

LIKE A ROLLING STONE (Inspired by the Bob Dylan Song)

Week #5 of a 7-Week "Songs of Life" Series

Rev. Richard Maraj

Sunday, May 25, 2025

LYRICS to "Like a Rolling Stone"

*Once upon a time you dressed so fine
Threw the bums a dime in your prime, didn't you?
People call say 'beware doll, you're bound to fall'
You thought they were all kidding you
You used to laugh about
Everybody that was hanging out
Now you don't talk so loud
Now you don't seem so proud
About having to be scrounging your next meal

How does it feel, how does it feel?
To be without a home
Like a complete unknown, like a rolling stone

Ahh you've gone to the finest schools, alright Miss Lonely
But you know you only used to get juiced in it
Nobody's ever taught you how to live out on the street
And now you're gonna have to get used to it
You say you never compromise
With the mystery tramp, but now you realize
He's not selling any alibis
As you stare into the vacuum of his eyes
And say do you want to make a deal?

How does it feel, how does it feel?
To be on your own, with no direction home
A complete unknown, like a rolling stone

Ah you never turned around to see the frowns
On the jugglers and the clowns when they all did tricks for you
You never understood that it ain't no good
You shouldn't let other people get your kicks for you
You used to ride on a chrome horse with your diplomat
Who carried on his shoulder a Siamese cat
Ain't it hard when you discovered that
He really wasn't where it's at
After he took from you everything he could steal

How does it feel, how does it feel?
To be on your own, with no direction home
Like a complete unknown, like a rolling stone

Ahh princess on a steeple and all the pretty people
They're all drinking, thinking that they've got it made
Exchanging all precious gifts*

*But you better take your diamond ring, you better pawn it babe
You used to be so amused
At Napoleon in rags and the language that he used
Go to him he calls you, you can't refuse
When you ain't got nothing, you got nothing to lose
You're invisible now, you've got no secrets to conceal

How does it feel, ah how does it feel?
To be on your own, with no direction home
Like a complete unknown, like a rolling stone*

MESSAGE

So, this guy gets home from work one night and he hears a voice that says, "Quit your job; sell your house; take your money and go to Vegas." And he's wondering what this is. He's like, "This is crazy!"

So he just kind of ignores it. The next day he comes home again and hears, "Quit your job; sell your house; take your money and go to Vegas."

And day after day, he keeps hearing this. And he's wondering what this voice is: just in his head? Is he hearing things? Or maybe it's the voice of God! So night after night: "Quit your job; sell your house; take your money and go to Vegas."

Finally, after two weeks, he gives in and he decides to sell his house and quit his job, you know, and take his money and go to Vegas. He gets there and the voice says, "Go to Harrah's Casino." So, he jumps into a cab, goes to Harrah's Casino. He gets to the casino and the voice says, "Go to the roulette table." And he goes to the roulette table and the voice says, "Put all your money on number eight."

And nervously, he went and changed his money, got all his chips, put them all on number eight. And the ball is going around, just cameraing around. And he looks nervously as the ball just slows down, and it stops on number 21. [Congregants laugh] And the voice says, "Oops." [Congregants laugh] Okay.

So, how many people have ever lost so much and had so much go wrong in your life, it felt that your life was falling apart? Anybody ever have that experience? And so, how many people have ever had your entire life changed suddenly and unexpectedly? Anybody? And how many people have ever felt that your life was just like one struggle after another? Anybody ever have that experience?

You know, we all in life get rocked sometimes to the point that we feel devastated; to the point that we feel lost. Or that we're hurting, and we're in such disbelief, we literally wonder if or how we could ever bounce back; if or how we could ever rise again.

And today, we're in Week #5 of our seven-week series on "Songs of Life," taking famous hits -- famous songs that we love so much, that are familiar to us -- and extracting a spiritual message and some life lessons to help us live more full, more lovingly, more joyously, more abundantly.

Week #1 we did "Doctor My Eyes" by Jackson Brown. Week #2 we did "Daydream by The Lovin' Spoonful. Week #3 "Home" by Michael Bublé. Last week we looked at "Anticipation" by Carly Simon.

And today we are going to look at "Like a Rolling Stone" by Bob Dylan. It was a hit in 1965, and it is a song about an arrogant, privileged woman and her fall from grace. That she literally has everything and loses everything: her money, her possessions, her way of life. And her life and world is turned upside down. And she is trying to cope with all of it, especially being alone. And in the song, he mocks her. The singer mocks this character -- this woman -- and keeps repeating, this penetrating and haunting line:

*How does it feel, how does it feel?
To be on your own, with no direction home
A complete unknown, like a rolling stone*

And the repetition of that is kind of cold and brutal. This is not a song about love or joy. And you'll understand why in the context of what was going on in his life back then. He had just returned from a long tour in the UK, and he was feeling down and worn out. In fact, he was feeling angry, hateful, and resentful towards reporters and his fans, because he was trying to switch from acoustic and folk songs -- which is what made him famous -- to electric and rock songs.

And he was also angry and upset at himself, and really at the point where he thought, "*I'm going to quit music. I'm not going to play anymore.*" He was so angry. But what he did was he redirected and channeled that anger and hatred in writing. And he wrote 10 pages. This song was 10 pages long. It's been really cut down, and it's still six minutes long! He had a lot to get out. In a way, it was therapeutic. In a way, it was cathartic. It was a release for him to write an anger-filled song; a song of being vengeful and mocking another human being.

He makes fun of someone who's fallen on hard times. And what he'd said is that, "*I was really just needing some of the characters in my song, just to show the human folly of some of the silly and ridiculous things we do to ourselves and one another, and also the possibility of us seeing it and learning and changing.*"

This song is really a rebellious anthem, but if you look a little deeper, you'll realize it's a spiritual wake-up call for us all with a powerful message for us how to live more fully.

So, we're going to look at three life lessons and the spiritual message from the song, "Like a Rolling Stone" by Bob Dylan.

By the way, this was his most famous song. It would reach number two on the charts, which was the highest he ever had. And I found it interesting through that anger and writing that and releasing it actually revived his passion for music again.

And so, let's look at point one. The first thing I think it teaches us is to **LOOK AT OUR ATTACHMENTS AND OUR JUDGMENTS.**

*Once upon a time you dressed so fine
Threw the bums a dime in your prime, didn't you?*

And she is a wealthy socialite who has a lot of attachments. She's attached to her money, her possessions, her status, her power and the luxurious lifestyle that she has. She so identifies who she is -- her value, her worth, her image -- with all that she has. And there's nothing wrong with money; nothing wrong with possessions. There's nothing wrong with any of those things. It's when we cross that threshold, instead of just owning stuff, that our stuff owns us. That we literally believe that it is that stuff, that success, those achievements that make us who we are; that are the real source of our happiness, and security and sense of self and sense of worth.

And so, we so cling and are so attached to certain beliefs and images and ideas -- and believing it's our security and happiness -- we cling onto it even tighter, you know, when life gets tough and difficult. But what we don't realize is that our attachments and judgments literally block our joy. They block our peace. And they prevent us from knowing our true self: knowing our divine connection; knowing that inner peace and fulfillment. We literally limit our lives and our experiences when we are overly attached and when we are extremely judgmental.

She was quite judgmental of people who weren't wealthy and successful. And the fact is: we all have judgments. We all have attachments. Sometimes we're attached to the image that we like to present to the world. We are attached to the mask that we put on so people will like us. Sometimes we're attached to our need to be in control; we're attached to the desire for life to always go our way.

Wayne Dyer said that we're attached to limitations. And he said we're not only attached to our limitations; we will argue and fight for our limitations! Like, *"I'll never be able to do that! I couldn't own that!"* We sometimes passionately are so attached to the things we *can't* do, to the things we'll *never* have, to the things that'll *never* work. We judge ourselves and we judge others. And it is amazing how we limit ourselves not realizing it.

So, my question for you is: What are your attachments? What are your judgments? What are some of the beliefs that you're holding on to that are literally limiting your ability to live more fully? Where in your life are you stuck? And what is the belief that is keeping you stuck? And what is it holding you back that you're holding on to?

In the Book of Matthew, Chapter 6, Verse 21, it says, *"For where your treasure is, there will be your heart also."* And so, a question for all of us is: Where is your treasure? Where is your heart? What are the things that you are so attached to that you so believe, without it, you could not be at peace or you could not be happy?

In Philippians it says, *"But wherever were gains to me, I now consider loss for the sake of Christ."* And what it's saying is: when we have all these things that we think are gains or successes or achievements or money, we think it's a gain ... but, in fact, it's a loss spiritually, because it keeps us distant from God. You know, we're further away from feeling a sense of peace or joy or fulfillment ... or at least true peace, true joy and deeper fulfillment.

So, my question for all of us is: What are you attached to? What are you attached to to the point that you think you could not be happy without it? And suppose you lost that something you think you couldn't be happy without. Do you think you could find peace? Did you think you could find happiness? Do you think there could still be meaning for your life and deeper levels of joy?

This song, I think, invites us to go deeper; to really look at our attachments. What are the things that we're holding on to and the beliefs that are so limited? They're literally blocking our ability to live as fully as we can live and be who we truly came here to be.

Buddha said, *"The only thing we lose are the things we try to cling to."* And it's those things we're trying to cling to. There's nothing wrong with any of them, but we can't let them be the source -- or what we think the source of our happiness is. I think this talk really triggers and invites all of us to look a little deeper into ourselves. To look at where do we have strong attachments and judgments that are stopping us and blocking us from living as fully as we can.

The second thing I think it teaches us is to **ADMIT OUR STRUGGLE AND FEEL OUR PAIN.**

How does it feel?

How does it feel ...?

I love how he used that line so many times. How does it feel? Because the truth is, in our culture and society, we're not very good at sharing or allowing ourselves to feel our feelings. Because feelings are a bit uncomfortable and so uncomfortable are they -- or so uncomfortable we believe they are -- we will do anything to avoid them. We would rather lie and pretend that all is well rather than be honest and vulnerable and admit that we're hurting, or admit that we're struggling, or admit that we're lost or feeling hopeless.

You know, I think that men have a harder time sharing their feelings, but I think *all* human beings have a hard time sharing their feelings. How many people know what emotional intelligence is? EQ. You know, we could be successful in all our business and all the ways of the world, but you know, sometimes ... EQ is: how well do you handle your emotions? How well are you in touch with your emotions? How well do you manage all the emotions that we feel and experience through the course of our day and our lives? And also, how well do we manage and handle the emotions of others?

Anybody ever been with someone when they started crying? And the first thing you say is, *"Don't cry; don't cry; don't cry."* Now, crying is a good and healthy thing and we think we're trying to comfort them, but the truth is: we're trying to comfort ourselves. It's because *we're* uncomfortable with someone else's emotions, as well.

Emotions aren't easy. *"How does it feel?"* Well, first you've got to give yourself permission to feel. And another thing that stops us and makes it hard for us to share and feel our feelings is that we don't want to look like we're weak or wimpy. And sometimes that is an issue. And so much so that I think our culture ... we put a pressure to be positive always to folks in our lives.

You know, when you see somebody, they'll say, "How are you doing?"

"Oh, I'm good. I'm good." You know, *"I'm fine. I'm fine."*

And you're *not*, but you're saying it. And we're just kind of pretending that. You know, sometimes it's, *"I'm good, and I'm getting better. I'm wonderful. I'm fabulous."* You know, *"I'm okay; everything's good!"* And we know that it's not.

You know that expression: *"Fake it 'til you make it"*? You're like, once in a while, that's okay ... but that is really not a healthy way. Because it just perpetuates not acknowledging and not feeling and recognizing and owning our own feelings. We have this tendency to want to numb ourselves from our feelings or hide from our feelings.

The author and therapist, John Bradshaw, said, *"You can't heal unless you're willing to feel."* And suppressing our emotions is like trying to dam a river. Eventually, that water is getting through, and there's going to be a flood. And so, it is an important thing for us to learn how to allow ourselves to feel our feelings.

Megan Devine, a grief counselor, said, *"It's okay if you're not okay."* We live in a society, again, that puts pressure to be positive and expects us all to be happy all the time. And that, if we're not okay, we think there's something wrong or bad or something to be embarrassed about, or that that is a sign of weakness. And it is just not true. She says, *"True healing comes not from fixing pain, but from holding a space to feel that pain; holding a space to honor and have compassion for that pain."*

Feeling our feelings is not something we should be ashamed of. In fact, it's healthy, and it's important for us. And it is a part of the process of healing and reconnecting to our true wholeness.

Rumi said, *"The cure of pain is in the pain."* And the fact is: if we're alive, we're going to experience some pain, some heartache, some loss, some sadness or depression. You know, disappointments and disagreements, agreements, anger. There's a whole range. Life is an emotional experience.

Jesus wept. Jesus was angry. Jesus was frustrated. He felt the emotions of being alive as a human being. And we shouldn't run from them. And we shouldn't hide from them. And the best way to deal with them is to face them and feel them.

And so let me ask you a question. How well are you in touch with your own feelings? Let's do it on a scale of 1 to 10. On a scale of 1 to 10 -- 10 being highest. How in touch with your feelings are you?

And how in touch with the feelings of the people in our lives are you? Or how comfortable are you when the other people in our lives express emotion? This is an important thing.

Here's an exercise we should all practice. And it is just to sit quietly and then ask ourselves: What am I feeling today? What were some of the major feelings I felt through this day? And if something arises, just do a little journaling on it ... not trying to fix it or change it; just make some space and room for you to feel what you feel.

"How does it feel?" is an invitation, I believe, to be real and to be authentic and to be emotionally honest. And it's okay to not be okay. I think the second point of this song is trying to show us to be willing to admit that we're suffering; that we're struggling and to allow ourselves to feel our feelings. It's one of the healthiest and most important things we can do to improve our relationship with ourselves and our relationship with others.

And the final one is to **CHOOSE TO GAIN AND NOT TO LOSE FROM THE SITUATION**. To me, when anything traumatic or difficult happens in our lives, there are three outcomes: it either brings you down; it either leaves you unchanged; or you could utilize it to help lift you higher.

And so, we get to *choose* to gain and not lose in whatever situation that we are going through. You know, pain is not something to avoid; it's something to listen to. It is something to pay attention to, because when we get humbled by life, life is trying to get our attention. And we need to give ourselves and life -- and especially the pain -- attention.

We need to get to that place where realize and admit that, *"I am powerless to solve my problems. I need help."* To turn to a higher power; to surrender our own struggle, our own resentment, and our own way of doing things. To let go; to allow a Higher Intelligence and Power to come through. You know, we have to get to the place where we're teachable and we're willing, and we're no longer resistant. That we want the best; that we want the highest and best.

And we sometimes we need to be stripped away of all the things we believe and have before we get to that place of surrender and that openness and willingness to be changed and transformed. I love his line when he says:

When you ain't got nothing, you got nothing to lose

So, when there's no more blocks, no more walls. That when we are literally stripped of all of them, it's then our heart is open. It is then that that we are willing.

You know, somebody said, *"Sometimes losing everything is a start of gaining what truly, truly matters."* And what truly matters is our spiritual awareness; awareness and the connection to our spiritual nature. That is the thing that matters! You know, to gain, we need to also have hope: hope that everything's going to be all right; the hope that it's all going to work out for the best; the hope that things can get better.

That's what today's affirmation is about: *"All things are working together for my highest good."*

It is a statement of hope and trust that this process -- it may not be great right now, but it will unfold and work out for the best.

Jean de La Bruyère said, *"Out of difficulties, grow miracles."* Amazing things happen, but we must choose to gain and not lose from our experiences. We must choose to allow it to help us, not hurt us, and to not define us, but refine us.

The Book of Romans, Chapter 5, Verses 3 and 4 says, *"Rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance; and endurance produces character; and character produces hope."*

Oprah Winfrey, as everybody knows, was abused and abandoned in her youth. And she decided she wanted to gain from it. Her tagline is, "Turn your wounds into wisdom." That she literally transformed that experience. She decided to gain from it, instead of lose from it.

Eckhart Tolle had a life kind of life-altering experience where it felt his life was falling apart. And he decided to gain by using his breakdown for a breakthrough.

So, everybody, I want you to think of your biggest recent struggle and ask this question: What might this be trying to teach me? What is the message that my soul is sending to me through this? And how can I gain and extract the best from this experience? I think it's important for us to not waste our suffering, because it is there for a reason to help us grow, to help us awaken and to help us turn our breakdowns into breakthroughs.

"I choose to gain from this experience."

Together: [with congregants] *"I choose to gain from this experience."* Take a deep breath with that.

"All things are working together for my highest good."

Together: [with congregants] *"All things are working together for my highest good."* Take a deep breath.

"I am stronger, wiser and more grateful because of this."

Together: [with congregants] *"I am stronger, wiser and more grateful because of this."*

"I choose to gain from this experience."

One more time: [with congregants] *"I choose to gain from this experience."*

Jesus walks into a bar with his disciples and he orders 13 glasses of water from the bartender and turns to the disciples and winks. [Congregants laugh]

What do you call a row of rabbits hopping backwards? A receding hairline. [Congregants laugh]

Did you know that 90 % of bald men still own a comb? They just can't part with it. [Congregants laugh]

Okay, so when I think of how poorly those jokes just went, what comes to mind is: I choose to gain from this experience. [Congregants laugh] And we all need to pray for my jokes.

So, in the song, he is mocking this woman. But spiritually -- if you go to that spiritual place -- I think what he is doing is not mocking, but he is prodding. He is encouraging. He is inviting us. *"How does it feel?"* is asking us to feel our lives fully. And to own our journey; to own our struggle. To confront our pain and not be afraid of it, and allow it to liberate us so we can reclaim our spiritual power and our spiritual magnificence.

Last year, someone introduced me to ChatGPT; said, *"You could do this for your talks."* And I tried it, and I didn't like it at all. Rev. Stacy is more of a techie, and she's into all that stuff. And she had told me the other day she actually used it to write a poem.

And then, last night I was thinking, *"Wow; that's cool."* And so I put in my talk and said, *"Take my talk and make it a poem so I can end my talk with it."* And so, here's what my notes and ChatGPT came up with:

*When the palace crumbles and the road is gone
When silence greets you like a lonely song
Don't run, don't hide, don't fix or fight,
Just sit with your soul in the tender night.
The fall is not failure; it's freedom begun
A breaking wide open into the one.*

*So feel every tear. Let each ache be real.
For what breaks you can also heal.
Like a rolling stone, you may feel unknown
But the journey within is the path back home.*

[Congregants applaud] All right. Me and GPT. [Congregants laugh]

Anyway ... So, the invitation in this song is to look at our attachments. To look at the things we're holding on to and so attached to -- that we so identify with -- that it's actually hurting us and blocking our joy. And same with our judgments. And allow ourselves to admit that we're struggling. And allow ourselves to feel and honor our feelings and our emotions. And, finally, to choose to gain and not lose. Don't waste the pain; allow it to lift us to a higher place and truly reclaim our peace, our love, and our joy, and our spiritual magnificence.

Those are the three lessons in the spiritual message from the song, "Like a Rolling Stone."

God bless you all.

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