

ACCEPTANCE OF THE NOW

Final Week of the 5-Week Series, "The Power of NOW"

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So this guy goes to prison. And on the first night, five minutes after they turn off the lights, he hears somebody yell, "Thirty-one!" And the place erupts in uproarious laughter. Then somebody yells out, "Twelve!" And everybody's laughing and just cracking up. And this goes on: random numbers being thrown out, people laughing like crazy.

So the first-time guy asked his cellmate; he said, "So what's up with that?"

He said, "Well, there's only one joke book in the entire prison, and we've all been here so long ... we've read it so many times, we've got it memorized." [Congregants laugh] "So instead of wasting time, instead of saying all of it, we just say the number."

And he said, "Well, can I participate?"

He said, "Sure!"

So, the laughter dies down from the last joke, and the new guy yells out, "Forty-two!"

Crickets. Nobody laughs at all. And then a couple of seconds later, somebody else on the other side of the prison yells out, "Forty-two!" and everyone cracks up.

And so, the new guy says, "So what happened? How come no one laughed?"

So, the guy says, "Well, you know; some people can tell a joke and some people can't." [Congregants laugh]

You know, that joke actually reminds me of something that Jesus once said. [Congregants laugh] Jesus said, "You will know the truth and the truth will set you free." And he said these words because we often imprison ourselves; we often limit ourselves. And we are often the ones that cause ourselves the most pain and suffering.

So what do you think the truth is that sets us free? You know, what is a truth that you would need to know right now in your life to make you feel free? To make you feel a sense of inner peace? And for you to feel a sense of lasting joy?

You know, the truth that sets us free is to know the truth of who we are. And the truth of who we are is amazing spiritual beings. The truth of who we are is timeless, formless, eternal Presence that is beyond name; that is beyond form. To know that we are a part of the ever-present I AM in whose image and likeness we have been created: that is the truth that sets us free.

One of the reasons that we aren't free is because we are attached to our minds and our thoughts. We are attached and we identify ourselves through everything we think. And everything we think we believe is true! Everything we think – what we think about ourselves, what we think about others -- we believe it's true! We love what we think so much that we are obsessed with thinking! We think compulsively; we think non-stop.

Let me give you an example. How many people here ever overthink; worry too much; or sometimes can't shut your mind off? You know, we love thinking! We can't get enough of thinking! We keep thinking. And our minds already wander; they already jump around; they're already easy to distract. You know, they already run wild and create and make stuff up. They already create a lot of drama. They're already dwelling in the past and the future. And so, it is amazing how much our minds trap and limit us.

You know, I think I've already cited that 90 % of the thoughts that we think today, we thought yesterday. We love our thoughts so much we keep repeating them! And 80% of them are said to be negative. I mean, our minds consume our identity. They consume our attention. And what they do is they rob us of being present. They rob us of feeling a connection with the Presence and living in the power of now.

We are in the final of our five-week series on Eckhart Tolle's book, *The Power of Now, a Guide to Spiritual Enlightenment*. And one of the issues about it -- about how we find peace; how we find Presence; how we live in them now -- is because it sounds easy and obvious to be present. But we're usually not present.

And so that is the biggest challenge, because when we're not present, it means we're not conscious. It means we're not connected. And we don't feel the peace, the power, the presence, and the possibilities of living in the present moment.

And so, today we're going to review some of the ideas that we have learned, which are some of the foundational principles for us living in the now and being more present.

You know, there is an ethical principle with many applications in medicine and in professional standards and humanitarian efforts. And it is called, "Do No Harm."

When Jesus said, "*Father, forgive them for they know not what they do,*" he was saying: Father, forgive them because they don't realize what they're saying and thinking and the way they're behaving is actually causing them harm; is actually causing themselves pain and the people in their lives pain. Do No Harm should be a principle we all take up, because I think we don't realize the harm we cause ourselves by living, thinking, and believing in certain ways.

So, today we're going to look at three different areas where we can Do No Harm, and it can help us accept what is and truly live in the power of NOW.

And the first one is to **LET GO OF RESISTANCE**. How many people here would love everything in your life to go exactly the way that you'd like it to? Anybody? [Congregants laugh] How many people would like people in your life to behave the way you think they should? [Congregants laugh]

One of the things we learn is: life doesn't always go our way. And sometimes it feels like life does not very often go our way. And so, my question is: How do you handle it when things don't go your way? How do you respond when things don't go your way at work? How do you respond when things don't go your way in your relationship? How do you respond when things don't go well and the way you like in your finances or in your overall sense of peace and happiness?

In a general sense, I would use one word to say how we all respond. And that word is resistance. It comes in various forms. It could be frustration. Anger. It could be complaining or whining. It could be being bitter or blaming others. Or it could become -- one in the forms -- is telling as many people of how horrible, how bad, and how unfair, and that thing should have never happened.

You know, we fight against life. We resist so much of life, because we don't like the way it turned out, or it's not going the way we think it should. One of the realities is: living that way -- with resistance -- is living hard. It is living and causing more pain; it's creating more harm for ourselves and others. It creates it in our bodies, in our minds, in our relationships. We make our lives harder by spending time in resistance.

It's not a good energy, that resistant energy. How many people have ever had somebody do something for you, but they did it really reluctantly and with regret? And you ever do the same thing? Do something for somebody, but you did it with regret? Well, that is not good energy. That is not healthy energy. It is not helpful energy. And it is harmful energy that does not serve our peace and happiness.

So, how do we let go of resistance?

It is by starting -- by just acknowledging that we are resistant. And so, whether we get a flat tire or an expected bill, or have an argument with our spouse, it's just to acknowledge the resistance that is going on in ourselves. The energy that is hating, disliking, rejecting, denying whatever that thing is that has happened. And just being aware of our own resistance and how it shows up for us. Sometimes it shows up as being defensive or attacking the other person or getting annoyed or ranting. But either way, it creates tension in ourselves. But just observing it is the first step to being liberated from it.

And after a while, when you just observe how we show up -- defensive; angry; however that is, or shutting down -- is that we will begin to realize that that's not a healthy way. That is wasting energy. That is causing more pain. And it's really misdirecting the creative energy that God has given us.

And so, by focusing on the present and the resistance we're experiencing, you know, that we're unconscious of, Eckhart Tolle says, *"Once we become conscious of resistance, resistance disappears. Once we become conscious, unhappiness disappears. Once we become conscious, suffering disappears."*

And I noticed that, when I read that, I had some resistance about his thoughts about resistance. [Congregants laugh] I was resisting his ideas of resistance. The thing is ... and it showed up in me at first with me saying, *"He is not writing clear; he should write better so I could understand."* And then I thought, *"I should get it; you know, I'm a minister, gosh darn it! I should get it!"*

And so, I noticed -- even in this simple way -- to pay attention to the little bits of resistance that we have. And as I sat when I'm observing this, you know, I realized that that isn't serving me. Me pushing against it isn't increasing my understanding. And I was able to choose that I don't have to understand everything the very first time. Or I may not have to understand it at all! And I can have a sense of peace, or I could just do something different about it.

So my question for you is: Where in your life are you experiencing resistance? What in your life isn't going the way you want? And are you willing to be aware and pay attention and acknowledge the way and the form resistance is showing up in you?

And I would suggest -- whether it's a big thing or a small thing -- any bit of resistance in us, it's important for us to be aware. If we want to be liberated; if we want to be conscious; if we want to be transformed from it; and know our oneness with Spirit and the Presence and feel a sense of peace, we need to practice being aware of our own resistance and observing it.

So, the second thing to Do No Harm and to accept what is and live in the power now is to **ACCESS PRESENCE**. Eckhart Tolle says one of the most important tasks and practices for us is to regularly access our connection to the timeless, formless, eternal Presence that we are.

Here's what he says. He says, *"Underneath the outer form -- beyond our physical bodies, beyond our minds -- we are connected to something so vast, so immeasurable and sacred, it is truly more than we can conceive of. But to become conscious of being, we must reclaim consciousness from our minds."*

You know the best thing we could do to use the power of our minds -- and to get the best of our minds -- is learn how to quiet our minds. How to slow down our minds. How to stop some of that thinking, so that we could enter higher levels of understanding.

See, as great as human thinking is, it is quite limited. There's levels of genius and wisdom and insight above it. But we need to slow the human mind down to be able to access and become open to higher levels of intelligence, higher levels of consciousness. It is through accessing this connection that it liberates us; it's truth that really sets us free.

And so here are some ways to focus our mind to access higher levels of consciousness.

And the first one is meditation. And it could be as simple as getting the mind's attention to focus on the breath as it comes in and out. You know, the word breath means spiritus. I mean, Spirit coming in; Spirit flowing out. It is a powerful and simple thing to just follow our breath as it comes in; follow our breath as it leaves.

Another one is just using our body to help us go deeper. You know, we are told in Scripture that our bodies are the temple of the living God. Our bodies of the temple of God! It means that that Spirit of God dwells in our bodies.

And so, a simple one: let's just do it just for a second. Close your eyes; take a deep breath. And just be in your body for a moment. Just notice your body sitting against the chair. Just be aware and notice your shoulders and your neck. Notice your back, your chest, your stomach, your arms. Just notice. Feel your body: your legs your toes. And now, we just want you to feel the energy in your body. There is an energy field in your body, and I just want you to feel and tune in to that level of your body. And allow that energy field in your body to be filled with white light. From head to toe, just see and feel that light. And now, let that light of your spirit and essence expand beyond your physical body. To know that you are light; you are spirit; you are without limit or boundary.

"I am pure light, completely weightless and free."

Let's say that half-voice together: [with congregants] *"I am pure light, completely weightless and free."*

Take a deep breath and feel your spirit expand beyond your physical being. Feel how freeing that is, to know that you are unlimited. That the essence and nature of who you are is divine; it is spiritual; it is absolutely unlimited.

Take a deep breath into that, owning and accepting the truth of that amazing being that you are. Take another deep breath. Become conscious of your body again. Put a little smile on your face. Take a deep breath. And just open your eyes again.

Any form of meditation that takes us out of our limited thinking and to expand into the awareness of the truth is powerful and good, whether it's the breath; whether it's through the body; whether it's whatever form of meditation ... It is a powerful way to access presence and consciousness. All meditation will calm; it will center; and it will connect us.

And the next one to access presence and consciousness is to engage in intense present moment awareness. You know, there are many things that we miss because we don't pay attention to so many things in our lives. We don't pay attention to our own feelings. We don't always necessarily pay attention to the people in our lives and what's going on with them. We don't pay attention to the things in our lives, the activities in our lives ... because we're not always present. We're not always engaged.

Remember when Jesus said, *"Consider the lilies of the field. See how they grow."* I mean, how often do we pause and stop to be fully present? To consider a flower: to truly be with and see a flower? To notice its petals; to notice its color; to notice the texture; to notice and behold its incredible beauty. To not just see it but to feel it. To not just see it, but to experience it. To be fully present to it.

Could you imagine if we were like that in our relationships? In the different activities that we do? To be fully present; to be fully engaged? No matter what it is: a piece of art or whether it's a musical instrument ... or even your own hand. Have you really looked at your hand recently? I mean, it is amazing! You know, our fingerprint lines: there's no other human being that has ever been born that has your fingerprints. It is the coolest thing to behold!

So, last night, I was looking around for something for me to pay attention to and be present to. And I found this embroidered pillow that I have: you know, one of those throw things you throw on the couch; you throw it on the bed. And the thing is: I have had that for a long time, but I have never really looked at it. And it has this beautiful embroidery with circles, little dots, little circles; it's got leaves and veins. It is the coolest thing! And to have noticed it, felt the texture. I mean, I was one with that pillow! [Congregants laugh] I mean, and I'm not kidding! It was like I saw it for the very first time!

There is so much in life that we miss. That are subtle -- that's seemingly insignificant -- but are powerful and meaningful if we give it our undivided attention ... if we allow ourselves to be engaged in connecting with it and just being present to it.

So here's our homework: just a couple times a day, find something -- whether it's a piece of fruit or the design on your wallpaper -- to just give your undivided attention, even for two or three minutes. To give yourself fully and be fully present and fully engaged in it. We will be amazed of how connected and how much we feel a sense of experience and understanding of ourselves and that thing and our lives.

And the last one I want to talk about to be an access portal to connection is to bring our being more into our doing. And so one of the things is that ... You know, when Jesus said, "*We are in this world but not of it*" ... Eckhart Tolle says that we don't have to give 100% attention to the outer world; that we could hold back some and then have that be a conscious connection to Spirit. And we could engage in whatever activity. So, we could hold a conscious connection of our oneness with God and do our exercise. We could hold that conscious awareness of Spirit and do the dishes – or whatever it is. Or do our work. He says there is a way.

And here's what he says: "*It is possible to be conscious and connect to the Presence throughout your life, but the way that happens is by tuning in more frequently and consistently.*" And he says that the more consistently we connect consciously with Spirit, the more of that spirit we can actually bring forward into any and everything we do in our lives. But we must be consistent in our being to allow it to flow through to our doing.

How many people have heard of Brother Lawrence? He wrote a book, and it was called *Practice the Presence*. And apparently, this guy was so centered and was so committed to his oneness with God and his awareness of that spiritual Presence that he would wash the dishes ... and doing it, or even people seeing him doing it, felt like a sacred spiritual experience. Whether it was cooking or cleaning a toilet, he made everything he did a spiritual activity of living in the presence of God.

And so, one of the things about doing this more frequently -- and allow our being to be more of our doing -- it elevates our consciousness and it elevates the experience in our lives. And so, this is a powerful and important thing.

These are the three ways that we can access presence and access consciousness: meditation, practicing being fully in the present moment; and bringing our being more into our doing.

And so the last thing I want to talk about how to Do No Harm, and how to accept what is and live in the now, is to **SURRENDER WITHOUT RESERVATION**. The word surrender doesn't exactly bring a lot of inspiration and warm fuzzies, because it gets a kind of a bad rap. It sounds like we're giving up. It sounds like you're just settling; you're not trying hard enough; you're not doing anything. That's what surrender feels like.

And in a world where it's about drive and success and being number one, surrender is not a word that most people want to take very seriously. And the other thing is: surrender sounds like we're not taking any action at all. It sounds like totally giving up.

But the truth is: surrender is an inner experience of relinquishing resistance and any negative energy that we hold towards whatever situation we might be in. And so, it doesn't mean: don't take action. In fact, it means take action, but just take it -- in a sense -- without resistance without judgment; without anger; without feeling this is wrong or unfair. That there is only as a centered sense of peace in the action that we take versus resistance and reluctance and anger in taking that same action. That it absolutely makes a huge difference.

Here's an example. Eckhart Tolle gives the example of how to surrender. And the example is: he's stuck in mud. So, let's say you're stuck in mud. And so, he says that being stuck in mud ... when you say surrender, it doesn't mean you're resigned to being stuck in mud; it just means to be aware and not resistant or judging about being stuck in mud. That we don't have to accept -- surrender doesn't mean you have to accept that -- or stay in that way or pretend that it's all good. It is to recognize that you're there without judgment or resentment and then get out ... and allow your focus to just be on that one thing or the first step you need to do to remove yourself and take the action.

You know, it is a far healthier and better way to do the same action centered without judgment and a sense of peace and awareness versus doing actions with resistance and anger. It is a huge qualitative difference.

He says, *"The challenges of life, and especially the patterns of human beings and our minds, require daily practice of surrender."* That we need daily practice of surrender: of not resisting and making peace with "what is," so we could take healthier and more effective actions. More grounded and spiritual actions.

You know Paul said, *"Do not conform to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."* And that's what surrender is. It's a renewing of our mind. So a situation happens. Renewing of our mind ... of just resisting judgment so we can -- with a good and positive mind, with a spiritually centered and grounded mind -- we could take the most effective action.

He calls it surrendered action or non-resistant action. And that is the most effective action that we could ever take. Sometimes think we need to be angry or we've got to do it so we can prove it to people. It actually is not the healthiest way to be acting and living in our lives.

And he said that, when a situation happens like that, and you let go of the resistance, we should ask ourselves the question: Is there anything I need to do to change or improve or remove myself from this situation? And he says if there is something we could do, then we take the action; surrender; take action; surrender until it's resolved. But if there's nothing we can do -- or we need to remove ourselves from it -- he said keep using that situation to take your surrender to a deeper level, and to deeper and deeper levels.

And he says what happens is, over time -- when you go deeper into your consciousness, deeper into surrender -- he said that the universe will begin to move and open things up for you. Things will begin to change. That the deeper we're willing to go and to surrender more, something magnificent will begin to pour and express itself through us.

Here's what he said. He says, *"When you surrender, the energy you emanate, and which then runs your life, is of a much higher vibrational frequency than the mind energy that still runs the world."* So he says our energy in surrendering goes to a higher vibrational level that begins to move and shift things in the universe to bring greater things into our lives.

So there was this army fort. And the captain you know brought in this native elder to help protect them against getting attacked. And so he says, "Chief, can you tell me anything?"

And so, the native elder lays his head on the ground. He's lying there with his ear to the ground. And he thinks and does his face for a second and he says, "Fifty warriors on brown horses; war paint on their faces; all with bows and arrows. Ten white horses with warriors; with spears. Five wagons; plenty of guns.

And then the captain says, "My goodness! You learned that all just from laying your ear on the ground?"

And then the chief elder says, "No, there's a hole in the gate. I can see right through it." [Congregants laugh]

Eckhart Tolle says, "When we give complete surrender and accept without reservation," he says, "suddenly a great stillness arises within you: an unfathomable sense of peace. And within that peace is joy. And within that joy, there is love."

And he says when we have experiences like that, the first thing we're thinking of is, *"I just found God!"*

And the truth is: God is always here. We didn't find God! Paul said, *"It is in God that we live and move and have our very being."* There is no spot, there is no moment, there is no situation where God is not in us and all around us. We live and move and have our very being in God.

What they're really saying is we realized God. We awakened to God. Because God is always there, but we're not always present. You know that old line that says, *"If you feel distant from God, who moved?"* [Congregants laugh] And that is because it's: we have disconnected. We have gone unconscious. You know, we have felt distant.

And so, what we need to do is to make NOW our focus. It is to say yes to "what is," and to awaken to the realization of our oneness. It is to choose to Do No Harm. It is to choose peace. It is to choose enlightenment. And the way to do it is to let go of resistance; access the portals of presence; and surrender with no judgment and to do surrendered action.

That is the path to peace. That is the path to enlightenment. That is the way to accept "what is" and to live in the power of NOW.

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