

RADICAL SELF-AWARENESS & DEEP SELF-ACCEPTANCE

Week #2 of a 5-Week Series Based on the Robert Brumet Book, "Living Originally"

Rev. Jimmie Scott

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So, I'm going to begin with a personal acknowledgement of Bob, who -- or Robert, I should say -- who wrote this book. It's quite an amazing book and I'm really sort of amazed that it wasn't on the bestseller list. But then, after reading it through for this service this evening. I think I have an idea. It's long and complicated stuff, but it's good stuff.

And I had the privilege of working with Robert at the Unity seminary when I was the chaplain of the seminary. And so, I got an opportunity to have a number of chats with he and many of the other teachers that were on staff there. And also got a chance to check in with myself and to determine what it is that I truly believed and to stand in my own truth. And sometimes that wasn't a pretty experience there in that seminary, but it was also one of many major highlights in my career.

This lesson this evening is based on chapters #3 and #4 of the book. Chapter #3 -- the first practice -- is titled **RADICAL SELF-AWARENESS**. And if you read the book, he stated that radical self-awareness is, in short, deep self-awareness. In other words, it is comprehensive. It goes beyond our appearances. It goes beyond our personality. It goes beyond our habits. It goes beyond our way of showing up in our lives. It goes beyond our titles that we accumulate in our lives. It goes beyond our practices. It goes beyond our feelings. And just on and on and on. It is a deep practice.

In his words, radical self-awareness is a practice. Personally, for myself, I would define it as a way of being. It's a way of being present to myself. It's a way of adjusting. It's a way of adapting. It's a way of evaluating different circumstances and conditions. And, at the same time, it's a conscious attempt to understand what is taking place in our heads and in our hearts ... and in someone else's heads and their hearts. And all of this is taking place at what we might call "warp speed," which speaks to the amazing capacity that we have as human beings that we are sometimes unaware of or maybe even uncomfortable with.

He said that, if we are conscious enough to understand that no moment, no experience, no definition, no feeling, no life, no failure, no *anything* has any permanence, that we would then be more open and receptive to acknowledging what incredible beings we are. But that's the tall task: to be that aware.

Some of the monks who have studied meditation for years are still struggling to reach that level of being present to what is going on in their lives and in our world and they live in a place and in the time we're in where they're not confronted with all the noise that we have to deal with in our outer world here. So, it's some deep stuff.

And that can be exciting. And it also can be maddening. Because, at the core of all of this -- I use that idea of core kind of loosely -- this is important to how we live out the rest of our lives, no matter how young we are or how old we are.

So, from that standpoint we have to be hyper-vigilant in our lives and about what's going on in our world, as Robert stated. He said, "*It is easier to do than it is to describe.*" And I'll agree with him on that. Getting into this state of being is easier to do than it is to describe.

I remember a time early in my career when I was asked to be a part of training the police department in Nashville, Tennessee. What had transpired at this moment -- and I was pretty early into my time in ministry -- is a police officer had been called to one of the projects in the city because of the disturbance. And, when the officer arrived at the place he was called to, a lady came out the door. She was a small

petite lady about 4'8" tall; in her 70s; in her house coat; with a butter knife in her hand. And she came running towards the police cruiser and he rolled the window down and told her to drop the knife. And, in her hysteria, she paid no attention to him. And he yelled again, *"Drop the knife!"* And she still paid no attention to her. When she got about four feet from the vehicle, he fired his service revolver and killed her.

The community was enraged ... as well as they should be. And, for some strange reason, I get a telephone call and I was asked to come and meet the chief of police. I got to the meeting and there were two other people there, and they were from another church in town.

And he said, *"I need your help."*

And I was thinking to myself, *"Help? What can I do to help?"*

And he said, *"We have got a community problem that we need to solve. And I need you three people to be willing to talk and train my police officers how to not be so impulsive."*

I'm thinking to myself, *"What is this man talking about? How in the world are we going to be able to teach police officers -- or anyone, for that matter -- how to not be impulsive?"* I'm speaking primarily of myself, I was overly impulsive then.

Long story short, we ended up having to do that. I don't know how many years we did that. Mary probably knows to the day and to the month. [Congregants laugh] But I learned a lot about how impulsive we are as individuals. And I also learned a lot about how deeply ingrained ideas and concepts are in our collective heads, and how they often get in the way of our ability to communicate freely and openly.

And from Robert's perspective as a psychologist, he is suggesting that we have become that way because we are not open and receptive to being still long enough to actually hear or to feel what is taking place in the moment. And, after years of meditation, I'm inclined to believe that he is spot on.

I think it's hard to vocalize what our sense of "me-ness" -- our sense of self -- is. And any time that self -- sense of "me-ness" or that sense of self -- is threatened in any way, we immediately go on the defensive. And as a result of that, communication breaks down. And when communication breaks down, everything else around it begins to break down, as well.

And this takes place in the workforce; it takes place in our relationships; it takes place in marriages; it takes place with our children ... Because we've got these preconceived ideas about rightness and wrongness and what should be and what should not be.

And most of us, if you ask us -- just curiously ask us -- if we are that way, we would say, *"No."* But in every circumstance that I can remember in my life that was of importance to me, I know personally that I've gone into that situation with a kind of tightness; a nervousness. You could even call it an arrogance, even. Because I know what I think I know. And so, I'm on the defensive when I go into a situation, because I think somebody's going to try to convince me of something.

And when that's taking place in our heads or in our hearts, we literally are incapable of having a decent conversation. Because we've already made up our minds what the conversation should entail. So what Robert is suggesting is that it's important for us to truly know who we are ... so that, if that knowing who we are is ever truly challenged, then we have the calmness and the solidity of being to be able to deal with it competently.

And we all have that skill set in ourselves. But we also are more accustomed to acting out automatically in whatever is taking place in our lives or in our world.

Robert says that there's a level where this understanding of ourselves takes us to a place of where we might consider ourselves as -- what I'm going to use my words here -- the capital "I." I know there's an "I" in me that is able to withstand pretty much anything that comes up to challenge me. But my task -- my inner task -- is remembering that in the moment of the heat of the situation.

If you've ever been in sales, you know what you've got to sell; you know how it functions; you know everything about it. But when it comes to convincing somebody to buy it, you start to get a little uncomfortable. And so, you go into that sales presentation kind of uptight. And the person who's in the conversation feels that uptightness, and so it never goes the way you want it to go.

It's that way in relationships; it's that way in arguments; it's that way in pretty much every facet of our lives.

This is finding out: What does this sense of "me-ness" mean to me? Who am I?

When I was a child, I pretty much knew who I was. And when I was challenged, I was always fairly comfortable standing in who I was, and doing that most of the time with ease and grace. And then, as I picked up more knowledge and I picked up what I considered to be more external learning, that internal process became more externally focused. And so, then I began to see every challenge as a threat to my existence. It's a hard way to live. And we see that in politics; we see it in business; we see it in religion, even.

One of the toughest challenges I dealt with in my experience of going to ministerial school was not being ordained with the rest of my class members. We were all gathered together the day of graduation, lined up all 40 some of us. Go through the line; each person is called out -- "Ordained." "Ordained." "Ordained." "Ordained." Get to Jimmie Scott: "Licensed."

It was like: *"What does that mean? What does that mean?"* And what it meant was: there was a perception -- possibly true, possibly untrue -- that I was not ready. And so, it was a shock to my system. And I went home, and I prayed about it, and I said to myself, *"That is what it is. That is what it is."*

Got out of school; got a job; begin my job. I was on the job just a few months, and then I get the call from the police department. And I don't know how much time we spent there. It was in an inordinate amount of time working with the police department. You put 200 police people in a room and it's a challenge, because there's this thing called "law and order."

We had a big discussion about that one day and as everybody went around the room and they expressed their thoughts about law and order. I listened and I listened deeply.

When it came my turn to speak about law and order, I said, *"I'm a law and order proponent, too. But for me, it's about spiritual law and spiritual order."*

And so, there was a quietness in the room. And then when the discussion began again, it began with more openness to hear. And it wasn't magical. The next day we were back to the old habits. But we'd always come back to spiritual law. And slowly and gradually, over time, we all got it. And we were able to perpetuate some change in our community that I think lasted for quite some time.

I read somewhere that the chief retired a few years ago. And I thought about calling him. And then I thought, *"That's another life. Another life."*

We are all different in the way that we perceive our world. Stephen Covey said that the single most important thing in communication is to be able to hear what isn't being said. [Repeats] To be able to hear what isn't being said.

I can hear that in this room today. And I can hear it on a multiplicity of levels, because we're all capable of doing that. There may be folks who said, "*This is meaningless.*" And that's okay! There can be other folks who said, "*This is meaningful.*" And that's okay.

And one of the hardest things for us to grasp is that we have to do that day in and day out habitually. And we're equipped to do it, but we don't trust ourselves to do it. And the reason we don't trust ourselves to do it is because we have learned not to trust ourselves to do it.

We can argue with that, but it's a fact. The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place. I don't know how many times I've spoken to someone and then have them repeat back to me what I said, and it's entirely different. Happens with me and my wife all the time! [Congregants laugh]

Happens with me and my children -- when they were children all the time and as adults. Because we go on the defensive. And I do it! So I'm not trying to elevate myself. But it's a practice that we can and should move beyond.

This is another interesting statement by Christopher Morley, probably my favorite. He says, "*There's only one rule to being a good talker -- and that's learn to listen.*"

Learn to listen. Learn to listen when you're having a conversation with others. But it may be more important to learn to listen to your own inner voice. And while listening to that higher aspect of yourself, to also have the confidence in its value. Because that inner voice speaks to us from authority. Its power -- its intuitiveness -- is what makes us capable of living originally, which is the title of this book.

And in order to do that -- to communicate on this vast rim that I believe defies our imagination -- we can't complicate it with external noise. And we can't complicate it by trying to think that we already know what's going to happen or what's going to be said.

I'm a big Bible student. And I studied Moses' two words that he repeated almost *ad infinitum*: "I AM."

And then he'd take it to another level and say, "*I AM that I AM.*" "*I AM.*" "*I AM that I AM.*"

In this moment, I am what God created me to be, what I was created to be. And I am that all the time. Whether I want to publicly acknowledge it or not, I am there.

Not only am I that, I am more than that. And that's taken it to an even deeper level.

When I was growing up in rural Kentucky, I used to remember the preachers saying, "*My help comes from above.*" And, as a child, I naturally thought this help was coming from God. Because in my childhood mind, God lived in the heavens, the air, the sky.

But as my understanding has unfolded, my idea of my help coming from above is when my consciousness is elevated or lifted up; my help coming from that higher consciousness, from that higher plane of my existence.

So **DEEP SELF-ACCEPTANCE** -- the other part of this talk -- is about getting to that point where you can accept yourself, no matter what is going on around you or in you or to you. Because you are more than that.

And it has nothing to do with any kind of self-image that we may want to project. And it's not about comparing ourselves against somebody else or some ideal or some standard. It's about deep self-awareness. Deep self-awareness that, no matter what your life is all about, you don't have to let external forces shift that one way or another, if that makes any sense. It's an unconditional acceptance of who you are.

So, even though we all live in community with one another, to certain degrees, we are individualized expressions of God.

And there are churches where that would be offensive. But I've been studying these scriptures for probably 50 years ... and not just studying, but analyzing and studying other relatable works. And I can't see anything that would deny that reality.

So, who are you? Who do you think you are?

I think the beginning of self-acceptance – and I'll use the word "beginning" cautiously – is an ongoing practice. It's never done. And that can be exciting. [Laughs] Or it could be challenging. I choose to see it as exciting. I really, really choose to see it as exciting. And my hope for myself is that I'll live to see it exciting for another 15 or 20 years. It's my hope, my challenge, my job -- is to figure out how to do that and maintain this sense of expectation and excitement, day in and day out.

Robert's "deep acceptance" is not meaning that I believe my perceptions are absolutely right, or that they are superior to others' perceptions.

He said, *"You can't use the practice to justify self-righteousness. You can't use it to justify your anger or to make someone else wrong."* He said, *"Radical self-acceptance is not an attempt to live some idealized image of calmness and serenity."* He said, *"Instead, it's a practice to teach us how to accept ourselves at a level that we were never capable of accepting ourselves before."* And he said that process generally adds a level of honesty that all parties are receptive to.

You know, I go back to that community meeting with the police officers. I've never been a fan of police departments or police states or any of that. But in those months that we spent together, I began to see them not as police officers, but as fellow men and women. And so, it shifted my consciousness to the point where I'm able to accept people at a whole different level. And it's served me well throughout my 42-plus years in this business.

He states, *"There is wisdom within each of us: wisdom that knows how to respond perfectly to every life circumstance."* He said, *"Allow that wisdom to emerge, because initially you may feel a bit awkward or vulnerable, but if you stay present to it, eventually it gets easier and easier."*

I'll add to that -- that it gets easier, but it never gets easy. Never gets easy.

And interestingly, most of the known history of humankind has been filled with attempts to make life easier. Think back to all the different inventions that we have. They're all created purportedly to make our lives easier.

I love my automobile, but it's made my life a living hell! [Congregants laugh] I want it to run and never break down. And every time it breaks down, I go into my stuff about it and then I think I want to buy a new car. But I know what happens when I buy a new car. I get new car payments. And then I want to whine and moan and complain about new car payments. [Congregants laugh] It's comical, but it's also very true that we create a lot of stuff in our lives.

I want to leave with a story that was written by a blog writer. Her title is "Expert Editor." This article is written on: "Making Peace with the Life I Didn't Get to Live, and Learning to Love the One That I Actually Have." I don't know about the grammatical aspect of the title, but it's an incredible article that's simply written. She says:

"I used to have a fantasy about my other life. You know the one: the parallel universe version of my life; where I made different choices; where I took bigger risks; said 'yes' when I should have said 'no' and 'no' when I should have said 'yes.' In another life, I was braver; I was wiser; I was more

adventurous. I traveled more. I loved more freely. I spoke up more boldly. In that life, I didn't waste three years in the wrong relationship. I didn't turn down opportunities because they were too scary. I didn't spend my 20s playing it safe, instead of following dreams that seemed to be too big for someone like me. For years, I carried this alternate version of myself like a secret. She was my measuring stick; my reminder of all the ways I'd fallen short. Every choice I've made looked smaller next to the choices she would have made. The cruel irony is: while I was busy mourning the life I didn't live, I was barely present for the one I had.

I think most of us do this to some degree. We all have a story -- who we could have been; if only we'd been different, braver, luckier. We carry these phantom selves alongside our real selves, letting them cast shadows on our actual experiences.

But here's what I've learned. Making peace with the life you didn't get to live isn't about resignation or giving up on dreams; it's about something much more radical. Something much more radical: learning to see the beauty and the purpose and the life you actually chose, even when it doesn't match the story that you thought you were supposed to write."

Living originally. That's what it's about.

Before I say goodnight, we also say this topic is worth thinking about. And it's worth exploring. And I believe it's worth practicing.

As any good therapist would say: *"Don't be too hard on yourself for being yourself."* Let me say that again. Don't be too hard on yourself for being yourself. Just be yourself. And be yourself as long as you can. And practice as long as you can. Because there will probably come a time when you won't remember any of it. [Repeats] There will probably come a time when you won't remember any of it.

Mark Twain said, *"When I was younger, I could remember anything, whether it had happened or not."* [Congregants laugh] He said, *"But my faculties are decaying now, and soon I shall be, too."*

[Chuckles] That's what it comes down to. But it's all good. It's all good.

Groucho Marx says, *"You're only as old as the woman you feel."* [Congregants laugh] Take that any way you want. Watch out, Mary!

God bless, folks. Thanks for coming out.