

PUT YOUR HEART INTO IT

Week #4 of a 6-Week Series, "Ignite Your Spirit: An Inner Journey"

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Sunday, Feb. 1, 2026

Good morning, Unity of Phoenix! How are you this morning? [Congregants whoop and applaud] Good! It ... I'm glad some of you are doing well. [Congregants laugh] That's good. I'm so happy to be here. Thank you for having me, and we do send Rev. Richard lots of love and healing energy. And again, I'm delighted to be your substitute quarterback for this morning.

There ... see? I made a reference to football. Today we're going to talk about love. February is kind of the month of love, right? But today we're not going to talk about the hearts and flowers and chocolate candy, although not a bad thing. You know, greeting card love; not that. We're going to talk about a different version of love today. The version of love that -- as these beautiful posters say -- ignite the Spirit. The version of love that asks something of us.

So today we're going to explore putting our heart into it. What is "it"? Love. Putting our hearts, our minds, our souls, our bodies into love. And that phrase matters. That phrase matters because the world does not need our half-hearted gestures or performative kindness. What the world needs now is true, deep, sweet love.

So, let's hear about that true, sweet, deep love. [Soloist Cerise Patron sings:] "*What the world needs now is love sweet love; it's the only thing that there's just too little of. What the world needs now is love sweet love; no, not just for some, but for everyone. No, not just for some, but for everyone. No, not just for some, but for every everyone.*" [Congregants applaud]

And applause to you [congregants], as well; nicely done, choir! Nicely done!

So I have a trivia question for you about that song. Who knows ... By the way, I like to have a little congregant participation, so here's moment for it. Who knows who made that song popular? [Congregants shout out answers] Dionne Warwick. Okay, we'll go with that. Because, yes, she did in 1996; but she was not the first one. As a matter of fact, the song was offered to her originally, and she thought it was -- and these are her words -- too country and too preachy. So, she didn't want to sing it.

Decades after it became popular for the first time, she did sing it. But who sang it originally? [Congregant: Diana Ross] Diana Ross; I love that idea. Not correct, but I love the idea. I heard it back there. I heard Jackie DeShannon. Jackie DeShannon in 1965. Nicely done. Who said that? I don't know where that came from. Perfect! Thank you. You threw your voice. I thought it came from over there.

So, here's the thing about that song. It was written in 1965. Hal David wrote the lyrics; Bert Bacharach wrote the music. And it was written in a divisive and tumultuous time in America. It was written right in the middle of the Vietnam War. And the subtext of those lyrics: they were written to uplift humanity; to uplift what was happening in the United States to send a message of what is needed right now in this time of turmoil and division.

Could that song not be an anthem for our world today? Yeah, it could. Because we are living again in a divisive time in America. What the world needs -- what we need; what our country needs -- is love, sweet love; sweet, wholehearted love.

So, that brings up a burning question for me this morning. And that is: What can I do, what can we do, what can you do to live from a wholehearted loving place?

I love this quote from Dr. Ernest Holmes, who is the founder of Science of Mind, which is a sister religion of Unity. And he wrote, *"If we would look for a God of love, we must look long and deeply into each other. We must look away from the differences until we penetrate into the unity of the whole. Love, alone, reveals love."*

That is such a beautiful statement, and that last line so beautiful. *"Love, alone, reveals love."*

But it raises another question for me. And that is: What do we do when it's hard to love? When it's difficult to love? Has anybody experienced a time like, you know what, in the last 24 hours, where it's been where it's been difficult to love? Yeah. If we said the last week, I think maybe all of us would raise our hands. The last month, we'd raise both hands. There have been things -- there are experiences that are happening in our world right now -- that are hard to love, most definitely. So what do we do then? What do we do then?

Well, years ago I heard a speaker; Van Jones is his name. He used to be a news commentator. He's an author, a social activist. I heard him at a spiritual conference. And he said words that have stuck with me ... and I went to this conference decades ago. His words stuck with me, and they're very appropriate for right now. And what he said is: *"When it's hard to love, love harder."*

When it's hard to love, love harder. And that's what our time is asking for right now. And that's what we're going to talk about here this morning.

And before I give you some suggestions on ways that we can love harder, I want to share an example of how transformative love can be and why. And this was written up in a book entitled "The Quest, A Journey of Spiritual Rediscovery." And it was an "experiment." And I'm going to put that in quotes, because it didn't start as an experiment. It kind of wound ... it was something that happened that wound up being studied and then written in this book.

And it was babies born prematurely addicted to drugs because their mothers were addicted to drugs. And what the hospitals found -- not surprisingly, of course -- that these little infants were small, they were weak, they were lethargic, and many of them did not survive. The mortality rate for these little ones was very, very heart-breakingly high.

Doctors did everything they could from the medical perspective. They gave them the medicine that they needed; they gave them the procedures that they needed; they gave them the monitoring that they needed. Everything that could be done medically they did, and yet these little ones still were not thriving, and many of them were dying.

So, one of the hospitals had an idea that then caught on and then got written up in this book. And the idea was to bring in volunteers to hold the babies, to speak kindly to the babies, to be warm and tender to the babies. In other words, to love the babies. And what happened was -- well, according to them -- miraculous. I don't think it was miraculous; I think it's just what happens. But it was miraculous. And that these babies started to heal. They started to put on weight. They started to get stronger. Their vital signs started to increase. And the mortality rate dropped ... meaning they started ... more of them -- much more of them -- started living and moving into being more healthy infants and growing into healthier children.

So, scientifically they attributed that to, you know, a hormone balance; enzymes working better; nervous system regulation, all of that. That's what the scientist said. And, yes; all of that happened. But I think something deeper *spiritually* happened. And here's what it is. Hang with me in this. Maybe a little mind expansive.

So, we believe in Unity. I hope you all believe this. We're going to do a test. It'll check. We believe that we are made in the image and likeness of God. Do we all -- are we all on the same page? [Congregants: Yes] All of us? [Congregants: Yes]

Okay, okay, good. We are made in the image and likeness of God. And if we were going to put one word to describe God, what would that one word be? [Congregants: Love!] Thank you! Oh, you're sharp! Good! Yes; that one word would be love.

So, in other words, we are love, right? We're made in the image of likeness of love. So, we are love incarnate. Love is at our core. Love is who we are. So, what if those babies didn't heal because they were given love? What if they healed because they were -- they experienced an environment that called forth the love that was already in them? Yeah; yeah. What if these babies healed, not because of the love from the outside, but because of the love that was awakened in them? That was already there?

Rumi must have known something about this when he wrote these words a long time ago: "Your task is not to seek love, but merely to seek and find all the barriers within yourself that have been built against it." So, our job here is to create environments, situations, opportunities for love to be awakened in, not only ourselves, but in others. to be called out. And that's what heals ... and I think what could have a huge hand in healing the division and the divisiveness that lives in our world today.

So, good theory, right? We like the theory of this. Theory is good. Theory is a foundation. It's important, but if we don't put some teeth to it, as I said, love that has skin in the game -- oh, perhaps another football reference! Ish! [Congregants laugh] -- It doesn't matter. It doesn't do anything.

So, we're going to talk a bit about love as a verb. There's a great book written called "Love is a Verb" by Rabbi David Cooper. It was a fantastic book, but just the title alone was enough, right? Love is a verb. It's not just a sentiment. It's not just an idea. It's not just a feeling. It's action. And I love Cerice's song ... which, by the way, her song she sang, she wrote. She wrote that song. [Congregants applaud] She's sitting in the back. She can hear it. She wrote that song. It's on her newest album, which is at her table out there. That was my little plug for her.

Yes, love is the root. It is! It is the root. And it is also the action that comes out of that foundation, that root of love.

So, we're going to talk about some ways that we can tangibly do that. But I'm going to give you one more quick story. I love stories, because I think they just illustrate things so beautifully. Another example of how love can change everything and the love that calls out love from someone else.

So, this is a story that went viral a couple of years ago, and it was written by a middle school teacher. And in this school, they had a little boy -- a young boy who was angry all the time. And he was disruptive, and he was rude, and he was defiant. And he was constantly getting in trouble, being sent to the principal's office so often. Most of the teachers had washed their hands of him. They just thought he was a problem kid. They'd written him off. They had found him -- as we had said before -- hard to love. Right? So, they just send him to the principal.

Well, this one particular teacher one day thought she would do something different. And he had acted out again in class, but instead of sending him to the office she asked him to stay after class. And, instead of lecturing him or telling him, you know, why he had to be better or why he was bad or anything like that, she asked him a question that he had never been asked. And the question she asked him was simply: What's going on with you that makes school feel so hard?

And, with that, the little boy broke down into tears. And he told his teacher that his parents worked two jobs, so they worked at night, and he was responsible for his younger siblings. This young man -- young

boy -- was carrying the weight of adult responsibility on his shoulders, and he said that he was exhausted, overwhelmed and scared.

Moving forward, this teacher didn't try to fix his life. She didn't have expectations of him, but she also didn't lower her expectations that she had of *all* of her students. And she didn't excuse his bad behavior. But what she did do was: she greeted him by name every morning. She made sure he had a hot breakfast. And she asked him regularly how he was doing without judgment; just with care.

And just like those little babies, something miraculous happened. His behavior started to change. He wasn't as angry. He wasn't as disruptive. He wasn't as defiant. The teacher wrote this. She said, "*I didn't give him love. I made room for the love that was already in him to come back online.*"

That's what we're here to do, my friends. We are here to wholeheartedly -- to put our whole hearts into -- bringing love back online for individuals.

So, I'm going to share four ideas this morning that you can do to activate love in yourself and in others, and have it be a ripple effect. And, as I'm sharing them, I want you to just be feeling into, "*Oh; might that one be for me?*" And then at the end, we'll do a little guided meditation to help you even deepen a little bit more into -- "*Might that be up for me?*" And also, perhaps one of these ideas will stimulate *another* idea in you, which would work, as well.

But here are my four.

The first one is pretty easy. I'm hoping and thinking we probably, at some level, do it already. But I want to really anchor it as a powerful way to aliven/awaken love in someone else. And that is, whenever you see a police officer, a firefighter, a serviceman or woman, a nurse, a doctor, an EMT -- anyone in the profession that serves and supports us in ways they do -- thank them. Take a moment to thank them. You probably think it in your head. I know I do. I think it, but I don't always get the words out of my mouth.

And then, if you want to add to it/amp it up even more, briefly -- and let me put that word again in big bold letters underscored -- briefly ... Did I say briefly? Share with them some way in which someone in their position has supported you or helped you or someone that you love.

I know when my mother was ill before she passed away, she lived alone, and I couldn't be with her all the time. And she had issues. And she called the fire department a lot. I think she just liked the handsome firemen, frankly. [Congregants laugh] She did like that ... But they were so kind to her and they helped her so much. I'm so grateful for that.

So, you could say something like that. They don't need your whole life story or, you know, a big, long dissertation, but a brief example of how what they do -- even if it wasn't that person -- what they do for a living, how it helps. That would go a long way to be an act of love.

Number two: ask someone -- maybe someone you know; maybe someone you don't know -- what can I do to help? Maybe it's a friend who's having an overwhelming time. They just had a baby. They're a single parent and have a big project at work and have to work extra hours. Maybe it's someone who's ill. Maybe it's someone you don't know who's in the grocery store struggling to reach that thing high up on the shelf and you're tall. Offer to help. Somebody who's trying to take a whole load of groceries loading in their car; offer to help.

I know for me, as I was ... you know, I always ... Whatever talk I ever give, it's because I need to hear it. So, they're there for me, and if you get something out of it, I'm glad ... but it's for me. And as I was thinking about this one -- ask for help -- I realized that I have offered to help, but I haven't done it yet in a

really important area. And so, my commitment is to do it. And that is: my chiropractor that I've had for 25 years. And I love her so much. I don't know her outside of that chiropractic relationship. But she is ill right now. She has a very aggressive form of cancer. And she's going through a very debilitating series of chemo treatments. And a mutual friend who has put together a whole chart of people to go visit her and spend time with her – maybe make a meal, maybe do some errands for her, help her do something around the house. And I have said I will help, but I haven't put my name on that list yet. So, I haven't done it. That doesn't cut it! We've got to actually take the action.

So my commitment – out loud to myself and to you; hold me to it when you see me next! -- is today, after I get home from church today, I'm going to open up that document and put my name on the list.

Number three: **if you see an unhoused individual sitting in front of a store, and they ask you for money or if you could help, what if you ask them: "What can I get you in the store? What can I buy you?"** And within, of course, your financial means; don't go beyond that, of course. But if it's within your financial means, go get it. Go get it, and bring it out. And when you bring it out, don't just, like, say, "Here; bye!". Spend a moment. Ask them their name. Tell yours. Spend a moment. Treat them like a human being. Because people sitting there like that often get just completely ignored or, worse than that, met with contempt. Let's treat them with care and kindness ... which is love. Which is love.

And the last one I want to share with you -- some of you have heard of it. I want to go a little bit deeper in the description of it, though, for those of you who haven't. **Do the Hawaiian healing process called ho'oponopono for 30 days around someone with whom you are angry or you don't like.** What is ho'oponopono? Well, it is simple and yet deeply profound. It is simply getting an image of that individual. Maybe you have a picture; maybe you don't. You have an image in your mind, and simply looking at that image and saying, *I'm sorry; I love you.*"

Now, what the heck is that all about? There was an author, Joe Vitale, who, years ago, interviewed a Hawaiian doctor who actually went into an institution for the criminally insane. He was a therapist and he performed this ho'oponopono ... and miraculous things happen.

So, I'm going to read you a little excerpt from an interview that Joe Vitale had with the doctor. His name is Dr. Hew Len. I'm not going to try to pronounce his first name. I can't do it, so I'm not even going to try. We'll just go with Dr. Hew Len. And this is how it went. Joe Vitale wrote:

If we believe that we are responsible for our lives, it means that everything in our lives, simply because it is here, is our responsibility. In a literal sense, the entire world is our creation.

Whew! That's tough to swallow. Being responsible for what I say or for what I do is one thing. But being responsible for what everyone in my life says or does is quite another. Yet, the truth is: if you take complete responsibility for your life, then everything you see, hear, taste, touch, or in any way experience is your responsibility, because it is coming into your life. This means that terrorist activities, the president, the economy, or anything you experience and don't like is up for you to heal. Take a breath. Take a breath.

The problem isn't with them; it's with us. I know this is tough to grasp, let alone to accept or actually live. Blame is far easier than total responsibility, but as I spoke with Dr. Len, I began to realize that healing for him – and in the whole ho'oponopono practice -- means loving yourself. If you want to improve your life and that of others, you have to heal your own life. If you want to cure anyone -- or I would say if you want to awaken the love within them, even a mentally ill criminal -- you can do it by healing you.

So, I asked Dr. Len how he went about healing himself. What was he doing exactly when he looked at those patient files? And he said, "I am saying, 'I'm sorry; I love you' over and over again."

After a few months, patients that had been shackled were being allowed to walk freely, he said. Others who had been heavily medicated were getting off their medication. And those who had no chance of ever being released were being freed.

Vitale writes:

I was in awe.

That's the power of the whole ho'oponopono practice.

So, I invite you to close your eyes for a moment. Take a slow, deep breath. Put your hand on your heart if that feels comfortable. Feel the warmth there. Feel the love there. As Rev. Stacy did so beautifully in the opening meditation, put a smile there. Feel the life there. And as I briefly reviewed those four ideas, just ask yourself, *"Which one? Is this the one for me this week, next week, to make an ongoing practice? Is this the one for me?"*

The first one: whenever you see a police officer or a firefighter or a medical professional, thank them. Briefly share how their profession has beautifully and positively impacted your life.

Is it asking someone, what can I do to help ... and actually doing it?

Is it offering to buy an unhoused individual something from the store they're sitting in front of? And, when you bring it back, is it spending a few moments treating them with care and kindness?

Or is it the high and holy practice of ho'oponopono for 30 days around someone with whom you're angry?

Which one is it for you? Which one of those actions will you put into action?

Let's take another deep breath. And imagine that love that you already are being stirred up; being released from you; being sent into this room -- beyond this room, out into our world. And silently affirm, *"I allow the love that I am to move through me, to express as me, to inform my actions. I ignite my spirit with my whole-hearted love."*

Martin Luther King, Jr. gave us a collective calling that is as relevant today as it was when he said it. We have before us the glorious opportunity to inject a new dimension of love into the vein of our very civilization. Let's do that!

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