

NOW THAT WE FOUND LOVE

Week #2 of a 4-Week "Songs of Life" Series

Sunday, April 30, 2023

Rev. Richard Maraj

Now That We Found Love – Lyrics:

Now that we found love what are we gonna do with it?

Now that we found love what are we gonna do with it?

Let's give it a chance

Let it control our destiny

We owe it to ourselves

to live happy eternally

Oh, love is what we've been looking for

And love is what we've been searching for

Now that I've got it right here in my hand,

seems like I'm gonna spread it all over the land

(Now that we found love what are we gonna do with it?)

(Now that we found love what are we gonna do with it?)

Let's forgive and forget

Let no thought be your enemy

I've never felt so good

I'm happy happy happy

as any man could be

'Cause love is what we've been looking for

Love is what we've been hoping for

Now I've got it right here in my hand,

I'm gonna spread it all over the land

'Cause love is what we've been looking for

Sweet love is what we've been searching for

Now I've got it right here in my hand,

I'm gonna spread it all over the land

Now that we found love what are we gonna do with it? ...

Message:

So a new specialty store opened up in a Manhattan shopping center. And the store specialized in selling husbands. [Congregation laughs] And it's hard to find love and hard to find the right one, so this store gives you the opportunity -- women the opportunity -- to browse among the men availability with various floors and various choices. And there are six floors, and going up each floor adds more positive attributes to the men that are available. But the catch is: as you go up, you can purchase ... but if you go higher, you are no longer eligible to have the lower floors be a part of your choice.

And so this woman starts shopping. And she starts on the first floor, so excited to find a husband. And on the first floor the sign says, "First floor: These men have jobs." [Congregation laughs] And the woman said, "Well, that's better than my last boyfriend, but I think I could do better than that."

So she goes to the second floor. The second floor says, "These men have jobs and love kids." And she said, "Oh; that's nice! But I wonder what's up another level."

And so the third floor says, "These men have jobs; love kids; and are extremely good looking." She said, "HMMMMM! That's really nice! But I wonder what else!"

And then she goes up to the fourth floor. And the fourth floor says, "These men have jobs; love kids; are extremely good looking; and they help with housework." [Congregation laughs] And then she says, "Wow! I wonder what else I could get!"

Well, the fifth floor says, "These men have jobs; love kids; are extremely good looking; help with the housework; and have a strong romantic streak in them." She says, "Wow! That is incredible! But I wonder what else I could get!" [Congregation laughs]

And so she goes to the sixth floor. And the sixth floor reads, "You are visitor, 7,548,652 to this floor. There are no men on this floor." [Congregation laughs] "This floor only exists as proof that women are impossible to please." [Congregation laughs and applauds]

So today we're talking about love. [Congregation laughs] So how many people have had a time in your life where you felt like you didn't have enough love or you wanted to have more love in your life? Anybody have a time like that? How many people have ever found that sometimes loving people is hard work? [Congregation laughs] And then how many people still believe that you could love bigger and deeper and have more love in your life than you ever have before still? Alright!

You know, love is the thing that every one of us is searching for. It is the thing that every single one of us desires above everything else. Everyone wants to feel cared for; everyone wants to feel valued and cherished and appreciative. Everybody wants to feel a sense of connection and belonging. I think the amazing thing about love is that: Love -- in addition to doing all those other wonderful things -- gives us the strength to carry on. It gives us the resilience to hang in there. It gives us the power to overcome and to strive and improve ourselves.

Love has an amazing uplifting and transforming power to every area of our lives. The Bible tells us so much that love is the greatest commandment: to love God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength and to love others as ourselves. In Corinthians it says you can have knowledge; you can have wisdom; you can have wealth; but if you don't have love, you have nothing. And finally, Paul said that love is the fulfilling of the Law. He's saying love is what makes life fulfilling. Love is what fulfills us and fulfills life itself. Love makes life better: more beautiful; more wonderful. And go through painful and challenging stuff ... love makes those things more bearable.

I think we'd all agree that love is the greatest thing in the world. And as great as love is, what I find amazing and surprising and saddening is that more and more people are reporting in the United States that they feel lonely. Three out of five people report feeling at least lonely some of the time, and some all of the time. Since 2018, loneliness in the United States has increased by 13%. That even though the impact of epidemic and Covid has slowed down, the level of loneliness has actually increased.

And I believe that there is a connection with loneliness and feeling a lack of love in our lives. The great spiritual writer Emmett Fox said this about the power of love:

"There is no difficulty that enough love will not conquer; there is no disease that enough love will not heal; no door that enough love will not open ... It makes no difference how deep set the problem; how hopeless the outlook; how muddled the tangle; or how great the mistake. A sufficient realization of love will dissolve it all."

Love is the answer! We are here to BE love; to share love; and spread love. Because love is what we are all looking for.

This is the second week in our four-week annual series, "The Songs of Life," where I take some famous popular song and extract from it a spiritual message: a message and a lesson for us living our lives in a greater way.

Last week we started with the 1973 hit by Elton John and Bernie Taupin, "Goodbye Yellow Brick Road." Today we're going to look at another 1973 song written by Kenneth Gamble and Leon Huff, made famous by the O'Jays. And that song is "Now That We've Found Love." Now in 1978, five years later, a Jamaican band called Third World did a reggae version of it, which is the one I knew. I saw them in concert, and it was fabulous. And then Heave D and the Boyz in 1991 did a dance version of it. And if you saw the movie, *Hitch*, it appears at the end of it. If you heard it, you would recognize it. But it is a powerful and an incredible song.

You know, this song really acknowledges the presence and power of love in our lives, and how we can make our lives happier; more joyful; and more positive and fulfilling.

And then it goes deeper and asks us a question about it. and so whether that love is a romantic love or it is an agape love or brotherly love whatever kind of love it is we find, the profound question this song asks is: What are you going to do with it? **NOW THAT YOU'VE FOUND LOVE, WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO WITH IT?**

And the message there is so powerful. But it is saying: **How are you going to put love into action in your life?** How are you putting love into action in your life? And how would you like to put it in action in greater ways?

Because love is an action. Sometimes we think that love is a feeling: you know that warm, giddy feeling where you have butterflies in your stomach. You get all excited to see somebody that you're attracted or connected to or just admire. And that is a nice feeling! It actually -- in the therapy world -- is called "limerence." It's that infatuation feeling. But everyone agrees that that's not love. It could lead to love, but it isn't. It is the feeling.

And so here's the definition that I found about love. It says:

"An intimate emotional bond that strengthens over time through a series of caring and supportive actions."

The way we build love in our lives -- the way we strengthen love -- is through action over time. And it is then that emotional and deeper connection of love is built.

You know, there was a study at Penn State that had 495 people who were given 60 scenarios and asked the question, "*What makes you feel more love?*" And they gave them different options of what people say or do. And they found that -- for most people -- small gestures of kindness and thoughtfulness and helpfulness make people feel more loved than even hearing, "*I love you.*" That cuddling with a baby or hugging someone or being there -- actually those behaviors absolutely are the thing that make people feel more loved.

And so the fact is: We can have an impact on the level of love in all of our lives by engaging in action. By doing something with love. Putting it into motion.

So this morning I want to talk about three things that this song teaches us to do with love to have a greater level of experience and fulfillment with love.

Let me just read you the first verse. It says:

***Let's give it a chance
Let it control our destiny
We owe it to ourselves
to live happy eternally***

And so the first thing this song teaches is: **YOU'VE GOT TO GIVE LOVE A CHANCE.** So where in your life are you not feeling as much love? Or you'd like to feel more love? And if you had all the access to God's full and abundant and unconditional love, how would you love the people in your life differently than you're currently loving them? How would you love bigger? Who would you love bigger? How would you love better? How would you love more abundantly, more deeply, more kindly, more patiently?

Because for us to love bigger, we need to open our hearts more and to allow ourselves to make new choices in how we love. Because while love is an action, and love is a choice, sometimes we don't make the best love choices. Like, one of the choices we make in love sometimes is that we close our hearts or we shut our hearts off to certain people. And not only do we close our hearts, sometimes we intentionally keep them closed and refuse to open them to certain people.

Another poor love choice is when we push love away or run away from love, thinking that we'll get hurt. So we kind of sabotage things so we don't get hurt.

Another one is making poor judgements. Like, have you ever been impulsive in love or foolish for love? I categorize those things as, *"It seemed like a good idea at the time."* [Congregation laughs] You ever have one of those? You know, there's a song they call "Looking for Love in All the Wrong Places." I mean, sometimes we can make some bad decisions. But here's how we can make some better choices when it comes to love.

The first one is to go to your heart and listen and trust your heart. **Trust and listen to your heart.** In the Shakespearean play, *Measure for Measure*, there's a line that says:

"Go to thy bosom, knock there, and ask the heart what it doth know."

I'll bet you our hearts are way more intelligent than we give them credit for. I know if we go deep down that we know more things than we let ourselves know. Sometimes just checking in with our bodies about: Is this the food the right thing for me? Sometimes our body will tell us. Sometimes in a certain decision: Is this the right decision for me? If we listen to our heart, we'll know. Is this the right relationship?

And so what we need to do is to begin to listen and trust with our heart. That is a powerful choice for love and for life is to listen to your heart. Your heart knows!

And the second one is: If we want to expand the level and have a deeper and greater level of love, **we need to be willing to risk being vulnerable.** To share more of ourselves. To share with the people closest to us what's really going on with us. Because sometimes we don't share. Sometimes we withhold.

Anybody ever overshare and feel like you exposed yourself and you felt really embarrassed? [Congregation laughs] Now that's embarrassing. And then the next time we think, "Oh, I'm not going to go there again!" But the truth is: With love, you've got to risk yourself. You've got to be willing to put yourself out there. And we're going to survive those little embarrassments, or those moments where we get a little more vulnerable, because the other risk is too hard -- of not opening our hearts fully.

You know, somebody once said if you want to taste the sweet fruit of life, you've got to go out on a limb, because that's where the fruit is! That we've got to be able to put it out there.

So I ask you: Where in your life are you willing to open your heart more and be more vulnerable? To risk and share more of yourself? To be honest with the people you know you need to be honest with about what's really going on with yourself? Whether it's in your primary relationship or a family member or at work or in church ... where is it that you're willing to open up and to open your heart to have a deeper connection with someone? Because we are more vulnerable and share more of our hearts, we're never going to have that fullness of the love that we all desire.

And sometimes we've created patterns in our lives where we don't share. Patterns where we withhold. And so breaking through it and taking that risk is a bit scary! But it's something we need to do. Emmett Fox says:

"Do it, trembling if you must ... but do it!"

Because the benefits and the rewards and the fulfillment are absolutely worth the risk. Love is an action. And so, if we want a new experience, we've got to create some new actions. Make some new decisions. What is one small gesture you can do for someone in your life? Some small way of helping them? Or something that's important to them? Sometimes just doing those small little things absolutely makes a huge difference.

So let's give love a chance in two ways: Number one, be willing to risk your vulnerability and share something in you with somebody that you know will be important for you to share. And the second one is: Pick a new action; pick a new choice of how you show up and share with some little kind gesture.

And so the second thing this song teaches ... The second verse says:

***Let's forgive and forget
Let no thought be your enemy
I've never felt so good
I'm happy happy happy
as any man could be***

You know the quickest thing to stop us from feeling happiness? That is holding a grudge against someone. Holding a level of resentment or bitterness of blame or hatred is the quickest way to deplete our level of peace of mind and happiness.

And when it says:

Let no thought be your enemy

Resentment and bitterness and blame and regret and shame are enemies of our peace of mind. They're enemies of our happiness. They're enemies of living the kind of happy and successful life that we all desire.

You know, love isn't easy; it's hard sometimes to even love the people we love! It's harder to love people we don't like! And it's hardest to love people we feel who have hurt us in some way. Because we hold on to that bitterness; we hold on to that pain.

Everybody makes mistakes; everybody hurts other people unintentionally and sometimes intentionally. And any and every relationship -- to stay healthy and even to consider being developed into a closer one -- requires compassion and forgiveness and understanding and listening and patience. It requires a willingness to work through some of those tough and difficult times and difficult disagreements. It's hard, but those rewards are absolutely huge and invaluable.

Anybody ever watch *Naked and Afraid*? [Congregation laughs] Anybody? Who wouldn't mind admitting it other than myself? [Congregation laughs] I'm a fan! I love it! And so basically what it is: Two people

who are strangers to each other -- usually a male and a female -- are dropped in the Amazon or some rough place. And they have no clothes and they've got to build a tent together and fire and water and all that kind of stuff and survive for 21 days. Twenty-one days!

So this particular episode ... And they have to work together! So this particular episode these two people couldn't stand each other; couldn't agree on anything! Were arguing from the beginning They made some little shelter thing; they only could last in there for one night, and then the guy went and just slept outside and threatened leaving. They argued; spoke over each other. It was horrible! They just could not stand each other. Seventeen days they did not speak; they just did their separate thing.

After 17 days, he offers her some food: a fish. And they kind of reduces some of the tensions a bit. And then they start talking and kind of own and admit that they were both a little stubborn. And they forgave each other. And over the next four days, they really worked through so much that, at the end -- and they finished it successfully, which looked impossible at the beginning -- they were actually closer than some of the people who got along the whole time. Because they hung in there and they worked through it.

Sometimes working through stuff in relationships -- working through stuff where we disagree -- instead of just splitting and not talking, or not seeing other, sometimes those things actually bring us closer. It helps us experience greater levels of love. **WORKING THROUGH DIFFICULTIES AND FORGIVENESS AND COMPASSION ARE SUCH IMPORTANT THINGS IN ANY AND EVERY RELATIONSHIP.**

The Book of Matthew, Chapter 5, Verse 24, it says:

"So when you're offering your gift to the altar, if you remember that your brother or your sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift."

And what he's saying is: If you've got resentment or bitterness, you're not going to feel God's peace. You're not going to be able to offer God very much when there's resentment and bitterness and anger still within us. We need to be ...

Forgiveness, I would say, is an incredible act of love, because it is giving up hate for love. It is giving up being caught in the past to free ourselves to move forward in the present and in the future.

Love heals through forgiveness. Love liberates through forgiveness. Love frees through forgiveness. And sometimes we think we need to know how to forgive. If somebody does something big -- "*I don't know how to forgive them for that!*" But the only thing you need for forgiveness: You've got to be willing!

Are you willing to forgive? Are you willing to be healed? Are you willing to feel yourself from the pain? God will heal it! The question is: Are we willing? Willing to love them, bless them, and release them to their highest good? And willing to love ourselves? And bless ourselves and release ourselves to our highest good?

Every one of us needs forgiveness. It is an aspect and dynamic of love in all human relationships. We need it individually; we need it as couples; as communities; as a country; and as a world. Because it is a healing and liberating dynamic and aspect of love.

And the final thing this song teaches ... The third thing to do is to **DEEPEN OUR LEVEL OF SELF-LOVE.** The line in the song says:

***Now that I've got it right here in my hand ...
I'm gonna spread it all over the land***

And the fact is: The only way we can spread love over the land is to make sure that love is in here. [Points to his chest] That we are filled in here with our own love; our own sense of appreciation and care for ourselves.

You know, the second greatest commandment is to love others as ourselves. That means loving ourselves is a commandment and a direction from God! That is a responsibility we have -- is to love ourselves. Self-love is a vital and important aspect of peace of mind and success and happiness.

In the Book of John it says, "*God is love.*" And we are created in the image and likeness of God, which means we are created in the image and likeness of love. We are here to love; to express love; and to experience and share and spread love.

So loving ourselves sounds easy. Shouldn't it be easy? But here are two reasons why it's not. One: Sometimes we are conditioned to believe that we're not good enough. That we are not worthy enough: worthy of love; worthy of success; worthy of greatness. Sometimes we think we are unworthy of God's grace and God's love. Sometimes we have a hard time seeing our own beauty and our own greatness and our own talent. We have a hard time believing in ourselves. And we'd rather spend time judging, criticizing and putting down ourselves; that makes it hard to love ourselves.

And the second thing that makes it hard to love ourselves is that we think, in our culture, self-love is narcissistic and selfish and egotistical and greedy. So it makes it hard; we feel guilty loving ourselves. It feels like it's a wrong thing to do. But it is a vital and an important thing for us to do. Because unless we are loving and nurturing and respecting and honoring ourselves, we limit our ability to love and cherish and help and support other people in our lives.

Another Shakespearian play quote from *Henry V* says:

"Self-love, my liege, is not so vile a sin as self-neglecting."

[Congregation murmurs] Neglecting ourselves is a horrible sin. It is an abomination against God, because God made us ... and made us good! And made us as vehicles to bring more light and love and beauty into the world. And self-love; self-care; honoring and cherishing who we are; knowing our value; and treating ourselves with love and support, compassion and respect is a vital thing for us to do our spiritual work. To live and enjoy our lives more fully and more freely.

Jesus loved himself! But there was no arrogance there! He was respectful and kind to others, and he was centered in the truth of who he was, without any doubt.

And so it's an important thing! So two things for us to help us with self-love. One is to do a little meditation where we even say the lines:

"I am created in the image and likeness of love."

Or:

"God loves me, and I love myself."

Just meditating on

"I'm made in the image and likeness of love. God loves me and I love myself. I'm created in the image and likeness of love. God loves me and I love myself."

Let's say a couple of those together. Let's start with:

"I'm created in the image and likeness of love."

Okay, let's say it together:

[With congregation] *"I am created in the image and likeness of love."*

Take a deep breath and just open yourself to that.

One more time: [with congregation] *"I am created in the image and likeness of love."*

Take a deep breath. And now:

"God loves me."

Together: [with congregation] *"God loves me."*

Again: [with congregation] *"God loves me."*

One more time: [with congregation] *"God loves me."*

Take a deep breath. And now:

"I love myself."

[Congregation]: *"I love myself."*

Again! [With congregation] *"I love myself."*

One more time: [with congregation]: *"I love myself."*

Take a deep breath.

And so the second thing we should do to deepen our self-love is to write down things that we appreciate about ourselves. It's so rare that we appreciate ourselves! Sometimes we can't take when other people appreciate us, let alone us appreciating ourselves!

So what I want you to do is either once a week or a couple of times a week, write down things that you appreciate about yourself. Maybe you appreciate that you're funny. Maybe you appreciate that you're kind. Or appreciate that you're smart. Or appreciate that you have a really beautiful smile. Or appreciate that you love your job. Or appreciate that you're a good neighbor; you're a good friend; you're good at parallel parking. [Congregation laughs] Whatever it might be! I have this obsession with parallel parking. You know, maybe you appreciate that you're intuitive. Maybe you appreciate that you're creative. Maybe you appreciate that you're good at knitting or juggling or bowling. I don't know what it is in your life!

But the question: What do you appreciate? Us appreciating ourselves; cherishing ourselves; and valuing ourselves on a regular basis actually opens up the channels for the flow of light and love and goodness and beauty in this world. Because the more we love ourselves, the more love we have to share with other people. The more we honor and cherish ourselves, the more we can love and honor and cherish others. And that's how we can spread love all over the world! It has to come from in here [points to heart] first.

You know, I love the line in this song:

***We owe it to ourselves
to live happy eternally***

So we owe it to ourselves to give love a chance! to be vulnerable and to think of some simple act and kind gesture to someone that we love. We need to give love a chance by forgiving and working through those tough things, because they will bring us closer together. We need to give love a chance by deepening our self-love: by doing a meditation of love and also taking time to appreciate ourselves.

Love is an action! Love is a choice! And the song says:

*Now that we've found love
what are we going to do with it?*

God bless you all! [Congregation applauds]

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