

THIS MOMENT

Rev. Richard Rogers

Wednesday, Nov. 20, 2024

If you could choose one spiritual practice that would be the focus of the rest of your life, what spiritual practice would you choose? If you only got to pick one, and every day it had to be the focus of your life, which spiritual practice would you pick? Would you pick love? And would you just practice every day just opening your heart to bigger and bigger ways? And loving and bigger and bigger ways? And loving people you don't want to love in bigger and bigger ways? And would you just practice love in a greater and greater ways?

Or would you pick prayer? The idea of practicing prayer -- practicing the presence of God; practicing deep profound communion with God. And every day it would be about how deeply, how profoundly can I know God?

Or would it be service? Would you want to be in service to your spiritual teacher or your community? And every day you, in acts of service, you actually release your egos through, over and over again, serving in the deepest and most profound way?

Or would it be through studying sacred text? You know, there are those individuals who have made a personal commitment: that every day they study sacred text. And that's their path, and every day they study and meditate on a sentence or a word or an idea. And they take that word, that thought, that idea deeper and deeper every day.

Or would you want to practice living in the present moment? You know, living in the present moment is a spiritual practice. That every day, we just live right here, right now. Stay right here, right now. And what if living in the present moment was the focus of the rest of your life? That every time you noticed you were moving too far in the future or the past, you just brought it back to this present moment?

And I wanted to really challenge you tonight to really look at this as a practice that we can all evolve and expand into. See, for many of us, we spend moments in the now, but we spend a lot more moments in "the was." Have you ever spent a lot of time in "the was"? Right? "The was" is all the things that have been, right? Or we spent time in the "will be's," thinking that we're going to work so hard at creating what will be that it'll be better than right now.

And so, we can spend so much time in "the was" and the "will be's" that we forget to come back into this moment and to "be here now," as Ram Dass wrote in 1971.

You know, there's a quote from Evelyn Underhill, who is probably one of the most prolific writers on mysticism. And she said:

"God is always coming to you in the sacrament of the present moment. Meet and receive him there with gratitude in the sacrament."

And it's like, "Well, come on, now ... Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah ... but let's get to the future!" Like, that's where all the fun stuff's going to happen! That's where life's going to get better and better and better. We're going to move to the future, and the future's going to be better than the now, because the now just is ... but the future can be even better!

So, we focus on thinking about the future, and "Let's move into a bigger, brighter future than we've ever known before!" We don't need to focus on what's right now. Right now it could be boring! But the future is going to be great!

Or, because we spend so much time thinking about the past: *"Oh, my past was great. I loved that! It was the best time in my life. I loved every minute of the past. It was beautiful, fabulous. I looked better, and I felt better, and the past was so great. The past was fabulous!"*

And we're going to be so divided. We're not even sure: do we want to move into this future? Do we want to go back to the past? Or occasionally we think, *"Well, I'll just hang out here."*

Jim Carrey said:

"If you aren't in the moment, you're looking forward to an uncertain future or back to the pain and regret of the past."

I don't know if you know this about me, but I have been called a worrier. I have been known to be a planner. I have known to spend a great deal of time thinking about worrying, about planning. And for all kinds of things: money, you know; what's going to happen next in my life; my goals; my desires; my needs. You know, I have been [laughs] really kind of fixated about making sure that my mind really has a control over what's going to happen next. And I don't know if you've noticed, but I don't know if you have come to the realization that you really don't have control over what's going to happen next! But my mind loves the concept!

I remember my wife saying to me one time, *"Well, what's your Plan B?"*

And I said, *"How do you know I have a plan B?"*

She goes, *"You've got a B, a C, a D, an E, an F ... [congregants laugh] ... and I'm not sure there's enough letters to describe how many plans I know are going on right now in your head!"*

And I realized she was right! Like, I'm ... I, I ... aye yai yai! [Congregants laugh]

And I remember a moment when somebody said to me -- and it's one of those moments where it literally was an idea that I never heard ... I mean, I heard it before, but in that moment, I really; I got it. Like the idea was that, **in this moment, you have everything that you need.**

And when I first heard that, I wanted to argue; that, like, *"That's not true. Like, I've got a bill coming on Friday; I've got things coming up. I don't have everything I need! I'll let you know when I have everything I need, but that's not right now. Like I have stuff; I need stuff! I want to work on this; I'm working on this. I don't have everything that I need! Please, come on; how ridiculous is that?"*

And the person said, *"No, Richard. Richard, in this moment, you have everything that you need."*

It actually stopped me. She said, *"In this moment, do you have enough money?"*

I said, *"Well, I guess I do; I'm not spending on anything right now, I guess I've got enough money."*

She said, *"Do you have enough air in this moment?"*

"Well, I guess I do; I'm breathing."

She said, *"Have you eaten enough today?"*

I said, *"Well, look at me!"* [Congregants laugh] Right?

And it really; it just completely stopped me and brought me into this moment. And I realized that **only in the future could I imagine lack and limitation. Or only in the past could I remember not having something that I wanted or needed.** And that sense of lack created such a belief that I have to be planning or orchestrating or conniving or manipulating -- or whatever it takes -- to create the future that I want to live into. Because in both those conditions, I'm either remembering this or planning for this ... but I'm not here.

And the reality was that I could **be here now**. Like, in this moment, I literally have everything that I need. There's not one thing missing in this moment.

"Well, Richard, I want this or I want that" or, "I don't have somebody to share with" or, "I want to be taller, better, whatever."

And it's like: NO! **In this moment, I have everything that I need.**

Will you say that with me? [With congregants:] *"In this moment, I have everything I need."*

One more time, like we mean it: [with congregants] *"In this moment, I have everything I need."*

And that was such a radical concept for me! Because at some level -- in that moment -- I literally got what they were talking about! I realized that, if I could stay in the moment, there was no lack in the moment! That the only way that I can experience lack was to go in the past or go into the future. But, in this moment, everything was here that I needed and wanted. If I could just stay right here moment after moment -- just be right here in the moment -- everything was provided. Everything was here!

And I realized I couldn't create a future of abundance if I'm living in the present moment of lack. Like, what we teach is that the inner life creates the outer experience. That I can't be in a sense of lack or neediness in this moment and imagine a future of abundance. It just doesn't work like that! That you literally have to stop everything and, over and over again -- every time your mind wants to tell you that you're missing something or something's not here or you're broken or you're less -- then just bring it back in this moment.

In this moment, I have everything I need.

Together: [with congregants] *"In this moment, I have everything I need."*

And I was realizing that, in this moment ... the fullness of God is only available in this moment. In this moment, all that God is, is fully present. And if I move to the future or move back to the past, I actually miss the blessing; the good; all the abundance; the miracles that are available in this moment ... because I'm so focused on being anywhere else but where I am!

In this moment, I have everything that I need.

Together: [with congregants] *"In this moment, I have everything that I need."*

And only in my mind can I tell myself that I shouldn't be here. Only in my mind can I create a reality that isn't real. [Laughs] Like in this moment: this is reality! If I trust God enough to move into this reality in this moment, I literally have everything that I need.

Eckhart Tolle said this:

"Most humans are never fully present in the now, because unconsciously they believe that the next moment must be more important than this one. But then you miss the whole of life, which is never not in the now."

It's a double negative, but just stay with me!

"... which is never not in the now."

I want you to really see how much of your time and energy is not in this moment. We're focused on what we're going to do next; how we want tomorrow to be better; how everything's supposed to be and look and have. Or we spend so much time in what it was or what it should have been or what I didn't get. And we never actually spend a lot of time where God is.

And the only place that we can actually connect with the presence and power of God is right here, right now. Right here, right now!

Eckhart Tolle also said:

"The decision to make the present moment a friend is the end of your ego." Wow!

I want to read from page 69 in his book, *The Power of Now*. And if you haven't read this one, it is worth your time and energy. Here we go. Page 69: bottom of the page.

"Are you stressed? Are you so busy getting to the future that the present is reduced to the means of just getting there? Stress is caused by being here but wanting to be there."

Can I read that again?

"Stress is caused by being here but wanting to be there. Or being in the present but wanting to be in the future. It splits us; it tears us apart inside. To create and live in the full inner split is insane. The fact that everyone else is also doing it doesn't make it any less insane! If you have to, you can move fast, work fast, even run without projecting yourself into the future; without resisting the present moment. As you move, work, run, do it totally in the moment. Enjoy the flow of energy -- even high energy -- of the moment. Now you're no longer stressed, you're no longer splitting yourself."

Can you imagine joining us in this present moment? And what if we let go of the idea that the past is better than the present? Or the future is going to be better than the present? Because what makes a better present is a better moment. The more you engaged in the moment, your future will take care of itself. And, as we live in the moment, everything gets better.

So, you know, when I do a talk, I usually give you, like, three points or sometimes I go five or six points, right? And I give you some things to think about and some things to take home? Tonight I have 13. [Congregants laugh] I do! [Laughs] have 13. So, I hope you brought a pillow and a blanket, because we might be here a while. No ... I promise I'll get you out pretty close to on time.

Alright, the first point that I want you to hear is **practicing mindfulness** is the way you move into the moment. Focus on your breath. Use your breath as the anchor. Take slow, deep breaths. Pay attention to the situation and the air moving in and out of your body. Engage your senses. What are you seeing, feeling, hearing, tasting, smelling? What is going on around you? Be here now.

And what's so amazing about being in the moment is: your body becomes the path.

You know, most of us who were raised in a Christian environment, your body was – you were told -- your body is the problem. Your body keeps you from God; it keeps you from heaven. Your body is the problem. And if we could just kind of manage our body differently, then we would feel more God; we would be more in heaven. But the body, we were taught, was the problem.

Here's the Apostle Paul from Romans 7:15-20:

"I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do, I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself that does it, but the sin living in me. For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out."

"For I do not do the do do that I want to do do."

No! I'm sorry! [Puts hand over his mouth] [Congregants laugh]

"For I do not do the good that I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing. For if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I that is doing it, but the sin that lives within me."

Right? And so, that is a statement that says what? Your body is the problem. That's where sin dwells. It dwells in your body, and if we could just get it out of your body, we would be okay.

Now, what did Jesus say? Jesus said in Luke 17:21:

"Lo, is it here or there? For behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you."

I want you to hear the difference there! Like, what Jesus said is: It's in the midst of you! The glory – the kingdom -- is within you! And as we breathe; as we experience our body; as we go deeper and deeper into the moment, we actually experience the kingdom.

Paul was a little confused. Right? He so wanted to have that experience, but it comes out just kind of gobbledegook. And I know I probably shouldn't say that Paul was gobbledegook ... but, ehhhhh.

[Whispers:] It's gobbledegook. [Congregants laugh]

The kingdom of God is within you! You can't experience that in the future; you can't experience that in the past. You can only experience when you move into your body and you breathe. And the more that you breathe, the deeper you go, the more you feel the kingdom of God within you.

So that was one. I've only got 12 more to go. [Congregants laugh]

Number two: **avoid multi-tasking.** To focus on one task at a time, give it your full attention rather than dividing your focus across multiple activities.

Three: **let go of judgment.** All of it! Let go of judgment. Accept things as they are without labeling them as good or bad. Observe your thoughts, your feelings without attaching to them. *"I have feelings, but I am not my feelings. I have thoughts, but I am not my thoughts."* And when we move into the moment -- when we let go of the idea that, *"My life shouldn't be this way!"* ...

We talked about this last week. Like, that's such a powerful thought. It's just nonsense! That as soon as we say, *"My life shouldn't be this way!"*, we actually move ourselves out of the moment. And in the moment, we can actually experience the fullness of God. But we have to be in the moment without judgment.

Four: **practice gratitude.** Reflect on what you're grateful for in this moment. Reflect on all the good -- the blessings -- that are surrounding you constantly.

Limit the distractions. Five. Reduce screen time; put away your phone And when you engage with others, actually look at them in the eye.

Six: **meditate.** Even just a few minutes a day of meditation can help train your brain to stay in the present moment.

Seven: **engage in physical activity** like yoga, walking, dancing requires you to connect your body and stay in the present moment. But so does crocheting, knitting, woodworking, chores, doing the dishes, vacuuming; all those things that we can do! But be present that we're doing them. It allows us to be in our body and in the moment.

Use; appreciate ... Number eight: **appreciate small joys.** Notice the little things like the warmth of the sun, the taste of the food, or the sound of laughter. These moments are often overlooked and unappreciated.

Nine: **use affirmations:** Be here now.

Together: [with congregants] *"Be here now."*

In this moment, this moment is enough.

Together: [with congregation] *"This moment is enough."*

And now, when you say that – *"This moment is enough"* -- how many times does your mind want to argue with you? This moment's not enough! If it was 20% better, then it would be enough. But it's certainly not enough the way it is. Right?

So, every time we use an affirmation, it brings us back to this moment. Or: this moment is exactly the way it's supposed to be. I have everything I need in this moment.

Together: [with congregation] *"I have everything I need in this moment."*

Ten: **forgive yourself and others.** Let the past go. Let the future's worries take care of themselves. Accept and forgive everyone for everything, and that starts right now.

Eleven: **take breaks.** Pause during your day to check in on yourself; to take a quick mental break; and to bring yourself back to this moment.

[Twelve]: **Spend time in nature.** Nature has a calming effect and can help us reconnect with this moment ... And it helps us breathe in the moment.

And 19: **accept life as it is.** With consistent practice, living in the moment becomes a natural part of our life.

So you ready for your homework?

[Congregant: *"You said 19."*]

I said 13. I said 19? [Congregants laugh] See, you got three extras. [Laughs] Stay in the moment, dear.

Okay, here we go. So you ready for your homework? I want you to spend one week where all you focus on is the future. I want you to get yourself so stressed out and worried and freaked out about everything. That you're so upset that you decide this is never going to work and you move into the present moment.

Because if you spent one day fully embracing that you had everything that you need ... If you really, deeply, profoundly believe that you had -- in this moment -- you had everything you need, you would never want to leave the moment. The moment is like gold. It has such value; it is so important; it is so beautiful.

That when you fully come into the moment -- and you leave the future and you leave the past ... When you come into this moment, it is so rich. Because the fullness of God is right there. **God is only available in the moment.** You can think about God in the future, or you can remember an experience of God that you've had in the past. **But literally to experience God, you have to come into the moment.** And, in that moment, all things are provided. In that moment, you have everything that you need.

Will you pray with me?

I want you to take a deep breath and I want you to feel the presence of God. And notice how much of your energy is already moved out into the future -- that you're thinking or planning or creating so much energy out in the future -- that sometimes we have to gather it and bring it back into this moment. And notice how much energy you have stored in the past: with all that you've done; with all that you've been; the ups and the downs. Feel all that energy that you have in the past, and see if you can gather all that energy and bring it into this moment.

And with all the energy from the past and all the energy for the future, see if you can take a deep breath and feel the presence of God right here, right now. That God is right here, right now. God is right here, right now.

Thank you, God, for this moment.

Thank you, God, that this moment is so deep, so rich, so wonderful in every way that I can just stay right here. And then one moment rolls into two. But not because I did one thing. I'm just right here, God, just watching life roll through me.

And, in this moment, I do have everything that I need. So, I stay right here, fully present in this moment. And in all things, God, I give thanks. And so it is. Amen.

Copyright 2024 Unity of Phoenix Spiritual Center/Rev. Richard Rogers