

ASK THE MINISTER

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MESSAGE:

Well, good morning again, everybody! It's so good to see ... Everyone's so smiley today! I love this! Hello, hello, everyone!

So, I love this Sunday also, because the message, "Ask the Minister," was created by those of you who submitted questions to me. So, thank you to the congregants who submitted some questions. I appreciate that. I asked folks to submit spiritual questions for me to answer, and I will tell you ... I have been ... personally, I've been doing this series since 2019. This is my second year here at Unity of Phoenix doing "Ask the Minister." But since 2019, I have to say this is probably the most challenging questions I've received! So, well done, you! [Congregants laugh] I like a good challenge! I like growth! So, well done! Well done!

Well, I also always like to start with Unity's foundational teachings. Because, while we do honor all paths to God, Unity does have its own specific teachings. And essentially, it's our five Unity principles. These are the foundation of Unity's teachings.

Now, the five Unity principles came about by Connie Fillmore. She was the great-granddaughter of Unity's co-founders, Myrtle and Charles Fillmore. And she was asked to summarize Unity's teachings for a "Daily Word" magazine article in 1989. That would have been the year Unity celebrated our 100th anniversary. So, she put together five principles which, again, now offer us guidance and staying in tune with our own divine nature and are our foundation. We keep referring back to these.

So, I thought I'd quickly review those five Unity principles. The first one is: God is everywhere and always present in every circumstance. This divine energy underlies and animates all of existence. So, there is good -- there is love -- everywhere. And with that note, that Unity teaches not that God is a person or a being outside of ourselves -- or in the world calling the shots like a chess game -- but really that God ... other words for God would be Spirit, Divine Love, Divine Principle, Presence, Creative Life Force. And is this creative energy that is within and around us and everything.

Our second Unity principle says: Human beings are innately good, because they are connected to and an expression of Spirit. So, because God, the Good, is good, and you are an extension of that -- an expression of that God -- then you, too, are good. And that reminder that you are not separate from, but you are one with this God energy. It's not outside of you; you are actually plugged in and a part of it.

Our third Unity principle is: Our thoughts have creative power to influence events and determine our experiences. Our thoughts, words -- with strong emotion underneath -- create our experiences. We're creative beings. We're creating things all the time. So, we can create a garden; we can create pie for Rev. Jimmie ... [Congregants laugh] And we can create our lives: how we feel about them; how we go about them. We're creative beings. How do we want to use that creativity?

And then the fourth Unity principle is that: Prayer and meditation connect and align us to our own spiritual nature. So, we get quiet. We turn within to remind ourselves and to connect with that divine identity that is there; that we are; that is within us.

And then Unity principle number five is my favorite, because it says: It is not enough to understand spiritual teachings. We must apply our learning in all areas of life, incorporating them into our thoughts, words and actions. In other words, it's not enough just to learn these spiritual teachings or principles, but we have to apply it to our daily life.

So, if you think about a challenge maybe you're having right now with a person or a situation, how would you apply these five Unity principles? Okay, so here's this challenge before me. And so first I'm going to take those first two Unity principles. I'm going to remember that there's absolute Good in the universe and in my life, and that I am a loving expression of the Divine. That I am an expression of God -- of this creative Life Force -- and that that other person is, too (if there's another person in the situation).

And if I forget that, then I turn to Unity principles three and four. I release those thoughts that are not spiritual truth, and then I align my thoughts, words, emotions with spiritual truth. I spend time in prayer and meditation that help align me with and remind me of my spiritual nature.

And now that I'm reminded of this, now I go out and I live it. That's Unity principle number five. Let me go out and be loving awareness. Let me go out and be peaceful presence. Let me be God in action, God in the world. Let me show up and be the work. It's all of our interactions, not some of them. It's not just a lofty idea, but it's actually a verb: it's about going out and being the spiritual teachings, the spiritual being that you are.

So, that's the foundation of Unity, all of our key teachings.

So, with that in mind, let's jump into our questions.

Here's our first question: When someone close to my heart makes a statement that is disturbing to my soul, what spiritual process can help put me at ease?

So, I've been working a lot lately with the pause -- taking a breath; pausing. If someone is upsetting me -- I'm upset with them -- I stop and I take the pause. And then I start to get curious. You know, what is this bringing up in me? What is this triggering in me? What feeling from my past or past experience is arising within me?

If the person's yelling at me, maybe suddenly now I'm going back to my five-year-old self where a teacher yelled at me. Huh; interesting. Okay; this old pain is coming up. Let me look at that. See, we can see it -- whatever those feelings are -- as an opportunity for our own growth.

And then maybe I can comfort that past version of myself, whether that past version of myself was 50 years ago or five minutes ago. Let me take a moment to comfort myself in where I am right now with those feelings.

And then we can start to move into forgiveness. Asking the question: And when have I done that? Have I snapped at somebody I love? Yes. I can offer a little bit more grace and compassion. Have I cut someone off? You know, I'm all upset they've cut me off on the road. I'm like, "*Arrrggghhh*." Oh, wait, I've also done that. I can offer some grace and compassion.

Or in an interaction with another person, remembering that they're expressing from their current level of healing and awareness in that moment. It's not making it right, but it's just allowing ourselves to open up our hearts to forgiveness, to compassion.

And then to communicate, if appropriate. So, when you're calm, when that person's calm -- and it's safe to do so to speak to the person -- and calmly share with them how their words hurt you. If it's not safe to do that, you can journal; you can talk to a minister; you can talk to a therapist, a trusted friend. Sometimes I like to put a chair in front of me, imagine talking to that person, just so you get to move and express and process all those feelings that are coming up.

And also, we hold on to our healthy boundaries. See, we teach others how we want to be treated. So, if it happens, it happens again, we can calmly say, "*You know, I need to walk away until you can speak*

respectfully to me. I'll be happy to continue this conversation when my boundaries, when my heart can be honored. But I don't let my friends talk to me that way."

I even taught this to our sons -- one who's here, he'll remember this ... That's why I've got to be honest with you all. I've got witnesses. [Congregants laugh] You know, when they were in that age -- like older child/preteen, and they're really testing the limits of how far can I go with being respectful or kind to mom -- and I would say the same thing to me: *"I'm sorry, we're going to stop this conversation right now, because I don't let my friends talk to me this way. I'm not going to let you talk to me this way. So, when you're calm and you can talk to me lovingly and with respect, we can come back to this conversation."*

But see, we hold those healthy boundaries, because we teach people. And what is that doing? It's respecting the Divine within me, and it's respecting the Divine within that other person. Because ultimately, would I allow God to be treated that way? Would I treat God that way? Would I treat Jesus that way? Would I allow Buddha to be treated that way? No.

You know, some individuals -- I think this also needs to be noted -- they're in our lives for a lifetime, a season or a chapter. Not everyone is there for our entire story. It's true. We can have two truths at the same time. I can love this person and I can outgrow the relationship. Or I can love them and expect to be treated with kindness and respect. Honoring that expression of the Divine that you are. Because, ultimately, treat yourself and others with the respect you would of God as the Divine. Because that's who you are; that's who they are.

Okay. Question #2: How can I spiritually overcome the guilt and shame of my husband's passing?

Okay; so first, from my heart, I want to say I'm sorry about your husband's passing. My heart gets heavy when I think and hear these things. And so, I'm sorry to hear this. I'm also sorry for anyone else who has guilt and shame around a situation that has occurred in your life.

And I don't have a lot of context here. So, I'll just say this: that ultimately this is about forgiveness: forgiving yourself. So often we think about forgiveness as forgiving another person, but really remembering ourselves in that forgiveness equation. And I would say: start by challenging the belief about yourself. Right now the belief is, *"I am guilty, I am shameful."* But, again, would you say God is guilty? God is shameful?

See, as an expression of the Divine, those labels don't belong to you. Unity teaches that I AM is God's name in human form. So, what are you putting behind your I AM? Whatever labels you put behind yourself is what you're applying to God: that infinite Wisdom of the universe, that Divine Love within and around all of us.

Rev. Joel Osteen of the big church down in Texas there, he said, *"Whatever follows your I AM is going to come looking for you."* [Congregants laugh] What do you want to come looking for you?

Yeah, so offering yourself compassion and grace: *"I did the best I could with the information, experience, and wisdom that I had at that time."* Or, *"I wish I could have done it differently and, at the time, I couldn't."* And, again, then letting your present self embrace that past version of yourself. Really seeing that younger version of yourself -- again, whatever timeline that is -- and just reminding yourself, *"I love you. My essence is love. I'm loving awareness. I am pure consciousness."*

And so, letting your current self comfort that past version of yourself: *"It's okay that I forgot my spiritual truth, but now I'm remembering. In this moment, moving forward, I'm remembering my spiritual truth."*

Forgiveness really is for us. It's about releasing all those emotional weights and resentments that we carry. Because the more we focus on the past, the less we're living in that present moment. So, when we

forgive, we release ourselves. We release that heavy weight, and we open up space to enjoy the beauty and the magic of life -- of the right now moment; of this moment.

So let yourself grieve. Grief comes in waves: after recent loss, around anniversaries, around the holidays. So, allow grief. And also allow forgiveness, compassion, and offer yourself grace. When we hold ourselves with loving kindness and compassion, then we're able to be more present to the gifts that life has to offer to us today right now.

Question #3: What is the difference between Spirit and Soul?

This is actually a question we get when we test for licensed Unity teachers, and even ordination. Because Unity teaches the three-fold nature of humankind. The three-fold nature of human kind: spirit, soul, and body.

So, the body is that physical self. Right? It provides the answers to us through our five senses and our physical experience.

Soul in Unity is the sum total of conscious and subconscious mind. In other words, the full spectrum of awareness. Now, usually, culturally, we hear soul and we think of one's spirit. But in Unity, soul is that full spectrum of awareness, including our personality and our ego. And we say we can work with our ego and personality to be more spiritually awake. We can work with the ego and personality. Because if we didn't, I wouldn't be standing up here right now as an introvert expressing my personality! So, we can work with our ego and personality to be more spiritually awake, and an instrument of the Divine. That's our soul: our evolving awareness.

So, spirit in Unity is who we truly are; it's what we truly are. It's a true nature. It's that eternal, invisible, unchanging Spirit that never dies. Spirit is our oneness with that creative Life Energy; it's that pure consciousness -- God. There's no separation from this Life Energy/God, because we're part of it. We are it. We're expressions of it. Rev. Eric Butterworth -- famous Unity minister -- said, *"God is in us, not like a raisin in a bun, but like the ocean in a wave."*

So, the invitation is to nurture all parts of ourselves. And we can do this each morning. And we can ask, *"How can I care for my body today? How can I nourish my mind and soul today? How can I remember and express that I am Spirit today?"* So, Unity's three-fold nature honors our humanity, while affirming our divinity. Great question!

Number #4: multiple questions within one, but all around the same topic. It says: **Does Unity teach that Jesus the Christ physically rose from the dead on the third day, or is this story considered only as a metaphor? Does Unity believe that it was necessary or was necessary for Jesus to die by crucifixion in order to fulfill God's plan and save us? How should we understand his crucifixion and resurrection?**

So, in Unity, we view the Bible -- we study the Bible -- metaphysically, meaning spiritually, esoterically. We take a spiritual interpretation, not a literal one. Not a physical or literal interpretation, but a spiritual, metaphysical interpretation of the Bible. We also look at it from a history perspective: what was happening at that time and that moment in history. And Unity also sees the Bible as a symbolic story about the evolution and growth of human consciousness.

So, when we read Bible stories -- interpret them -- we do that metaphysically and look at the historical context, and then we ask: And how does this apply to my life? Because whether we're teaching the youth or we're teaching adults, it's a living curriculum. How does this live in me? The answers are already there within you. It's just a matter of pulling them out. It's all there.

So, since the question was also around Jesus ... So Unity sees Jesus both as the man from Nazareth as well as that Christ potential, that divine potential within all of us. Right? What I can do, you can do also.

And since these questions are around Easter ... Well, Easter invites us to turn within to our spiritual selves, to our Christ selves, our divine selves. So metaphysically, crucifixion is about crossing out the error thoughts: those limiting thoughts, any belief that we are separate from this infinite love, God. And resurrection is rising into -- rising up into -- Christ consciousness. So, we have a resurrection every time we transcend those limiting thoughts and beliefs. We have a resurrection every time we remember and express our divine identity: that Christ within; that Divine within. And then we can experience a new way of being when we rise above our human limitations -- our human thinking -- and express our divinity.

The number three, metaphysically, symbolizes the trinity. But in Unity, we look at that as mind, idea, expression. Or divine order. That's how everything comes into being. It's the creative process.

So, we rise from the dead whenever we awaken from our spiritual sleep. When we choose thoughts -- Truth thoughts, spiritual Truth thoughts -- like, *"I am Loving Awareness. I am Divine Love. I am Presence. I am pure consciousness."* When we rise in thought from separateness to oneness.

And that empty tomb reminds us to roll away: roll away our self-imposed limitations and obstacles; step into our light; and express our divine nature. And, because our true nature is divine, there's no need for God to "save" us. In Unity, we don't teach original sin. We teach original goodness. You are born of original goodness. That's our second unity principle. Our second Unity principle affirms our inherent divinity, because God is good, we are expressions of that God/goodness, and we are inherently good. So the only "saving" needed is usually our human self from our human self. [Congregants laugh]

But Easter is ultimately a story of hope. That, no matter where we've hidden our light, or how we've hidden our light, we can raise our awareness around the limitations we've placed on ourselves; cross out -- roll away -- the negative thoughts, words, and actions; and affirm our true spiritual identity. We can rise into new awareness, new possibilities, and a new life.

And so, the message -- the Easter message -- really, is to shine your light ... not just at Easter, but every day. To allow the divine Christ consciousness to rise in you and to be expressed in the world: the Christ in you, the hope of glory. Be it. Be the divine spark. That's what the Easter story asks us to do.

And our last question, **Question #5: How can we keep positive and not let the negativity in others about politics or wars or the atrocities in the world dim our light and faith in humankind?**

Now, this question I can see from both, right? I've been the one spinning around world events, and I've been the one holding on to my spiritual truth. And so, I will say, for both of those individuals, look for the good. Look for the good. There are actually positive news accounts that you can follow. Follow those.

In fact, I shared with the last group, I just saw this post yesterday. There was two 90-year-olds who were celebrating their 70th wedding anniversary, so they went out and bought a Porsche 911. [Congregants laugh and whoop] Good news! I bet it didn't show up in your feed, right? [Congregants laugh] Yeah! Go find those good news accounts. Go look for the good.

And then be the good, right? So, Mr. Rogers. What did his mother give him advice -- was to look for the helpers. When there's a crisis, look for the helpers. They're rushing in. Look for the helpers.

And I will add, be the helper. Be the helper. Set the intention at the beginning of the day to go find the things that you're grateful for, that you're looking forward to. Rev. Jane Simmons, in her book, "You Can't Sleep Through Your Awakening," she says at the beginning of the day, ask: *"What am I looking forward to today?"*

So often we look at our calendar; we're like, *"Oh, I've got a doctor appointment, then I've got to rush over here, and then I've got to do that."* Instead: *"Wow; what am I looking forward to today?"*

Because, as you show up as the light of the world -- as a positive beacon -- a gentle ripple goes out, like the pebble in the water. As you're the light of the world -- as you're a positive beacon -- then that gratitude is what is going to go out to the others around you.

And there's a lot going on. So, we don't need to deny reality. We don't need to "bypass," especially another person's feelings. Most people want to be heard. Most people want to be heard with compassion. Most people want their heart held. So we listen: *"I hear you. It's a lot."*

And here's what's helped me. I've been looking for the helpers. I've been watching where the good is happening. I've been finding the miracles.

Again, what did Gandhi say? *"Be the change you wish to see in the world."* The only thing we really have control over is our own thoughts and actions. So be whatever it is that you want to see and experience. That's our fifth Unity principle. Don't just say a prayer by memory; don't just attend church on Sunday. Be God in action. Be loving with your words. Be loving with your thoughts. Be loving with your actions. Be peaceful with your words. Be peaceful with your thoughts. Be peaceful with your actions.

In Unity, it's not how many times you show up; it's how you show up. It's how you show up that matters. So, demonstrate your spiritual nature as you move through the world. This is how you honor the Divine. When you embody love and peace and gratitude, you ripple that out and people feel it. God is love; therefore, you are love. And you can share loving kindness, because that is your purpose.

Our nature and our calling is to be and share love in the world, beginning with those in our life, whether it's our family or our friends or our neighbor, people in the grocery store, people in the larger community. But you were born to be loving presence.

Author Kute Blackson from his book, "The Magic of Surrender" -- and I read this on Wednesday, but I wanted to bring it in here on Sunday. It's so powerful. It's on your screen. It says, *"It is time to surrender to the love that you are. And love fully, with nothing held back. This is our calling. This is our destiny. We are love, and to share love with the world is the most powerful thing you can do. When we love this way, it changes every interaction we have."*

Powerful. Love is your calling. Love is how you bless the world and you bless the lives of those around you. Love is how you bless your own life. So, love is your calling. Be loving kindness. This is your invitation, my friends.

So, thank you for the questions. Thank you for another wonderful "Ask the Minister" Sunday. My blessings to you all. Thank you!