

## LOOK FOR THE GOOD

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So, the other day, I went to my fridge and got out a can of LaCroix. If you're not familiar, it's a bubbly water that has a little bit of a fruit flavor; my favorite is lime. And so, I was going about my business, going about my day drinking my LaCroix. And then I sat it down somewhere, and I couldn't find it again.

Now, I don't know about you, but I really can't stand it when I lose things. So, I was like, *"Okay; I'm going to find this can of LaCroix."* So, I went into my office; wasn't there. Maybe I left it in the kitchen; nope, not there. Went into my bedroom; no can of LaCroix. All right, so now I'm motivated. I go into the bathroom and I look across the entire countertop; not there. Go into the bedroom; I look at both nightstands, scan the top of the dresser. No can of LaCroix. So, I go into the kitchen. I look across every countertop, at the table, look across the whole thing. Go back into my office again. I look across my desk; I look across my credenza. No can of LaCroix.

So, I'm going about my day, and I really want that LaCroix ... but I'm too stubborn to get a new one, because I know it's here somewhere. [Congregants laugh] When all of a sudden it dawns on me: I wasn't drinking a can of LaCroix; I was drinking a bottle of Perrier. [Congregants laugh] So, I go into my office and right there -- right where I would expect it to be, in the center of my desk right next to my laptop -- is my ice-cold bottle of Perrier.

So, you see, I was looking for a can of LaCroix. Because I was looking for a can of Lacroix, when that bottle of Perrier was sitting right there, I couldn't see it! I couldn't see it because I wasn't looking for it.

So, it turns out there's a scientific explanation for what happened to me that day. [Points to the base of her skull] Right here at the base of your skull, there is a bunch of neurons called the reticular activating system, or RAS for short. And the RAS is the gatekeeper of our consciousness. It determines what information that we take in through our senses makes it to our awareness.

So, all day long, through your senses -- what you hear and what you see and what you feel -- you are absorbing billions of bytes of information. More than the world's fastest supercomputer could process in any reasonable amount of time. Everything that you see and hear and feel can't make it to your conscious awareness. So that's where the RAS comes in. It makes a choice -- unconscious to you -- it makes a choice of what makes it through to your awareness.

The RAS is the reason why, if you've ever searched for and researched a new car and decided, *"This is the one that I want,"* all of a sudden it seems like everybody is driving your dream car. Or why, if somebody tells you about this cool new gadget that you're really interested in, the next time you pull up your phone you're seeing ads for it. And it's the reason why when I was looking for a can of LaCroix, even though I saw with my own two eyes that bottle of Perrier, I didn't see it.

So, it seems pretty important, right? This reticular activating system? And it got me thinking: What if we could train our brain to look for the good?

I imagine if our brain was constantly bringing goodness into our awareness, quite a few things would change. We'd probably be happier in general, because we'd be seeing good stuff everywhere we looked. We'd notice more opportunities that align with what we want in our life. We'd probably complain less and have less negative or anxious thoughts. We'd carry less judgment for ourselves and for other people. I think we would experience increased creativity and more inner peace.

And that's just what would change inside our own brains; inside our own inner experience. Out in the world, if we were constantly looking for the good, we would probably find that communication with

other people would be easier. That our relationships would improve. That we'd have more collaboration and more progress towards our goals. And that more good things would be happening in our lives. All by priming a small group of neurons -- the RAS; the gatekeeper of our consciousness -- and teaching it to look for the good.

So, before I go on, I want to talk a little bit about what I mean when I say the word "good." Because sometimes when I hear the word "good," I think the opposite of "bad." Or I think that it's some moral bar or disclaimer. And that's not what I mean when I'm saying "good."

In the Ubuntu tradition, they have this practice where, when a thought comes into their minds, they classify it one of two ways. Some thoughts they categorize as "unhelpful." Ever had an unhelpful thought? [Congregants laugh] You know, those ones that say, *"I'm not good enough."* *"I can't do it."* *"I shouldn't have said that."* *"She shouldn't have done that."* Those are unhelpful thoughts, right?

You might call them negative thoughts or you might call them bad thoughts. But I like the word "unhelpful," because those types of thoughts are unhelpful in us showing up as the full expression of the light of God that we were meant to be. They are unhelpful for us living into our truth and what we want to accomplish in this world. So that's one type of thought: unhelpful.

The other type of thought they call a healing thought. Wouldn't it be nice to constantly be thinking healing thoughts? The thoughts that tell me, *"I have been through something harder than this before; I can get through this too."* The thoughts that tell me, *"I am prosperous and abundant"* and, *"I am the light of God shining in the world."* Those are healing thoughts.

So, when I say the word "good," you can decide that something as good as if it is aligned with the vision that you want to hold for yourself and for the world. By finding the good in a story, I am finding the ways in which it is an example of or contributing to that vision that I hold.

It reminds me of Unity's first principle, which says: *"There is one Presence and one Power active as the Universe and as my life: God, the Good."* And when we say God the Good, we don't mean good as the opposite of bad; we mean absolute unimaginable goodness.

Sometimes in Unity you'll hear people say, *"It's all good, because it's all God."* But sometimes things don't look so good, do they?

So, one Presence and one Power tells me that there is no outside force working against God. That, when I see a situation and I struggle to see the good, it's not because God isn't there, but because that goodness is just covered up. It's hard to see. So, it's not that there's some extra evil force winning out. But, just like darkness doesn't have its own power -- it's merely the absence of light -- when we can't see the good, the good is still there. We have to be the ones to look for it and draw it out.

So, this is relevant for me, because sometimes I can be a little bit nitpicky. [Congregants laugh] When my husband and I first got married, I discovered that he had this habit. He would walk into the kitchen and he'd open the cabinet door and he would get out whatever cup or plate he needed. And then he'd go about his day. [Congregants laugh] And the cabinet door would just sit there open. [Congregants laugh]

Now, maybe it didn't take some of you as long to learn this as it did me ... but pointing out those things in a marriage doesn't exactly generate those warm, fuzzy feelings. Right? [Congregants laugh] So, it's not helpful. It is an unhelpful thought.

Have you ever had someone who was doing their best to help try and help you improve by constantly pointing out all the ways that you were falling short? Helpful or unhelpful? So, I know. I know being nitpicky and pointing out people's flaws is very unhelpful. But dang it; it's hard! Right? [Congregants

laugh] Because I see the cabinet door open up. I see the kids' dirty socks left on the living room floor. I watch that driver cut in front of me without using his turn signal. And I read the news headlines.

So, here's a question for you: What if, instead of looking for all the ways you or your loved ones or the world need fixing ... What if, instead, you focus on all the ways that they're already good?

Anyone have kids? What if, instead of focusing on and putting your energy into all the things they have left to learn and all the ways they need to prepare themselves for the next grade or the next phase of life, and putting your energy into that, and helping them ... What if, instead, you put all of your energy and focus into their goodness? Into their talents and their uniqueness and the things that make them *them* and the light of God expressing as them? And what if, by doing that, you not only saw more of it, but you drew that light out even more and all the rest just took care of itself?

Looking for the good isn't about ignoring the not-so-good stuff. It's not about spiritually bypassing it or burying your head in the sand. Looking for the good is about where you are directing your energy.

When you study or research something, you spend time with it. You read it. You listen to podcasts about it and watch YouTube videos about it. And you ask chat GPT about it. Right? Just like that car example: you research a new car; you put your energy into it. When you spend time with something on a daily basis, and are focused on it, you're giving your energy to it. Whether it's focusing on building a new habit or a new relationship, or focusing on whatever TV show you're binging right now. When you direct energy towards something, you are telling your reticular activating system: *"This is important to me. Show me more of this."*

A group of people were organizing a protest, and they went to Mother Teresa and they said, *"Will you march with us against war?"*

And Mother Teresa said, *"No. I will not march with you against war. But if you organize a march for peace, then I will be there."*

How much time do you spend fighting against what you don't want to see, instead of directing your energy towards what you do want to see? How much time do you spend pointing out the cabinet doors being left open, instead of looking for and thanking your spouse for all the ways they show up for you? How much energy do you waste being frustrated about the toys left lying on the floor, instead of soaking in the fact you only have a few more summers left before they go off to college?

Looking for the good isn't just about seeing more of the goodness that's already there; it's about creating more good in the world. In Unity, we call this the Law of Mind Action, and we define it as, *"Thoughts held in mind produce after their kind."*

This is the mechanism of what some teachers may call "manifestation" or "the Law of Attraction." That, as we put our energy into something, we create more of it. So, by choosing to look for the good, we're not only seeing more of the goodness that's already there -- that just didn't make it to our conscious awareness before -- we are also tapping into that spiritual power to create more good.

Unity Minister and author Rev. Ellen Debenport says, *"Your mind is a garden. Your thoughts are the seeds. You can grow flowers, or you can grow weeds."*

How much more greatness, how much more joy, how much more purposeful living could you draw out of others if you consistently looked for the good in them? How might your life change if you consistently looked for the good in yourself?

Last week I was at the Unity Convention with leaders and Unity ministers from all around the world. And the very last night of the convention, we sat -- a group of about a dozen of us -- in the lobby of the hotel

until 3 a.m. And what we did was: we all went around and shared what our intention -- our wish is -- for ourselves, for our communities, and for the world. And then it went around and every person in the circle shared the gifts and the talents and the strengths and the wisdom that they saw in each other person. What a blessing it is to have a community that consistently looks for the good in you and you in them!

Here at Unity Phoenix, I'm part of a small group called NextGen. [Some congregants whoop] Some of them are here tonight. [Laughs] It's a group for people in their 20s, 30s and 40s. And we do all sorts of fun things like play pickleball and board games and do book clubs. But when you boil it down to its essence, I think that's the power of the NextGen Group, and really the power of Unity of Phoenix and all of our groups here: is that it is a coming together of like-minded and like-hearted people with the intention of seeing the good in one another.

What a great place to be. Is it not?

Okay, so do you want to learn how to train your brain to see the good?

From Philippians, Chapter 4, Verse 8: *"Whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report -- If there is any virtue or if anything is praiseworthy -- meditate on these things."*

Now, typically when we talk about meditation in Unity, we're talking about the type where you sit silently and you try and clear your brain and just become this empty vessel. In this case, meditate means something different. In this context, meditate means, *"I'm going to take a specific thought or word or idea, and I'm going to dwell on it. I'm going to look at it from all these different angles, and I'm going to sit with it. And I'm going to allow it to just permeate into me so I can find something in here."* It's a way to let wisdom bubble up from within you.

Som neuroscientists say it only takes 10 minutes a day to change your RAS. So, five minutes in the morning and five minutes before you go to bed dwelling on goodness. It could be something good that happened to you that day; something you're grateful for. It could even be a good new story that you read on something like Upworthy. To really sit with that story; imagine how it feels to remember what that was like. To really sit and soak in the goodness.

Just 10 minutes a day! Any gratitude practice that you do consistently will rewire your brain and help train your RAS to show you more of what you're grateful for. It all comes down to: what you appreciate, appreciates.

Another practice you can use to train your RAS is by paying attention to those thoughts. When those unhelpful thoughts come up, you can catch them and say, *"Well, that's an unhelpful thought,"* and then choose a new one. Or if it's too hard to remember that, what I usually do is go, *"Oopsies!"* [congregants laugh] And then pick a different thought to think. Pick a healing story. Pick something that is in alignment with the truth of who you are and who you want to be in this world. So, if you notice yourself -- as you go through your day -- wanting to point out that open cabinet door, you can choose a different thought, instead.

We can and we should grieve the things that are happening in our lives, in the lives of our loved ones and in the world. We have to make space to feel those emotions: to allow them to move through us and be released. So, feel the anger; feel the frustration; feel the doubt. But then, once it moves through, you get a choice: *"What am I going to do? Who do I want to be how will I show up? What will I choose?"*

This past Sunday, Rev. Richard started a four-week series on *The Let Them Theory*, a new book by Mel Robbins And so the "let them" theory -- no spoilers! -- but the "let them" theory is all about recognizing

you can't control what other people say, do or think ... so let them. Let them do what they're going to do. But the second part of that theory -- and the key -- is let them and then let me. Let me choose. Let me decide.

Will you decide to look for the good? Because by looking for it, not only will you see more of the goodness that is already there, but you will create more of it in the world.

The good in me sees and honors the good in you. Namaste.

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