

RECEIVE & RELEASE

Week #1 of a 3-Week Series inspired by the Catherine Ponder Book, "Open Your Mind to Receive"

With Rev. Richard Maraj

Sunday, Sept. 6, 2026

So how many people would like to live a more prosperous life? And so, the question is: What specific things would you want more of to feel like you're living a life of abundance? Would it be financial wealth? Or maybe love? Or success? Or fame? Or peace, or joy, or purpose, or meaning? Or full health?

And a bigger question would be is: Are you ready to receive all the good you desire now?

I think we always say that. We all say, "Yeah; I'm ready to receive. I'm ready to receive!" But the question is: Are you really ready to receive?

If you won the lottery today, would you be ready to receive? If you met your soulmate today, would you be ready? If you became hugely successful and greater than you even imagined, would you be ready? Would you be ready today to make a life-changing decision. Are you ready?

The Bible reminds us in numerous passages the abundance of the universe that is available to us. The Book of Jeremiah 29:11 says, *"For surely I know the plans I have for you," says the Lord. 'Plans to prosper you, not harm you. Plans to give you hope and a future.'"*

In Luke 12:32, it says, *"It is the Father's good pleasure to give us the kingdom."*

You know, these two Scriptures make it pretty clear that there is an abundance of good that we can have; that we can attract and enjoy. And if this is true, why aren't we all experiencing the fullness of God's abundance right here and now?

Catherine Ponder said, *"The problem is not God or the universe or Spirit withholding our good. We live in a lavish, abundant, extravagant universe. Our problem is that we have a hard time receiving and accepting our good."* How many people ever had a harder time receiving than you did giving?

You know, this morning we start a three-week series on Catherine Ponder's book, "Open Your Mind to Receive." And it sounds pretty easy. But opening our minds to receive abundance is harder than we think, because our minds have been conditioned to two things that we believe to be the truth. One of them is lack, and the other one is worthiness. We believe that there isn't enough and that we aren't enough.

And so, that blocks us from opening our minds to receive. That blocks us from accepting as much the abundant good that is available to us.

Catherine Ponder says that prosperity is spiritual in nature, and it is governed by spiritual laws. For us to experience and enjoy an abundant life in all of its forms, we must allow ourselves to practice the dynamic laws of prosperity. And only then can we reap the benefits of the flow and increase of abundance.

So this morning, we're going to look at how we can open our minds to receive.

And the first one is to **GIVE**. And it sounds kind of funny. The first step in receiving is giving. But it makes sense when you realize that giving and receiving are not opposites. They are actually part of the same divine flow. Jesus said, *"Give and you shall receive."* This is the Law of Increase. This is the Law of Abundance.

And the secret to it is that giving is the thing that activates the flow. Giving is the catalyst that gets the flow moving in our lives. Giving is a powerful spiritual practice, and so is receiving. You know, both circulate; both increase abundance.

Catherine Ponder says this: *"Various schemes have been suggested for getting rich. Most of them fail because they are based on getting and not giving. There is no spiritual basis. The reason many people fail to receive their good in life is because they do not practice giving or returning impersonally to the universe on a systematic portion of what the universe shares."*

So, let's talk about that idea of a systematic portion for us to give and circulate.

The portion in the Bible talks about 10% -- a tithe; that we keep 90% of our good and abundance, and we share 10% to keep that cycle moving. And sometimes that's intimidating and scary -- scary to folks. Ten percent! But I think it's a small amount when you consider that 90% of it we get to keep.

I always think of it this way. It's really not in a certain context. Like, when I go to a restaurant, I tip the waitstaff 20%. All they do is bring my food! God fulfills all the abundant good in my life, and I think 10 is a smoking deal! But if it freaks out and scares you -- if it freaks out and scares you to get a systematic portion -- you can start your portion at 5% or 6%. I would say 10 and go.

And the other part of it is systematic; that it's not a one-time thing. It is a way of life. It is a continuous daily flow that is needed.

Giving is a powerful spiritual practice. It is a huge difference-maker. What I've noticed in my own experience is: when I started tithing, I didn't really notice anything at the beginning. And then, after a while, I noticed that everything was the same as it was before. I wasn't lacking in anything. And then I started to notice certain things in different areas of my life -- not financial -- started moving smoother and easier. And there was this collective flow: this collective understanding and insights that came. Clarity in my guidance of what to do with my life; all kinds of things started improving. So, it's a powerful practice.

A pastor was trying to teach a Sunday school class the importance of giving and honoring God. And he said to the class, *"Do you know where children who don't put their offering in the basket go?"*

And the little girl says, *"Yes, I know. They go to the movies."* [Laughs with congregants]

So, when we don't give, we create an actual imbalance in our lives -- in the flow of giving and receiving. And it creates lack in some form. And it could be peace of mind. It could be clarity. It could be inspiration; whatever it is. And it's not just a matter of believing that God is our source. It is a matter of moving and having things flow and increase and setting them in motion. Giving keeps us connected to the universal source of abundance and also keeps that flow moving in our lives.

King Solomon was the richest person in the Bible, and he said this: *"Honor Jehovah with thy substance, and with the first of all thine increase, so shall thy barns be filled with plenty and their vats shall overflow with red wine."* And so, what he's saying is that, when you give -- when you think of God first and keep that flowing -- you will be amazed at how your life is filled; amazed at how it's blessed; and how amazed that you are enriched in many ways.

So, the first thing about giving is to **give to God**. The second one is to **give to yourself**. You know, to love others as ourselves. We are more of a priority than we allow ourselves to be in our lives.

And what it's saying to give to ourselves is to give to better ourselves. You know, to improve ourselves. To work on ourselves. Because the better we are, the better life gets. You know, allowing ourselves and working on ourselves so we become a greater channel of light and joy and peace and goodness.

And so, to give to ourselves means to **give yourself time to work on your spiritual life**; to allow yourself to connect with your Higher Power and align your mind with the mind of God. The daily time to give yourself for spiritual study and meditation and prayer. To allow ourselves to be a vehicle and a channel for abundance -- not just for ourselves, but for our community, our families, and our world.

Another thing to give ourselves is to **self-care**. Sometimes we don't do the greatest job in caring for ourselves. And that's an important thing. We are the temple of the living God! And sometimes we don't treat ourselves as a temple.

And also, to just **treat ourselves to good stuff in life**. Like, if you want that new outfit, buy it for yourself. You know, if you want to go to a party or the theater. or a nice vacation, or take a painting class -- or whatever it is -- it's important to treat ourselves. If we want a prosperous life, we need to start treating ourselves in a more positive and prosperous way.

In the book, she cites William Shakespeare when he said, *"To thine own self be true."* And she says it should really read, *"To thine own self be generous. To thine own self be loving, To thine own self be kind. To thine own self be caring."* Again, we are the temple of the living God, and we need to take care of ourselves like we are that temple.

How many people have ever been cheap with yourself or held back buying yourself something good, even though you had the money? Anybody? Okay. I mean, I think we all have done that and do that sometimes.

And so, another thing to give ourselves is to give ourselves **a good attitude and a good outlook**. To focus our mind on the positive. To focus our mind on the good. To focus our minds on gratitude and seeing the positive and the abundance and the blessings in our lives.

Giving to ourselves is powerful and important. There's a spiritual level of giving to and working on ourselves. And there's a life way of working on ourselves: a way with our attitude to give ourselves the highest and best so we can be the highest and best channel we can for an abundant life.

And then the last one on the giving is **giving to others**. We can give to others in all kinds of ways. We can give support to others. We can give kindness to others. We can give others a second chance. We can give encouragement, a smile, attention. And you can give others through volunteering in different places ... like, oh, I don't know -- say, maybe a church. [Congregants laugh] And you can usher or serve coffee.

Because serving is giving of ourselves to others to bless and enrich and support other people in our lives, whether we know them or we don't. An animal rescue; being a big brother; giving a compliment; giving a helping hand in any way. And when we do it, we should bless them. So, if we give or serve, we should bless them for the opportunity to be able to serve and give.

One of the things she says is that we need to pray about who to give and how to be a channel of giving. That we should pray, *"Spirit, guide me in how I should show up to be giving."*

And somebody I really like is like Shaquille O'Neal. This guy is a hugely generous guy. They have little things about him on Facebook all the time. He goes into Target or something and buys \$30,000 of gifts and gives it away. I saw him give a car away the other day.

And you're probably thinking, *"Yeah, he's got \$40 million -- or maybe \$400 million."* But the fact is: it's his generous heart. There are people with that kind of money who don't. And I just find that so powerful. So, he gets guided and he gives.

You know, I was in an airport once, and usually I tip like, you know, two or three or four or five bucks. And I got this inner guidance, this voice said, *"Tip this kid 20 bucks."*

And I said, *"Are you talking to me?"* [Congregants laugh] *"Twenty bucks, did you say?"* And I just ... I did it, because that's what I was guided to do. And I have to say, the amount of peace and joy and ease I felt from doing that felt really, really good.

I'll bet every one of us has probably been guided at some point to give or do something that didn't seem within the norm or something we wanted to do. But you followed it because your inner voice said it. There are so many ways that we have to help people, and so many ways we can make a difference in

uplifting them; making them feel loved and appreciated; and also bringing out more love within ourselves.

Giving is a powerful spiritual law. It activates increase; it activates abundance; it activates our spiritual creative energy; and it helps circulate more good. I always say that if you're stuck in any area of your life, give, give, give. Find some way to give. It will move the energy in an upward way.

The second one is to **RECEIVE**.

Let me ask you: What do you have a hard time receiving in your life? Think of something. If you're given a gift, and has anybody ever said, *"Oh, no; you really shouldn't have!"*? Or if you've been given a gift, have you ever said, *"Oh, I can't accept this. This is too expensive!"*? I mean, it is amazing how often we fight, resist, reject, and push away our opportunities to receive good and abundance in our lives.

When we don't receive, we deny the other person the blessing of the joy of giving. And we block our own good. And to block our good and to say no to a gift ... I mean, it creates an awkward energy between you. It's hard to give a gift when the person is saying, *"No, no!"* That you want to give it from your heart, and you're getting that resistance.

Okay, so I want you to think about this now. How well do you receive various acts of love in your life right now? How do you receive appreciation and recognition? How do you receive kindness? How do you receive money? How do you receive compliments? How do you receive gifts? How do you receive help ... or do you?

You know, in Scripture it says, *"God loves a cheerful giver."* And I would say equally: God loves a grateful and cheerful receiver. It is a part of the Law of Giving and Receiving. And both are needed for that flow to take place. And so if we don't -- if we can't receive -- we are truly blocking the good of all kinds in our lives.

A psychiatrist to the rich that Catherine Ponder was interviewing said this: *"A surprising number of my talented, successful clients still feel unworthy. They feel guilty about receiving large sums of money."*

I would say the most important thing for us to do to increase the level of prosperity and abundance in our lives is to **work on how worthy we feel**.

There might be an unlimited universe -- an abundance of so much good -- but if we can't receive it, that we will always have a limit and a glass ceiling on how much good we allow ourselves to receive. So, we need to **increase our capacity to love ourselves** because that's what will increase our capacity to receive.

And we need to practice receiving. So, the next time someone says -- you know, gives you some kind of compliment -- just say, *"Thank you! I appreciate that."*

You know, you are the best 11 o'clock service group I have ever seen in my life! [Congregants laugh and murmur] Thank you! I appreciate that. So, when people do good things: *"Thank you! I appreciate that."* Fight that resistance to say, *"No, it's nothing."*

Use it as a spiritual practice. Say, *"Thank you; I appreciate that."* Or say, *"That really means a lot to me."* I mean, as many ways as you could say it and share it sincerely, it will open your heart and it will bless them, as well.

You know, we live in an abundant universe, and there is nothing divine about living a limited life; living a life of lack and thinking we're unworthy. That is not how we are meant to live. We are here to live life and live it more abundantly.

And **"abundantly" isn't just about quantity; it's about quality**. It's about having rich experience in our relationships and intimacy and closeness and friendship and laughter. There's so many aspects of good

that are available to us that are a part of an abundant life. And we deserve it! We don't want to cheat ourselves out of the simple and wonderful joys of life that we can be enjoying.

"It is my good pleasure to receive God's abundant blessings."

"It is my good pleasure to receive God's abundant blessings."

Together: [with congregants] *"It is my good pleasure to receive God's abundant blessings."* Take a deep breath. Feel your heart and your mind opening, expanding to greater abundance.

One more time: [with congregants] *"It is my good pleasure to receive God's abundant blessings."*

"I am open and receptive to all the good the universe has for me."

[With congregants]: *"I am open and receptive to all the good the universe has for me."*

Take a deep breath. Let's say it one more time: [with congregants] *"I am open and receptive to all the good the universe has for me."* Amen.

You know, receiving is a powerful thing. It's about creating an opening space for more of God's goodness in our lives and in our world.

The final one is **RELEASE**.

Here is what Catherine Ponder says: *"The act of release is one of the most effective ways to open our mind to receive."*

You know, the act of release frees the tension, the tightness; you know, the grasping and the old energy that we sometimes hold on to. Letting go is really freeing and liberating.

On the seventh day, it says God rested. And what that really means is: after that work was done, there is a place where you'd let it go and just let things unfold the way that they are supposed to.

Like, it's an important thing for us to learn the power of release. That when you're working on a project and an idea, there's a point at which you just **release it, knowing that Spirit will continue to move things for it to happen**. But we don't need to keep trying to force or make it happen.

Interestingly, you know, the Hebrews, they -- every seven years -- made that year a year of release. So that you looked at your life and you thought you've got some old debts with somebody, you just kind of released them and released that.

You know, anything. Like, in a relationship, maybe it's time to release that relationship. It's ran its course. I mean, all kinds of different ways. If you're attached to the way things should go in a particular situation, just release it to its highest good. You know, forgive people that you feel that have wronged you in a certain way. Or if there's some old dreams that you're hanging on to that really don't serve your best, release those, as well.

Releasing is a powerful, liberating, freeing process that opens a space for greater good in our lives.

And the other thing she says is that **be careful what you attach your mind and your focus and your thoughts to**. That when we focus on the negative or on criticizing or judging or blaming or limitation, we limit ourselves. We need to release those. Release negative beliefs, thoughts of unworthiness. All of those things are things we should release.

And we need to practice releasing and not identifying ourselves with certain things. Instead of saying, *"Nothing is going right,"* we can say, *"Something good is unfolding, even though I can't see it yet."* Instead of saying, *"There is never enough,"* we can say, *"I am open to new channels of supply."*

Or we can go deeper: stop rehearsing the reality of what we don't want, and start rehearsing the possibility of what we do want. That we **stop focusing on the negative and start focusing on the positive**.

Releasing is an act of faith and trust: a faith that there is more good still to come, but we need to let go and create a space for it. A space in our outer lives with the clutter, but also in our inner lives of what we might be holding on to that isn't friendly or supportive.

A man went to his doctor one day to do something about his bad hearing. He said, *"Everyone in my family is complaining about my hearing."*

The doctor said he could help, and he treated him by giving him a small hearing aid that he said that nobody would be able to see. The doctor said, *"Why don't you come back and see me in a week and we can see how it's doing."*

And the guy said, *"Okay."* The man came back. and said to his doctor, *"Everything is working great!"*

The doctor replied, *"I bet your family is happy about that."*

And the man said, *"I haven't told them yet. I just sit there and listen. So far, I've changed my will three times."* [Congregants laugh]

We all want a prosperous life, and we don't have to wait until we're in somebody's will. We think it should be easy, because we live in an abundant universe ... but it takes work. It takes spiritual work. We've got to work with the dynamic laws of prosperity, which is giving, receiving and releasing. It is the way to move towards prosperity and open our minds to receive.

God bless you all.