

AWAKEN THE SPARK WITHIN

Week #1 of a 6-Week Series, "Ignite Your Spirit: An Inner Journey"

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So how many people are excited to start a new year? I think at some level we all get excited, because a new year really represents a fresh start. And it represents the potential for a happier life, for a better life in some way.

In our culture, the path to a better life begins by setting resolutions or goals: thinking about our dreams, our desires, our intentions. And it's amazing how similar sometimes our resolutions and goals are. Tell me if any of these sound familiar == that have been on your resolution list: lose some weight; get in better shape; spend more time with the family; read more; meditate and pray more; get out of debt; finish your degree or get a master's degree; start your own business; meet Ms. or Mr. Right; increase your income; or go on your dream vacation. Any of those sound familiar in the resolutions that you have set in your life?

And interestingly, another part of our cultural pattern is: just about a month after the new year begins – at the end of January -- several people have hardly put any work towards their goal. Some have given up on their goals. And some can't even remember what the resolutions were in the first place. And then the end of the year comes, and the new year is approaching. We start thinking: What do we want? And we think: well, to lose some weight, get in better shape, meet the right person, get out of debt ... For many of us, resolutions tend to go in one year and out the other. [Congregants laugh]

[Laughs] Kind of like the guy who's trying to lose weight. And here is his pattern. In 2020, his resolution was: "*I will get my weight down to 180 pounds.*" 2021: "*I will watch my calories until I get down to 190 pounds.*" [Congregants laugh] 2022: "*I will follow my new diet religiously until I get below 200 pounds.*" 2023: "*I will try to develop a more realistic attitude about my weight.*" [Congregants laugh] 2024: "*I will work out five days a week.*" 2025: "*I will work out three days a week.*" 2006: "*I will try to drive past a gym at least once a week.*" [Congregants laugh]

So, I'm going to ask you like a very, very silly question, but there's a point to it. Do you think Jesus ever made any resolutions? Do you think Buddha or Krishna or Yogananda or St. Francis of Assisi or Meister Eckhart ever thought at the beginning of the New Year, "*You know, I'd really like to lose about 10 pounds and be more disciplined with my exercise program*"?

Now, I don't know if they did or didn't, but I bet they all had a resolution and a desire to have a deeper feeling and experience of the presence of God within them. I bet they all wanted to know a deeper connection to their oneness with Spirit and to fulfill the purpose for which they came. You know, they were not thinking about those other things, because their lives were built on a higher foundation of spiritual truth that Jesus expressed when he said, "*Seek ye first His kingdom and His righteousness and all these things will be added unto you.*"

And what this is really saying is that the best goal -- the best resolution -- we can have is making unifying our hearts and mind with God the top priority on our goal list. To literally have connecting with our Source and developing a God consciousness as the height of focus for our lives; for our new.

You know, what it's saying is: good stuff will come to you, but keep the priority of putting God first. You know, it's consistent with what Stephen Covey once said when he said, "The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing." [Congregants laugh]

And so, it's okay to want all those things. But when the priority is first to seek God with all of our hearts, then the rest of the stuff falls into place.

You see, when we keep playing on the superficial level -- when we keep playing on the periphery, when we major in the minors -- we are robbing ourselves of the depth of the insight, of the wisdom, of the guidance, of the inspiration, and the inner peace that comes with deeper spiritual pursuits as a resolution, as a goal and a priority. Every single one of us, I guarantee you, would like to feel a deeper connection and a oneness with God. Every single one of us would like to know and live from our true self, from our higher self, from our divine nature.

So our theme for 2006 is: "Ignite Your Spirit: An Inner Journey." See, at Christmas, we all lit our candles, symbolizing the reigniting of the light of the Christ in us: the light of God, the light of our soul. Because sometimes we can let that light go dim. Sometimes that light can waver and flicker in our lives and sometimes feel like it's almost close to being extinguished.

Well, our light is not meant to flicker timidly. It is meant to burn brightly and to shine. So, for the next six weeks, I'm going to share with you spiritual truths and practices to help us ignite our spirit, to help us move along our inner journey so that we live from a place of peace, a place of power, a place of purpose, a place of passion and a place of possibility.

And so, our first message this week is called "Awaken the Spark Within." So, we're going to look at three things we can do to awaken the spark within to help us ignite our spirit.

So, I'll begin to introduce the first time by telling you this old Hindu legend that said that all -- at one point, all humans were gods. But they so abused their power and their divinity that Brahma, the chief God, took it away from everyone and hid it so they would never find it again. And so, the topic became: where should we hide it?

And three of the lesser gods were helping him out. And the first one said, "*Well, let's put it deep in the earth. A man will never find it there.*" And Brahma said, "No. Their ingenuity and determination is strong, and they'll dig and find it."

And then another one said, "*Well, in the deepest ocean.*" He said, "*No; they'll swim down there on the ocean bed, and they'll find it.*"

"How about the highest mountain?" "No; they'll climb it, and they'll find it."

And they, *"Well, we can't think anywhere else to put it."*

And then Brahma said, *"I know a place they'll never find it, because they'll never look there. Let's put it within them."*

And the legend says ever since then, human beings have been running to and fro, jumping high and low, exploring and running and seeking and searching and desperately trying to find what is already within them.

And so the first point I want to make in awakening the spark within is to **LOOK WITHIN OR GO WITHOUT**. And sometimes we would rather look outside of ourselves for answers; outside of ourselves for peace and for happiness. We would rather think that more money or more power or more possessions or more success or the latest gadget or some convenience will make our lives wonderful and make us feel so much better about ourselves and our world.

You know, Jim Carrey once said "*I think everyone should be rich. Everyone should get rich and famous and do everything they ever dreamed of so they can see that that's not the answer.*" And we all know that the answer is within ourselves: connecting with our Source.

And my question is: Why is it so hard for us to look within? Why do we struggle? And even though we know that -- everything I've told you so far you know. And yet why do we still have a hard time choosing to look within and turn within first as a priority?

And here are some reasons. Number one: I think we're kind of uncomfortable turning within. I think we're uncomfortable sometimes to feel our own feelings, face some difficult truths that we might have to face. I think we have a challenge being honest with ourselves. And I think we have a challenge being still and entering the silence, because it's not something we're taught. It's something that makes us very uncomfortable.

Another one is distractions: the mental noise. Anybody ever try to meditate, and your mind is wandering like crazy and you can't slow it down? It's hard to look within when there's a lot of inner noise going on.

A third one is we love as a culture external validation. We love for people to like us and approve of us and affirm us. We love to show our power and our possessions. We love to show off all of our achievements so people will like us. We love that external validation.

A fourth one is: we have a hard time looking within because we don't want to accept responsibility for all of our choices, all of our mistakes, all of our failures.

Number five is that we sometimes have a hard time looking within because we don't always trust whatever that inner guidance and that voice says. Is that me? Is that some higher intelligence? I think we trust the advice of our hairstylist or the newest book or podcast sometimes more than our own inner voice. So sometimes we don't want to turn within because we just don't trust it.

So when we don't go within, guess what happens? We go without. We go without wisdom. We go without peace. We go without clarity. We go out with inner joy.

There was a song many years ago by a guy named Johnny Lee, and it was called "Looking for Love in All the Wrong Places." And sometimes I think we're looking for peace in all the wrong places. We're looking for joy and happiness in all the wrong places. We keep running here and there, and high and low, and anywhere and everywhere, except within ourselves

One of Jesus' main teachings was this. In Luke 17:21, it says, "*The kingdom of God is within you*." The kingdom of God is within you. A simple but powerful truth. And it is, in fact, the path to God. It is the path to peace. It's an inside job!

You know, if we feel stuck, you know what we should do? Look within. If you want some guidance and clarity, look within. If we want to get over the hurt or pain that we're in, look within. Feel uncertain about something? Look within. The allness of God is within us. The kingdom of God is within us. Everything we are seeking is within us.

So, the first step to awaken the spark within us is to look within, because if we don't look within, we will go without.

The second thing to awaken the spark within is to **OWN AND EMBODY OUR DIVINE NATURE**. You know, this is a beautiful world we live in. I mean, it is gorgeous. It's impressive in so many ways: all the architecture; all the beauty of nature. But what's amazing is: when you close your eyes and you take a deep breath -- a few slow, relaxing deep breaths -- it's amazing how calm, how peaceful, how grounded, how centered we feel; how much closer to God we feel; how much closer to ourselves we feel.

And you know Why? Because we are more than our bodies. We are more than this world of physical form. We are so attached to it, but we are so much more of it. And that's why, when we meditate and close our eyes and turn away from it, that's because we feel peace. And we connect more with the true

nature of who we really are. Because the truth is: we are spirit. We are light. And we are eternal. That's the truth of who we are, more than these physical beings.

I do a meditation with my sister once a week. It's called Brahma Kumaris; just a little app. And two of the affirmations we use every single week that I love meditating on it for five, ten minutes is: "*I am pure light, completely weightless and free.*" I am pure light, completely weightless and free.

And I love it because it helps me pull back from the drama of my life; from all the physical stuff and all the human stuff. And helps me realize I am pure light, completely weightless and free.

"I am pure light, completely weightless and free."

Half voice, let's say that together: [with congregants] "*I am pure light, completely weightless and free.*"

Take a deep breath and even softer say it again: [with congregants] "*I am pure light, completely weightless and free.*"

Deep breath and even softer: [with congregants] "*I am pure light, completely weightless and free.*"

I don't know about you, but that really helps me a lot pull back from the drama.

The other one that I love is: "*I am an eternal being, part of an eternal universe.*"

[With congregants:] "*I am an eternal being, part of an eternal universe.*"

Take a deep breath. Let's say it again, even softer: [with congregants] "*I am an eternal being, part of an eternal universe.*"

Deep breath. One more time: [with congregants] "*I am an eternal being, part of an eternal universe.*"

You remember when Jesus said, "*I am in this world, but not of this world*"? And so, we're in this physical world, but we are spiritual. We are light and we are eternal.

I remember I went to a retreat at the Encinitas Self Realization Fellowship. I was at a retreat there with my sis. And one of the things they said is that we are eternal, that we are spirit, we're light. And we are moving through what they call this "earth school." We are all just passing through this physical plane: learning, growing, healing, discovering things within ourselves, helping others, making a difference. That's what we're here to do. We're spiritual beings moving through a physical earth school to advance ourselves spiritually.

You know, one thing about a spark is it does not need to be forced. But it does need to be cared for. It needs attention. It needs to be fanned. It needs some oxygen. You know, in 2 Timothy, Chapter 1, Verse 6, Paul says, "*Fan into flame the gift of God that is within you.*" Fan into flame the gift of God that is within you. And for us to fan into flame means to own and embody your divine nature. And it requires attention. You know, it requires some time. It requires some practice.

Several years ago, this guy, Sam Cross -- from my previous ministry in Kansas City -- was teaching me about investing and building wealth. And he'd always say to me, "It's about time in the fund, Richard; time in the fund. There might be fluctuations, but time in the fund is what grows your wealth."

And I would say to you: spiritually, it's time in the silence -- time in the consciousness and immersing your mind in the Mind of God that grows spiritual wealth; that expands our own consciousness. Just to think a nice thought of, "*Oh yeah, the spirit of God is within me*" is not enough. The odd prayer here or there -- not that that's a bad thing, but it's not enough to go to the level of consciousness and depth and spiritual oneness that we're all seeking.

You know, Jesus never said, "Worship me." He said, "Follow me." And the Christ is not a person to worship, but it is a divine principle and a consciousness for us to attain. And to follow him means to pray daily, to pray consistently, and to own and embody the spiritual truth of who I am. And he did embody and own who he was.

So, I want to talk about two concepts -- sin and salvation -- from the metaphysical perspective.

First of all, Jesus did not come to save us from our sins. The word sin in Aramaic is "harmartia," and it means ... It does not mean moral sin. It means to miss the mark. Which means sin means to forget our oneness with God. Sin means to fall out of alignment with our original essence. Sin means spiritual amnesia: of forgetting who we really are. And so, we need to own and embody our divine nature.

Let's look at the word salvation. Salvation in Aramaic means ... the word is "sozo." And it does not mean to be rescued from punishment. It means to heal. It means to restore. It means to be whole again. So, salvation is to return into alignment ... and the alignment that we never actually lost, except we forgot.

See, Jesus did not come to save us from our sin; he came to wake us up and to remember the truth of who we are. And he said it so many times, in so many ways: "*You are the light of the world.*" "*You are the salt of the earth.*" The Old Testament said, "*You are the temple of the living God.*"

You are a child of God, created in the image and likeness of God. And if God is love, that means we've been created in the image and likeness of love. If God is peace and all good, then we are created in the image and likeness of peace and all good. Jesus did not come to save us, but to wake us up.

However, I have to say sometimes, being saved doesn't sound so bad! Let someone else do the work; I get saved. I'm thinking it's kind of a smoking deal! [Congregants laugh] It doesn't work that way, but it sounds like a nice deal. Because I think if we could, we would outsource and delegate our spiritual work, wouldn't we? [Congregants laugh] It's good for business, but spiritual awakening -- it doesn't help.

Could you imagine if I had a staff working for me? I'd be, "*Okay, Billy, I need you to meditate for me for 20 minutes. No; in fact, let's do 30 minutes of meditation for me. And then, Mary, I need you to forgive, all those dirty so-and-sos that have not treated me well. And Fred, what I need from you is to do positive thinking and gratitude for me all week long.*"

See, that could never work, right? We know that truth. The inner journey is a do-it-yourself inside job. No one can take that journey for us. No one can find and know inner peace for us. No one can discover God for us. No one can forgive for us.

And so, my question is: If Jesus did not come to save us from our sin -- and he came to wake us up -- what did he come to wake us up from? And here's what it is. It is the human mindset and mental system that tells us that we're broken. That tells us we are unworthy. That tells us we are not good enough. That tells us there isn't enough. It is that mindset that believes that we're victims, that we're powerless, that we're hopeless.

It is that mindset and consciousness that keeps us living in fear and lack and limitation. It is a mindset that makes us believe that the only way for us to play in life is to play small and to play safe. Any teachings that tell us that are not Jesus' teachings. And any teachings and mindsets in that are not the truth of who we are. We need to own and embody our divine nature.

The third thing, to awaken the spark within, is to **RAISE OUR FAITH AND FREQUENCY**. A flame does not grow brighter by hiding. That's why Jesus said, "*No one puts a lamp under a basket.*" A flame grows by shining and giving it the space to be able to rise to a higher level.

You know, if you read Chapters 8 and 9 in Matthew, it has a lot of Jesus' miracles. Jesus did a lot of miracles: you know, like the loaves and fishes; he raised the dead; he walked on water; he calmed the ocean; he healed the sick; he turned water into wine.

And from an Aramaic perspective and metaphysical perspective, Jesus didn't do these. We think Jesus did that to prove his divinity; to prove he was the one and only son of God; and to prove his faith. But from the metaphysical and Aramaic perspective, he did it to show us that we're divine and to show us that we have great faith. That's why he said, "*He who believes in me shall do the works that I have done in even greater things than these.*"

Jesus was demonstrating that faith is actually energetic alignment. That faith is not about believing; faith is about frequency. Faith is the inner coherence -- that realized the energy of God, Source and Creative Intelligence -- and raising it to the frequency of the good that we are seeking to attract and manifest.

In Aramaic, the word faith -- "hayman" -- means to align, to make firm, and to stand in unshakable certainty. And that's why Jesus said, "*Your faith has made you whole.*" Your faith -- or your vibration -- is what you've attracted that has made and brought forth wholeness.

So, my question for you is: If you wanted to attract prosperity, what would be the energetic and vibrational frequency you would need to raise yourself from where you are now to that level to attract it? If you wanted to attract more love or peace or success, what is the vibrational frequency you would need to raise to to naturally attract and call forth those things?

See, we can attract and manifest whatever we want, but we need to raise our vibrational level first. I think we put it in Unity: we can have anything we want, but first we must become it in consciousness.

And what are three of the things we can do to raise our vibrational energy? The first one is with our word -- with the power of the word. To speak the word. "*Life and death are in the power of the tongue,*" it says in the Old Testament. In Genesis, it says, "*God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light.*" There was power in the word. When Jesus healed, he said things like, "*Be clean.*" "*Rise.*" "*Peace; be still.*" He spoke the word.

And to raise the vibration of the power of the word and the power of our thoughts, and also our feelings. I truly believe that vibration is the bridge between desire and manifestation.

You remember the Old Testament where it says, "*As a man thinketh, so is he.*" Everybody remember that? That's not what it says. But that's what we hear. But what it actually says is, "*As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he.*" But we always just hear, "*As a man thinketh, so is he.*"

And what is it saying: As a man thinketh -- the thought ... in his heart -- his feeling ... so is he -- the outcome. Thought plus feeling equals the outcome. That's the way you raise your vibrational frequency. See, we think we can't control our feelings, and we absolutely can. We have more control over our thoughts, our words and our feelings than we give ourselves credit for.

Let me give an example. Right now, I want you to feel lazy and lethargic. Go with me on this one. [Congregants laugh] Feel lazy. Feel lethargic. You know, you're not supposed to be laughing during lazy and lethargic, but okay.

Okay, take a deep breath now. Now I want you to feel excited and powerful. Let's go there. Feel excited and powerful. Excited and powerful. How many people were able to go to each, at least a bit? How many? And a fair amount, even? See, we have more control over our vibration than we realize.

Sometimes we're at home and we just feel down and low and we don't know why. Sometimes get up, start clapping and say something positive! Feel powerful! Feel dynamic! Or even better, think of

something you want, and raise your vibration to that thing that you want in your life. We are powerful, creative beings! And the question is: Are we ready to raise our faith and raise our frequency to the level of life we want to live to attract it?

So, at the first service this morning, I told a joke. Did not go over well. [Congregants laugh] It's an old joke, but it's my favorite joke about prayer. And so, I said to myself, "*Let me skip the joke.*" And then I said, "*No; you are going to raise the frequency of funny.*" [Congregants laugh] "*You're going to raise your consciousness of comedy, and you're going to try it again.*" [Congregants laugh]

It's old, but it's good! Here we go. So, Larry goes to a revival and listens to the preacher. And after a while, the preacher makes a call for people to come forward and pray. And Larry waits in line. And it's his turn. And he says, "Preacher, I want you to pray for my hearing."

And the preacher prays; puts his hands on his head, puts his finger in his ear; starts speaking in tongues, shaking like crazy. And then after about three or four minutes of that, he opens his eyes, he says, "Amen." And then the preacher asks Larry, "*So how's your hearing now?*"

And Larry says, "*I don't know, Rev; it's not until next Wednesday.*" [Congregants laugh] Okay. See, raise your frequency, and good things happen. [Congregants laugh] That's very generous of you. Okay.

It's 2026, and I hope all your resolutions and goals come true. But I would like us all to add one together -- individually and as a church community -- that this year our goal is to ignite our spirits. And to take that inner journey to awaken the spark within.

And the three things we're going to practice this week is -- no matter what's going on, whatever challenge -- look within. Look within. Because it's better to look within than to go without. Second is: own and embody our divine nature. We are spirit. We are light. And we are eternal beings. And, finally, raise our faith and our frequency through the power of our words, our thoughts and our feelings.

This is going to be a great year for us. But we've got to start at the foundation and the truth of who we are by igniting our spirits. And the first thing we'll do is awaken the spark within.

God bless.

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