now the focus of our lives! Because it is the path to enlightenment. It is the path of knowing our oneness with the Eternal Presence.

And so, if living in the power of now is so powerful and so amazing, why aren't we all doing it? I mean, what is the thing and the obstacle that is stopping us from living in the most powerful time we have: the present moment? In the now? And in a word, I would say ourselves. Or to get more specific, I would say it's our minds.

Eckhart Tolle says we so identify with our minds that it causes our thoughts to become compulsive. He said that thinking has become a disease, and we fill our minds incessantly with mental noise. And the most dreadful affliction that we all have is our inability to stop thinking and to utilize our minds more effectively. And that is the thing that blocks us from knowing our oneness. That is the thing that blocks us from being fully present and engaged in the now.

How many people have ever overthought something? Anybody ever overthink something? And how many people's minds ever kept going and going and had a hard time stopping it or shutting it down? How many people would say you're a little bit of a worrier? [Laughs] And last one: How many people ever felt a little anxious about the future? Anybody ever feel a little bit anxious?

Eckhart Tolle says that 80% to 90% of the thoughts that we think are obsessive, negative, and even destructive. He says 80% to 90% of the unhappiness and suffering and pain that we experience is self-

induced by what we feed ourselves in our minds and keep repeating thoughts over and over and over again.

I've given this statistic several times: it says 90 % of the thoughts that we think today we thought yesterday. And what it is saying is that we are actually trapped in our own minds. Stuck in our own minds of limited thinking; of negative beliefs and memories that we just keep regurgitating.

Eckhart Tolle says that the more we identify with our thoughts and our minds, the more we will suffer. And the more we're able to disidentify with our minds, the more we're actually free to connect and know our oneness and know the truth of who we are.

This morning's talk is called "Freedom from Our Minds." As amazing and wonderful as our minds are -- as brilliant, intelligent, educated, I mean, all these wonderful things about it -- it can also cause us harm and pain. And we are so attached to believing everything in our minds, you know, we don't realize that the greatest intelligence we have is actually beyond thought. We are so hooked on what our human thinking is, we're missing the intelligence and the wisdom and the guidance that is beyond our thought by just being so attached to our own thinking and our own minds.

So today, we're going to begin this five-week series with the three simple but powerful fundamental practices that help us free ourselves from our minds and our thinking and help us move into the power of now.

So the first one is to **PRACTICE OBSERVING OUR OWN THOUGHTS**. So, every human being tends to believe what they think is true. We tend to believe that what we think is real, and we believe it is how the world works. We believe what we think is how other people are. And we believe that how we think is what we're about ... is about who we are, as well. And he said that the more we identify with our thoughts and believe that they're actually true, it actually creates a sense of separation from our Higher Presence and that Eternal Spirit. And so, dis-identifying ourselves with our thoughts is the first and the most important thing to learn to begin to free ourselves from our own minds, and to help us actually move to be more present in the now.

And so, it's about practicing a simple thing: just paying attention to what we're thinking. Paying attention to our thoughts; to our motivations; to our judgments; to our mental, habitual patterns of things we tend to think over and over again. And that whole idea of saying, "*Let's observe our own thinking,*" presupposes the idea that we have the power of presence and awareness to actually notice and pay attention to what our thoughts are; to move ourselves back from our thoughts and just actually watch ourselves thinking our thoughts.

Like thinking, like, right now, "*I'm feeling nervous.*" Or, "*Right now I'm feeling insecure.*" Or, "*I'm feeling excited.*" Or, "*I'm feeling depressed.*" Actually being aware of what we are thinking is actually very liberating, because it kind of pulls us away from it and it doesn't control us as much as it sometimes can.

How many people here ever talk to yourself? Anybody ever talk to yourself? Okay. The fact is: we all talk to ourselves, but I guarantee there was at least one person in the room who said to themselves, "*I don't talk to myself; what's he talking about?*" [Congregants laugh] We all have a running dialogue. We go outside: "*Oh, God; it's hot. Oh, look at that person. What a weird person that is.*" I mean, all kinds of stuff. "*Look how beautiful that is!*" We are saying stuff to ourselves all the time.

The question is: What kind of stuff are you saying to yourself? Is it loving? Is it supportive? Is it encouraging? Is it positive? And we need to begin to pay attention to those things. Not to judge them, but to just be aware. Eckhart Tolle said the very first thing for change and transformation in any area of your life is awareness. Just be aware of what we're thinking. It sounds simple, but that practice, we get so caught up in our thoughts sometimes that we sometimes don't realize what we're thinking.

And so, right now for a second, close your eyes. Take a deep breath. And I just want to be aware of: What are you thinking right now? And what emotions are you feeling? And use that higher awareness of yours to be aware of what you're thinking and what you're feeling. Whether it's joy or exhilaration or peace or calmness: What are you thinking? What are you feeling? Just be aware. Don't judge it! Just be aware.

Take a deep breath now. And that simple little practice done times a day will really begin to change the amount of attachment we have to our thoughts, which can free us to be more present, and free us to know our oneness and connection with the Divine.

You know, just noticing our thoughts helps liberate us from being controlled by them. It helps us realize that we are not just our thoughts; thoughts are just thoughts. They're temporary and they're transient. And then the third one is: it helps us not get stuck in the story and the drama of our thoughts and where our thoughts could lead us.

You ever notice, like, a thought sometimes leads to another thought and another thought?" So let's say I'm thinking a thought like, *"I really need to talk to a colleague at work, because they said something I didn't appreciate."* And then it might lead to another thought: *"I'm going to talk to them, but if they deny that they did that, I will give them a piece of my mind."* [Congregants laugh] And then it jumps to another thought: *"Oh, well, then I will go to my boss! My boss will defend me, you know. But if he doesn't, I'll give him a piece of my mind, too."* And we start running down the world at this drama of following each thought after thought.

But when we catch ourselves in the awareness that, *"Hey, you know, I've got some anger towards a co-worker,"* we can actually pull back from it and not have to follow that line. Because sometimes, you know, we could get really hooked in the story. The mind can just hook us, and we just keep going and thinking all these things. You know, the mind can run wild sometimes. And that's why just observing those thoughts can actually help disconnect us a little bit from it.

I saw this commercial once; I think it was a beer commercial. And this woman comes into a bar; she's sitting there by herself. She notices a really handsome man come in, and he sits at the bar just a few spaces over from her. And she looks at him. And you ever see those thought bubbles? You know, those little thought bubbles pop up in her head. And so, she sees them, you know, kind of falling in love. And they're driving in a convertible; her hair's blowing. They have romantic dinners. She's running, and she's so happy. She's just filled with joy! And then she sees him having an affair and cheat on him, and she gets angry. [Congregants laugh]

So right there sitting by herself -- in her own bubble thought head -- has gone from joyful exhilaration, man in my dream, do I hate him? And she gets so mad, she gets up, walks over to him, slaps him in the face, and walks out of the bar. [Congregants laugh]

Our minds can run a little wild sometimes! So just being aware -- just observing -- can actually help us derail those types of things.

The other thing that's important to remember is you don't have to figure out everything. Not only don't judge your thoughts, just be aware of them ... but also don't try to figure out every thought or reason in your history of why you think that thought. Just being aware of it, alone, begins to liberate and dissolve those deeper patterns. Because we could go down a rabbit hole trying to figure out all the things of why I think that way or why this happened. Just the awareness is liberating.

I think we all know the reason most of us are not in the present moment is because our minds are in the past or they're in the future: either reliving a pain or resentment or whatever regret that we might have, or even looking back in the glory days is still in the past. And then sometimes in the future: anxiety or fears or even projecting, *"Oh, one day I'll be happy. One day I'm going to hit it big."*

Either way, we're not in the present moment. But being aware of our thoughts begins to help liberate us so we can let go of that energy and be more present to where we are in the here and now.

Eckhart Tolle says, *"The moment you start watching the thinker, a higher level of consciousness becomes activated."* As soon as you start observing your own thoughts, a higher level of consciousness is activated in ourselves. It begins to truly liberate us.

He says, *"Enlightenment comes from rising above thought."* Because once we rise above thought, we release the things that block us from feeling a sense of peace in the present moment.

And he said that the more that we do it -- just disassociate from our thoughts; just keep observing our thoughts -- the more energy we can have to be present to whatever, including washing our hands! That we could be so present, we feel the warmth of the water; we feel the smoothness of the soap; we feel the towel drying our hands.

There are so many things we miss because our minds are either in the past or in the future that could be so much more joyful. Conversations with our loved ones. Taking a trip. All kinds of things! Driving. All kinds of things! Even sitting doing our work we can be so much more engaged. But the very first step to free us from our minds is to observe our thoughts.

The second one is **ACCEPT WHAT IS**. How many people ever had a hard time accepting something that happened? Anybody? I think every one of us has probably been angry or felt that something that happened to us was unfair and was wrong, and we just couldn't let it go. We just kept holding on and hanging onto it.

And the fact is: we need to learn to find acceptance. The fact is: every one of us wants things to go our way, but only 100% of the time! [Congregants laugh] We want things always. Always! And that is what resistance and a lack of acceptance is like. We get so attached to the way we think people should behave; the way we think everything should go; all that we want to achieve, that when it doesn't happen, we have a hard time accepting it. We tend to hate it or deny it or dislike it ... or all kinds of different things that we do. We complain; we resent it; we judge it.

And what happens is: it eats up so much energy. To resist what has already happened is one of the greatest ways of our time and our creative and spiritual energies.

Byron Katie in her book, *Loving What Is*, says that trying to change the past -- trying to change what has already happened -- is about as successful of trying to teach a cat how to bark. [Congregants laugh] It's just not going to happen! But yet, how many things do we keep saying, *"That shouldn't have happened! That shouldn't have happened!"*? We just can't seem to get over some stuff.

You know, in *The Big Book*, page 417, it says, *"Acceptance is the answer to of my troubles today."* That all of our problems come sometimes from not just being willing to accept that whatever happened has happened. It said that, *"If I'm disturbed, it is because I believe that some person or event or situation is unacceptable to me, and I can find no serenity until I accept that all these things are exactly the way that they need to be and are at this moment."*

It doesn't mean that we can't change them, or work to improve them. It means letting go of the resistance; letting go of the anger and the upset and, *"It should not be that way"* energy. To release that; accept it. And guess what? Then we have more energy. Then we have a greater perspective. We've become a greater channel for change and new decisions and better choices.

Deepak Chopra says in *The Seven Laws of Success* -- the fourth law -- he said, *"We need to welcome all that happens in life with open arms. Because if we resist and fight against it, we will cause turbulence in our minds and, therefore, turbulence in our lives."*

You know, I'll bet every one of us says at least one or two things we wish we're different than they are now in our lives. And that is one of the things that holds us back from actually having the creative energy and power to actually change and transform it into what it is that we would like.

So my question for you is: What are you resisting in your life? Or what are you having a hard time accepting? And what is the time for you to make peace with and to find acceptance?

Eckhart Tolle says this -- and to me, this is going to be a practice we're all going to do this week. Here's what he said. He said, *"Whatever the present moment contains, accept it as if you had chosen it. Always work with it, not against it. Make it your friend and your ally, not your enemy. This will miraculously transform your whole life."*

Think of something you're having a hard time accepting. And here's our practice for the week: whatever it is, accept it as if you've chosen it. Work with it, not against it. Make it your friend and ally, not your enemy. And this will transform your whole life.

The second step of freeing ourselves from our minds -- the second step toward moving towards enlightenment and the power of now -- is to accept what is.

And the final one is to **EMBRACE THE STILLNESS**. You know, we're really good at "doing" in our culture. Do, do, do! We reward doers! We reward action! Go, go, go; push, push, push; work, work, work! But we're not so good at "being." You know, we honor "doing" in our culture, but "being" seems soft. It seems unproductive. Just being?

But we have a hard time being still; being quiet; being calm; being patient. You know, there is something about that that we find challenging. And yet, it is probably the most powerful thing. It is the source out of which all good things come, and all things are made possible. It is in the quietness, and it is in the stillness.

Blaise Pascal in 1650 said this: *"All of humanity's problems stem from an inability to sit quietly in a room alone."* In 1650 he said that is where all of humanity's problems come from! Here we are hundreds of years later, and it's still true! It is our inability and our fear of sitting in the silence and being still.

And what he is saying: our inability to just calm down and be quiet. To be calmed down and just listen. To feel what we're feeling and to know who we are. To be still and to connect with that ever-present Spirit that is in us and around us that we aren't always aware of. Are we willing to be still enough -- to quiet ourselves enough -- to allow that which is natural that is within us to bubble forth and radiate from who we are, instead of holding ourselves back by the ways we think.

Eckhart Tolle says this. He said, *"In the stillness of your inner space, you will find the richness of the present moment."*

You know, the power of now isn't just about being present in the moment. It is about embracing the stillness; embracing the quiet. And for us to really embrace stillness and quiet, it means that every day we need to take time. We need to set time aside to quiet our minds and to do any kind of practice that will help us learn to be silent and to learn to be still. Whether it's meditation; whether it's yoga; whether it's chanting; whether it's saying a mantra over and over again; whether it's doing that heart math coherence practice; whether it's mindful breathing; whether it's breathing exercises; whether it's a guided meditation app ... whatever it is! The question is: Are you willing to take time to embrace the stillness?

In Psalm 46, Verse 10, it says, *"Be still, and know that I am God."* And what it's saying: It is the stillness; it is the quieting of our minds; it is sitting in the silence -- that is where we open ourselves to the Wisdom

and the Intelligence that is beyond thought; that is beyond our human capabilities. It is that Divine brilliance and light -- that Creative Source -- that is available to us if we would just be still.

Eckhart Tolle says, *"You are not a drop in the ocean; you are an entire ocean in a drop."* And I love that! Because he's saying that, when we get into the stillness, we discover the fullness and the allness and the goodness of God is already within us. The thing we've been chasing is already right here ... but we need to be still.

Somebody said, you know, we need to stop chasing after "it." We need to stop, because it's trying to catch up to us. And sometimes, you know, we think we're trying to get ahead and run, where just being still is the greatest thing we could do to allow ourselves to be filled to overflowing with that which is already within us.

So the first step to know the power of now -- and to move us towards enlightenment -- is how we use our minds, and to not be too identified with our thinking. And so the three practices for us this week are: Take time to observe your thoughts. Don't judge. Just observe. Just notice what you're thinking.

Second one is to accept what is. That whatever you're finding a challenge accepting, embrace it like you chose it. Make it your friend. Work with it. It's not your enemy and it will help transform your life.

And finally, embrace the stillness. Take time every day just to quiet your mind. Just to be still. Just to sit in the silence.

The power of now is truly a guide to spiritual enlightenment. And the first thing we need to achieve is freedom from our minds. God bless you all.