

THE SPIRIT OF FATHERHOOD: EMBRACING LIFE'S LESSONS

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Well, good morning everybody; it's great to see you! So many people out. Thank you for coming today!

My talk title is "The Spirit of Fatherhood: Embracing Life's Lessons." It's really about how we can apply spiritual lessons to life's challenges. Anyone having any life challenges at the moment? [Congregants laugh] I love that it was a collective group laugh. Yeah.

I want to start just off the bat, though, acknowledging that -- while I know some of us had exceptional dads that were supportive and loving and involved and everything we did -- I also want to acknowledge that I know that there are some in the room who also had dads that didn't show up in the way that you needed them to show up. And so, I just want to acknowledge you right now and know that I see you; that all your feelings are okay around this day.

And I encourage you -- and I encourage really all of us -- to maybe bring to mind someone who is a father figure to you who *did* show up in the way that you needed; who did comfort you, love you, support you and was involved. Maybe it was another relative or a teacher, a coach. But we can bring all of these men who showed up in our lives in these ways -- who supported us from childhood to adulthood or throughout adulthood. And maybe they weren't related to us, but they showed up in that capacity for us. So just bring those individuals into your heart and mind today, as well, as we go through this Father's Day.

So today, I'm focusing on three dads: my own dad, because I had direct experience with that. My husband, Juan -- who's the father of our two sons -- because I got to observe that. And then taking a metaphysical look at the Jesus/God relationship. Traditionally that's looked at as Father/Son. So, in Unity, how do we look at that metaphysically so that we can bring those teachings into our lives on this Father's Day, as well? So, those are the three folks that we'll be looking at today.

So, starting off with my own father. My own father taught me a few life lessons that I've carried with me. First is the art of packing. [Congregants laugh] The second is the art of being a teammate with your partner. And the third was the art of the bad joke: the dad joke. [Congregants laugh]

So, to the first point -- in **THE ART OF PACKING**. You know, whenever we went on trips, my dad packed the trunk of the car like it was like a Jenga puzzle or any kind of puzzle. I mean, he would get eight suitcases packed in the back of that little Dotson. Anyone remember Dotson? [Congregants laugh] Small trunk! We'd all be standing around going, "*There's no way he can do this.*" And man, did he not just get it perfectly set in there with even maybe probably some extra space in the trunk.

And I also remember I went on a trip to Europe. It was a high school-related trip. And they only allowed us to take one bag for two weeks. [Congregants groan] Oh! I know! I can barely take one bag for a weekend!

So, I was in my room struggling and my dad saw me and he came in. He said, "*Here; I've got a secret for you.*" So he started -- do you all know this? He started rolling up ... You roll up your clothes. See, this group, too! Same with 9 a.m.; they all knew the secret, as well! So, you roll up your clothes. And you roll up your pants, your shorts -- everything! -- and then it lines up, and then it layers ... And you get so much more into that bag. It was amazing! I got a lot into that suitcase. I was pretty impressed.

But ultimately, what the art of packing taught me was about **how to have patience**. How to -- when you have a challenge in front of you -- how to pause and think things out for a minute. Don't just throw

things willy-nilly, but to pause. It helped me to see that challenges could be looked at in a different way; in a creative way.

Because I might look at something in life -- anything in life -- and think, "*Well, there's only one way to do this*" or "*It will only work if I do it this way.*" But what I realized -- and what I learned -- was that, through packing that suitcase or that car, is that we can come to challenges with an openness to see the situation that it can be resolved maybe in a different way. Maybe I can come to this situation -- a challenge with another person; we're not talking about luggage anymore. [Congregants laugh]

I can come to this situation -- this challenge -- and I can approach it differently than I would before. I can do it creatively. How can I see this differently? What if, instead of seeing it as something difficult, what if I looked at it as a puzzle to put creatively together? Maybe there's another way. Wow!

But in order to approach something differently, we need to *see* it differently. So again, before that comes the pause and the patience. And then with an openness that we can do something differently -- and that it's okay to do it differently -- then we can approach it differently. Then we can think differently. We can communicate differently. We can build differently. We can solve differently.

And then that's where the magic of it all coming together: where we can get the most out of the space that we have. That's where it becomes **the lesson in being patient and using your divine nature as a creative being -- because we're all creative beings -- to creatively solve whatever challenge is before you.** And you can do so with an open mind ... and I would add an open heart.

Another thing I learned from my dad is **THE ART OF BEING A TEAMMATE WITH YOUR PARTNER.** He and my mom have been married together 56 years -- almost 57. And I remember at one point in my own marriage -- I've been married over 27 years. So, somewhere there in the middle, I was upset with my husband, Juan. Can't imagine why.

But here's the thing: I was talking to my dad, and I was telling him how upset I was. And you know what? I don't even remember why I was upset with Juan. I don't remember what the situation was, because all I remember from that was my dad's response. And he said, "*Stacy, in marriage, you're on a team. And in a baseball game, sometimes your teammate strikes out and sometimes they make a home run. But you're still a team. So, you keep playing the game; you support each other during the wins and the losses.*" Wow!

And we can apply this to other important relationships in our lives: with our children; with our friends; with our co-workers; with anyone -- any person that we invest a lot of time with. What if we came to that situation -- that relationship -- and we really asked ourselves: Do I want to build connection or do I want to be right?

I spoke on just that, alone, a couple of Wednesdays ago. Do I want to build connection or do I want to be right? And when I'm the one who struck out -- like this morning when I forgot my iPad -- and I called Juan to drive 25 minutes here to bring it to me ... So when I'm the one who struck out, how do I want the other person to react? Don't I want them to be supportive and understanding and loving towards me? How do I want them to react when I'm the one who's in a similar situation?

Let's be teammates. **We can be teammates.** And not just in our personal relationships ... But what if we take a wider scope? Take a step back, and we approach *all* of our interactions with other people in our community in this way? In our church community; in the Phoenix community; in the state of Arizona; in our country. What if we all came and said: How can I be a team player? How can I support the other person? How can I support the other people around me?

And we'll talk about Jesus in just a minute, but Jesus was all about coming to others with a heart of love; with a heart of forgiveness. How can I come to another person with an open heart? What if we all walked in the world like that: with an open heart? And we said, *"We're on the same team. I want us to succeed. I want us all to succeed."*

How can we go from conflict to connection with one another? It starts with our attitude. That, instead of seeing the other person as the "other," instead we recognize them for what they are; who they are. That we are one. That we're one! That we're both expressions of the Divine. We're both expressions of God.

That, instead of something to fight against -- to waste time and energy blaming -- instead we could be spending that time supporting and loving and winning at life together. Together! Wow!

And just take a moment and think: What does that feel like to know that someone has your back? That there's other people who have your back. Can you feel the peace that comes over you? And to know that you can give that to someone else in return.

We can be teammates. Be a teammate.

And in a strange segue, the third thing that my father taught me was **THE ART OF A BAD JOKE**. So, anyone who knows my father knows that he always has a joke on hand. But the thing is: he only really has four or five jokes, but he's told the same four or five jokes over, like, the last 20 or 30 years. [Congregants laugh] But he's always ready for a joke.

And the beauty of jokes -- even the ones that aren't so great; the ones that make us groan; the ones my friend Rev. Maraj tells on a Sunday ... [Congregants laugh and applaud] But they do make us laugh! They do lighten our hearts. They lighten our mood, right? It brings us together in a connection of laughter and silliness. And even the collective bad joke groan, right? It brings us together. It lightens us up.

And laughter has been known to lower our stress levels; to boost our immune system; to ease physical pain; and, in some studies, it even suggests that laughter can help us live longer. What we do know for sure is that it really feels good in that moment, doesn't it?

So don't be afraid of the bad joke. **Don't get caught up so much in the heaviness of life that we forget to make time for -- incorporate -- laughter and lightness in our life.** That's what we need to remember: that we don't have to be so serious all of the time. We can have a bad joke.

And here's the interesting thing about my dad telling the same four or five jokes all the time. So, my husband, Juan, about eight or ten years ago was -- he's already laughing -- was traveling down a California highway ... maybe too fast. And he got pulled over by a highway patrol. And the highway patrolman said, *"Well, if you have a good joke, maybe I'll let you off."* [Congregants laugh]

Now, remember my dad has about five jokes. Juan remembered two, and one was not appropriate. [Congregants laugh] So, he told the one other joke that he could tell and he remembered. And lo and behold: he got off the ticket! The guy said, *"That was a great joke; be on your way. But slow down!"* So you never know; a joke could get you out of a speeding ticket, as well. [Congregants laugh] Not going to promise; I'm just saying.

Speaking of Juan ... So, Juan's my husband of 27 years and the father of our two sons. We have two boys. One's 25; he lives in Florida. The other one's about to turn 21, going on like 51. He's an old soul.

But Juan was a wonderful parent to parent with; to watch be a father. Because he also brought great humor and goofiness into our family. And he also taught me as the other parent that gentleness carries more weight than might or than anger.

And so, on that first point of lightness and, again, laughter and goofiness ... We have a lot of laughter in our family. And it really is because of Juan. He was always -- still is -- really silly with the boys. He was never afraid to be silly. And he would always ... Every Christmas Eve, he would make these videos trying to capture Santa Claus. Now it was almost like, you know, just him in the dark making noises [congregants laugh], trying to capture Santa. And he never did.

But it captured their imaginations. And they grew up throughout the year -- the three of my boys -- making these crazy, ridiculous videos together. And, you know, now we have both boys: one has a film degree and the other is getting a film degree. And I really think it's because Juan really encouraged that creativity.

Yesterday we had our six-year-old nephew who's in New Orleans; he sent his first movie to us about his dog that he did a voiceover for. And Juan in the family chat said, *"Well, we need part two."* Part two came out. *"We need part three."* Part three came out. This morning, part four came out. So, he's encouraging the next generation, as well.

But here's the life lesson: again, **DON'T TAKE LIFE SO SERIOUSLY.** I mean, sometimes life needs to be taken seriously. But also, don't make it serious all the time. Purposely, intentionally, play; joke! Get creative; creativity keeps your mind young; keeps your spirit and your soul young. Bring lightness and silliness into your life.

We get so burdened by our responsibilities and caught up in the news and what's going on. And we forget to create fun for ourselves now. It's not something that's in the past; it's not something we got to hold off 'til the future ... But right now we can start creating a lightness and a joy in our lives.

And there were times when conversations may have gotten heavier, challenging, or, you know, anger may have started coming up. And by shifting the energy -- not by ignoring it, not by glossing over it or making fun of it -- but there were times where it was appropriate just to shift the energy into something silly. Make a silly face, right? And it can shift that energy and help resolve whatever the issue is.

Sometimes -- not all the time! -- but you really can resolve a standoff with a silly face and a hug. It's sort of like saying, *"We're going to agree to disagree"* and now a heart connection with the laughter and that physical touch of a hug.

Again, just a reminder, don't be serious all the time. **Create fun, which makes life more enriching and enjoyable and allows for heart connection with the other people in your life.**

You know, the boys still call him for advice: financial advice, insurance advice. Our older son just bought his first car all on his own; asking for advice for that. So, when we do make these connections, it creates exactly that: a long-term heart connection. So creating joy, fun; get creative.

And one of the biggest lessons I learned from Juan is **HOW MUCH MORE EFFECTIVE GENTLENESS IS VERSUS YELLING OR ANGER.** I tended to be the parent who got angry much faster. But Juan always stayed calm and present; gentle. You knew you were safe. The boys knew they were safe. They could express their feelings. It was okay to make a mistake.

I really got to observe how much more powerful and impactful it was for him to stay calm and supportive in times when most parents would have yelled or had a high temper shut down the child, or they shut down; situation became combustible. But instead, that a calm, loving approach allowed the boys to feel and confide in him and get advice from him again, even today. And, as adults, they also approach others this way, because you can be more impactful long-term, especially by having an open heart and a calmness that you bring into a situation, rather than carrying a big stick.

So how do we even apply that, not just in our personal relationships, but on a wider scale?

Here's the thing, everyone, my friends. Others are watching. Our children are watching. Even if you don't have a child at home, they're watching. They've got iPads now! The idea of meeting a combustible moment with a calm, centered, loving presence ... What would that look like? How can I be that?

Every Sunday morning, every Wednesday night -- at the end of every service -- we sing, "*Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me.*" That means: Be peace. Don't just sing about it and then yell at the guy who cut you off on the freeway. But whatever is in front of you: let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me.

And that becomes a ripple. Your non-aggressive reaction actually affects others in ways or in ways that you may never know, but it does. You meeting the moment in peace and in calm: that will make an impression on somebody. And they will then make a different choice on how they react to a highly emotional situation in the future. And ultimately, you keeping the peace allows you to keep *your* peace.

So, we can ask: How do I want to be in this moment? In whatever challenging moment conversation is in front of me, how do I want to be in this moment?

The Dalai Lama said, "*If you wish to experience peace, provide peace for another. If you wish to experience peace, provide peace for another.*"

So have your feelings. It's not that Juan never had feelings, but he walked away and he cooled off. And then you come back and you enter into the communication with an intention to understand the other person; to support them; to love them through everything, including the mistakes they may have made.

And I started to think about, again, Jesus' teachings on forgiveness and love. And so, in Unity, we look at the Bible metaphysically, meaning beyond the literal, beyond the physical. A spiritual viewpoint.

And metaphysically, **JESUS MEANS THE PRINCIPLE OF BEING.** The principle of being: meaning existence; life energy; the I AM identity.

Remember, God said, "*My name is I AM; call me I AM.*" So, if God's name is I AM, then YOU ARE. You are the Divine expressing. You are life energy expressing. What do you want to put behind your I AM?

"*I am angry*" or "*I am understanding*"?

"*I am going to punish you*" -- because we can punish adults to adults, not just adults to kids, right? "*I am going to punish you*" or "*I need to win here*" or "*I am listening*"? I'm listening for my heart; I'm listening as my divine self.

How do I want to be? Meaning how do I want to emulate Jesus, who we look to? Who showed love and compassion and forgiveness? That was his being. What is *your* being? What is *your* being?

And here's what Charles Fillmore, Unity's co-founder, wrote in *The Revealing Word*. He says, "*Jesus knew God as unlimited love; as ever-present, abundant life; as wisdom and supply. As God's son, he knew he had access to every blessing; to all wisdom, love, and help of this Father God Mind. He knew words were living and carried conviction, which produced immediate results.*"

Your words are powerful. You are a powerful creator, and you create thoughts. You create your life with your thoughts and your words and strong emotion. You are a strong creator!

From the Book of John, also, it says, "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*" So, if Jesus knew God as Love, then in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was **with Love** And the Word **was Love**.

We also read in the Book of John, "I and the father are one," meaning Love and I are one. God; Life; the Creative Energy of the universe and myself: we are one. We are one!

So, what kind of life are you going to create for yourself?

See, what I've learned from the fathers in my life is that you can create a life in which you bring creativity and patience and laughter to life to the most challenging moments in life. You can bring that creativity; that patience. You can bring that laughter to help raise the vibration; spread the healing possibilities while you connect with the people in your life. You can turn towards others and be teammates to create a positive loving experience for everyone involved. For *everyone*.

You can create a life of joy, of play, of lightness and share that with others. And we need that now! We need to be sharing a lightness and a joy with others right now. And you can walk the earth heavy-footed or with a wise, gentle, calm lightness. You can walk with love. You can walk with love.

You create what you are; what you are being. Choose to be the Christ consciousness. So, I invite you to step into your divine identity as the expression of God that you are. And, in doing so -- and as Jesus knew -- experience a life of unlimited love, wisdom, abundance and blessings. And so, on this Father's Day, we celebrate the spirit of fatherhood by embracing the creative divine force within all of us.

Happy Father's Day!

Blessings, everyone. Thank you.

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