

# LEARNING IS GROWING

Feb. 12, 2020

Rev. Richard Rogers

**Rev. Richard Rogers:** Okay, so are you ready for tonight? I'm even going to take a run at you tonight! Okay, so when have you enjoyed learning the most? I want you to think about that... Because what life lesson has been the most fun for you to learn?

How many of you have learned a couple of life lessons during the course of your lifetime? How many of you have learned some life lessons just the dog-awful-hardest way possible? That you were knocked down and drug for 50 miles before you got that lesson? Has everybody had a couple of those? Where you were just taken to your knees, and you would have gladly have learned, but you had to go deeper than that? And you just had to go all the way face-plant into the turf to learn that lesson? Anybody have a couple of those? Where it took everything you had to learn that lesson? You fought it...

But I also want to focus on, tonight, all the lessons that were just easy and fun for you to learn. Because we have this mindset that learning is hard. And it doesn't have to be! It can absolutely be the most joyful experience, or the most painful. And I think that we always get to decide. Right? When we're in "big R" resistance, does life become more painful? When we're in willingness, does it become easier? Right?

And so, over and over again, what I want you to see is: as we move our own mindset – our attitude, our beliefs, our understandings – as we move them from a place of resistance to a place of willingness, everything in our life gets easier.

You know, for me, one of my most favorite subjects in school – as I shared a little bit last week – was mathematics. I thought mathematics was the most fun you could have! Anybody else into math? Right? I love math! I felt they were teaching us how to solve puzzles! And the more information they gave us, the more it became easy and fun. And I wanted to know... Man, it was just like a game! I wanted to know everything about it! I wanted to know how to add and subtract and divide and multiply; I wanted to know how to multiply fractions and divide fractions. And anybody else love word problems? I loved word problems!

**[Congregation laughs]**

I wanted to know if I had a quarter of a pie, and I had three friends, and we had to each divide up a quarter of a pie by four, how much pie did I actually get? I wanted to know that I got 1/16th of a pie!

**[Congregation laughs]**

I might have felt a little robbed by that... but I wanted to know that! Right? And I wanted to know that, if a train was in Omaha 500 miles away...

**[Congregation laughs]**

...Going 35 miles per hour, and there was a train in Cleveland going 10 miles an hour... I wanted to know where they were going to collide! Was it going to get to Kansas City, or was it not going to get to Kansas City before... I wanted to know that stuff! And I love that, right?

And then there was English.

***[Congregation laughs]***

Now, English was created by an insane person. I really believe!

***[Congregation laughs]***

How many know that “i” before “e,” except after “c” ... except, except, except!!! Then they give you 50 words that don’t apply to any of the rules! And it’s like: a 4 is a 4!

***[Congregation laughs]***

A 4 is a 4! It doesn’t matter who you are. It doesn’t matter what your race is, your economics is, or your story, or your drama... It doesn’t matter what country you come from. Doesn’t matter if you come from a rich family or a poor family. A 4 is a 4!  $2 + 2$  is...

***[Congregation: “4!”]***

$2 \times 2$  is ...

***[Congregation: “4!”]***

Four! It’s four! It’s always four! But in English, there are three “theirs”!

***[Congregation laughs]***

Right? And they’re all spelled differently! Right? “THERE” it is! Right? “THEIR” piece of pie! “THEY’RE” in trouble. And I’m supposed to know which “there” they’re talking about by the context of the sentence! A 4: you don’t have to ask, “Now, 4...”

***[Congregation laughs]***

A 4 just is a 4! It’s not complicated! It’s just 4! Right? And by the time I got to high school, you know how you had to take those standardized tests? Well, when it came to abstract reasoning, I was a 99+ percentile. They wouldn’t give me 100%. But I was so far off the charts when it came to abstract reasoning, it was crazy. Mechanical reasoning... Mathematical reasoning... All that stuff. ***[Makes sound of an explosion]*** Top 95 percentile.

When it came to English, 52%.

***[Congregation laughs]***

My mother... My mother was worried, because here he was: this guy that could... He was so smart in some areas, and when it came to English, it was a problem. And we had a neighbor, Mrs. Newton. And Mrs. Newton was probably the most educated woman in our neighborhood. She was a nurse; her husband was a PhD. All the moms would drag their kids to Mrs. Newton, because she was a nurse, before they’d take us to the doctor. Whatever... And Mrs. Newton said to my mom – I’ll always remember this – she says, “Don’t worry! He’ll just have to hire a secretary.”

***[Congregation laughs]***

Right? And her whole thing was, you know, you don't spend a lot of time trying to compensate for somebody who's got something they're good at. You just kind of come up beside them, and help them out.

And over and over again, what I want you to see today is that there is an opportunity in every moment of every day to be in a learning mindset. A growth mindset. That same Mrs. Newton, when I was 13, she gave me a collection of... She had heard somehow that I was really into – at 13 – was into Eastern thought. And Eastern thought was really my introduction to spirituality. And she gave me a collection of five books: five of what she considered the best. Krishnamurti. There was Kahlil Gibran book. There was a book on Gandhi. She gave me what she considered five Eastern spiritual masters. And, at 13, I'm reading this stuff. Krishnamurti is not easy to understand when you're 13! But I took a stab at it.

And what I began to understand is the same level of mathematics principles applied to spiritual principles. That there were spiritual principles that you could apply, and it didn't matter who you were, or what you believed, or what you understood, or what was your background or how much money you had. That there were spiritual principles, and they were... That anyone could apply them. And it just made sense to me in a world that didn't always make sense. It seemed real. It seemed that I could count on it. That I could depend on it. That it wasn't changing, or people were making stuff up. This was real!

And so, one of the things that I just love about spiritual principles is that, every week, I can just present a spiritual principle and we can kind of look at it. You can kind of see if you believe it, or if you want to apply it, or if you understand it. And what's great about spiritual principle is you don't have to apply them. Right? But they're here. They're universal; they've been here maybe from the beginning of time! So the more you understand them, I believe that your life becomes easier. Because instead of going against the tide, you actually learn how to go with the tide.

Has everybody had a spiritual principle and, in learning or understanding this spiritual principle, everything in your life just got a little bit easier? Because it's like, *"Oh! If I put stuff out into the world, that stuff's going to come back to me. And every time – no matter what I put out into the world – that comes back to me!"* Right? And we can either be victimized by that, or we can actually decide that we're going to be intentional about what we put out into the world! We can actually do it.

And so I thought about, tonight – being Valentine's week – what's the principle that makes the biggest difference. And there are a lot of them, right? And, really, what I want to talk about tonight is LOVE.

How many of you have had an experience with love that was less than enjoyable?

***[Congregation laughs]***

How many of you have had an experience with love that was just downright painful? How many of you have had an experience with love that was so painful that you just wanted to go, *"Phu! Pooey on love; just forget it! I don't need it; I don't want it. This is just a raw deal!"* Right? So the problem is – the problem over and over again – is that we have these wonderful, human people who are trying to teach us about love, and some of them are not very skilled at it.

***[Congregation laughs]***

Can I get an *"Amen!"*? They're not very skilled at it! So what begins to happen in our culture – and, I believe, it's been happening for thousands of years – is we have all these people who are applying this

spiritual principle who are not very good at it. And we actually begin to believe that that is what love is. So we take our personal interactions and we label “love” across them, and for most of us – or for many of us – some of that experience of love has been less than desirable. But because the label of “love” has been placed on it, we actually think that was love. And so, what happens is: we never move to a higher experience or a higher understanding. We never move to God love. And what happens is that we’ve created a culture that has romantic love as the focus, but not spiritual love. Not God love. Not Divine love. And we have some people out there creating havoc with love. So there’s a whole lot of bruised and banged on people who have given up on love, instead of looking at it as a spiritual principle. Just because you had a bad teacher doesn’t mean that the principle is wrong. Are you with me?

And yet, our heart is so shut down, that we don’t ever give ourselves an opportunity to say, *“That’s what I was taught. But what if there is more than that? What if there could actually be more love than that?”* And the difficulty is: if you don’t really get that God is love – if you haven’t had the experience of God is love – then all the other spiritual principles don’t really make sense. Because love really is the juice that holds everything together.

And if you don’t really have an experience of how much God loves you, how much are you going to want to surrender to God? Not! Zip! Negative! You’ll go exactly the opposite direction! So what’s happened is: because we don’t have a profound experience of God love – of spiritual love – we are making life so much harder than it needs to be. Because we don’t really trust that the Universe loves us. Right? You don’t surrender to a Power that you don’t trust! You don’t turn a problem or a situation over to a Power that you don’t think absolutely loves you.

How many of you have had a friend that wasn’t very good at loving you? Has everybody had that experience? Right? Now, how many of you have had a friend that was really good at loving you? So what I want you to see is: if you have two friends – one’s really good at loving you, and one’s not very good at loving you – how many of you would choose to lean into the person who was good at loving you? Right? That’s not always what we do! We actually sometimes lean into the person who’s not very good at loving us, thinking that they know love better. That their love means something more. So we try to earn their love over and over and over again. And instead of just leaning into the person who loves us, and feeling unconditionally loved. That’s how messed up we are! And I’m not going to call it any names...

***[Congregation laughs]***

... but we’ve all had that experience. Or many of us have had that experience. That instead of dating the person who was right for us, we dated the absolutely wrong person, because we wanted to try to “earn” or get their love. Right? And, over and over again, what I want you to see is: this is weird.

***[Congregation laughs]***

That’s a spiritual term. Moses said it somewhere!

***[Congregation laughs]***

In the wilderness, right? About 28 years into wandering, he said, *“This is just weird! Why are we still here!”*

***[Congregation laughs]***

Right? But, over and over again, what I want you to see is that the spiritual quality of love is always there. And we kind of get lost in the human drama of love. So we never really get to the real stuff.

How many of you ever read a book or ever heard anything from somebody who's had a near-death experience? Anybody? So one of the underlying qualities of everyone who's ever had a near-death experience is that they have this feeling of feeling the Universe's pure love. Like, on the other side – when they get close to the other side – they feel such a level of pure love that they don't really want to come back. Sometimes they have to come back. Sometimes they knew they just weren't done. But the experience on the other side is pure love!

So, if the entire Universe is pure love, and we're in this weird, dramatic, love/hate thing going on in our culture, we miss the mark! Jesus said that the kingdom of heaven was at hand! Well, when you don't have love, it doesn't make sense. It just doesn't make sense!

Okay; are we ready with the video? I want to go Maya Angelou.

*[Video plays of Maya Angelou being interviewed by Oprah Winfrey.]*

**Maya:** *There's a book called "Lessons in Truth."*

**Oprah:** *Wow.*

**Maya:** *And, in the book, there's a line that says, 'God loves me.' And when I came to read it to my then-mentor, Frederick Wilkerson – the late Frederick Wilkerson...*

**Oprah:** *Uh huh.*

**Maya:** *... I read, 'God loves me.' And he said, 'Read it again.' And I said, 'God loves me.' He said, 'Read it again.'*

**Oprah:** *Ohhhh.*

**Maya:** *'Read it again!' And, finally, I said, "GOD LOVES ME." [Gasps and tears up] It still humbles me! That this Force, which made leaves and fleas and stars and rivers and you, loves me! Me! Maya Angelou! It's amazing!!! I can do anything, and do it well! Any good thing: I can do it. That's why I'm who I am. Yes! Because GOD. LOVES. ME. [Tears streaming} And I'm amazed at it! And grateful for it."*

**[Rev. Richard Rogers]:** *Isn't that fabulous? It's fabulous, right?*

**[Congregation applauds]**

So what she's talking about – just giving a context to that interview – she's talking about her experience of Unity. She had read – with her teacher – she had read *Lessons in Truth*. And in this line of *Lessons in Truth* it says, "God loves me." Right?

And so what I want you to see tonight is: for many of us, love has been a lesson that's been harder than it needed to be. Because we weren't really learning about love; we were learning about human drama. And we've confused human drama with love. But they're not the same experience! And, tonight, I want you to have a way of holding love that is not based on your human past, your drama, your disappointment, your fears, your abuse, whatever you've been through. I don't want that any more. I

want you – in your mind and your heart – to clearly be able to differentiate between love and the stuff that you’ve gone through. Because until we can really separate those two, then we lump them altogether. And we think... Pat Benetar. **[Rev. Rogers laughs]** What was it? “Love is a Battlefield.” Like, “Oh! Sign me for that!” Right?

**[Congregation and Rev. Rogers laugh]**

Right? Like, can I have, “Love Hurts.” “Yeah; please! Sign me up for that!” Right?

So we have this understanding that love is painful and hard and yecccchhhh. Right? And it totally takes us out of the context of the glory of love – of God love, of spiritual love – that we don’t even aim for, we don’t even shoot for it, we don’t even try for it, because we’ve diminished it to the point of it being painful or a battlefield or hard or stinky.

So, when I was 19... I was raised in Unity. And when I was 19, they let me be in charge of the youth summer camp for the Unity churches in California, Arizona and Nevada. And one of the things that’s happened to me most of my life is that I’ve been able to talk myself into situations that I should have never been able to do.

**[Congregation laughs]**

It’s both a gift and a not gift.

**[Congregation laughs]**

So, at 19, I told them that I was just getting out of YOU, and I told the minister that I could do this: that I could run summer camp. And so they let me be in charge of 55 kids, 15 YOUers, and four adults. And the adults kept saying, “Well, what do you want us to do?” And I said, “Well, I’d really like you guys to be in charge, but since I’m in charge...” Like, I didn’t feel, at 19, like an adult. Like, at 19... Have you ever had a 19-year-old child? They are not an adult! Right? They think they’re adults, but they’re not an adult. Right? So I had these kids, and we were in the mountains in Wrightwood, California. And I was working crazy hours -- sometimes midnight, 1, 2 o’clock, getting up at 5, 6 in the morning – to run this thing for a week.

And one night, one of the counselors was really just doing this incredible job of taking care of one of the kids. And there’s something inside me watching this counselor take care of this young girl that opened. And that’s the only way I know how to describe it. It’s sometimes called a mystical experience. But something in me just opened all the way. And I spent all night wandering in the woods, feeling the love of the entire Universe. As a real experience. I felt – and this is going to sound whacky – but I felt the love of the trees and the rocks. And I felt like the entire Universe was loving me. So, at 19 years old, I had just this incredible spiritual love experience.

As it got close to morning, it began – I say evaporate – it began to wane. It began to... And I was like, “No, God! No, God! Really! No! I don’t want this ever to end!” And the voice inside me said, “It was a free introductory offer.”

**[Congregation laughs]**

That's kind of my relationship with God, right? And then the voice said to me, *"If you spend the rest of your life practicing love, this will be the way that you die. That you'll die knowing this much love as your normal, regular experience."*

And so, it was transformative for me. Because I had known pain. I had known disappointment. I had known love that didn't make sense. And, in this moment, I realized that the way that we do love is not the way that God, I think, really intended us to practice love. But until we really know that God loves us – until we experience it, not just from our intellect, but really experience it with a wide-open heart... when we feel the entire Universe coming at us as pure love – all the other spiritual principles are just kind of intellectual information. But when you feel the entire love of the Universe coming at you, of course you surrender to it! Of course! Because that's what Grace is: Grace is the entire love of the Universe coming at you. And of course you say "Yes!" to it. Of course you surrender to it! Of course you allow it to bless you and heal you and transform you. Of course! Because it's so much easier!

So right now, what we're doing is: we're taking spiritual principles and we're intellectually trying to apply them, because they're not being conveyed in unconditional love.

So are you ready for your homework? So your homework for this week is one affirmation. And I know it's going to start in your head. *"God loves me."* Right? That's an intellectual understanding. It doesn't really ... you don't feel it here. **[Points to his chest/heart]**

But the more you take that intellectual understanding and you take it and you apply it to your heart, there's a moment where the entire Universe opens, and you feel the infinite love of the Universe fully directed toward you, at you. Because the Universe loves you! And the moment that happens – the more you move from your head to a profound experience of love... The moment that happens, every other spiritual principle makes sense. Every experience makes sense. The Universe makes sense; it becomes fulfilled. The kingdom of heaven is at hand.

Jesus gave an example of God's love for us in the Prodigal Son. And it was this idea of the second-born son, who – in that culture – should not have received, really, anything. He goes to his father and says, *"I want half. I want my share."* And the father gives him his half, and he goes to a distant country. And it says he enjoyed "riotous living." Right? How many of you can identify with riotous living?

**[Congregation laughs]**

Right? Riotous living: it's not bad, right? It's a ton of fun, until he ran out of money. And then it says... the only way he could make his way – and he was a good Jewish boy – the only way he could make his way was feeding the hogs. And the problem with feeding the hogs is they wouldn't even let him eat the food that he was feeding to the hogs. So every night, he was hungry. And one night, it says, he came to himself. And he thought, *"Even servants at my father's house eat better than I'm eating. Live better than I'm living."* And he said, *"Even though I'm not worthy of being called my father's son, I'm going to go back and see if he'll take me in, and let me be a servant."* And it says when he was still a far distance off, his father sees him, goes and greets him: hugs him, puts his arms around him, gives him his robe, gives him rings and kills the fatted calf so that they can celebrate that his son was dead, and now he's come home. That, whatever your story is – whatever your drama is, whatever your past is – the entire Universe loves you. God loves you with infinite, unconditional love.

And when we allow our shame to keep us from opening the door to God's infinite love, we keep ourselves in this Purgatory of semi-hell. Because our shame actually keeps us from opening to all the love that God is.

And so, tonight, would you be willing to take your next spiritual step, and let God all the way in? ALL the love of the Universe? And not wait until you die to remind yourself that God is love, but actually LIVE in that love: right here, right now. And to feel the infinite love of the Universe directed exactly toward you?

Does that mean you're loved more than anyone else? No! It's infinite love! There's a zillion of it for ALL of us. But if you don't feel it, it doesn't help you. It doesn't make sense. It doesn't make your spiritual life come alive.

God loves me. Together:

**[Congregation and Rev. Rogers:]** *"God loves me."*

One more time:

**[Congregation and Rev. Rogers:]** *"God loves me."*

God loves me! And you think, *"Well, but I've made a mistake!"* Say it with me!

**[Congregation and Rev. Rogers:]** *"God loves me."*

*"I get kind of creepy and cranky!"*

**[Congregation and Rev. Rogers:]** *"God loves me."*

Right? The whole truth of the Universe is that God wanted you to be exactly the way you are, and God loves you exactly the way you are. And if your shame keeps you from feeling that, you miss out on the whole ride. You miss out on the whole purpose. You miss out on the whole blessing of what's right before you, and the reality is that God loves you!

God loves me. God loves me! And that's really where we are. The planet – the Earth – isn't going to get better at our current level of love. And I know it's a cliché: we think we've got to love each other. No! If we try to love each other from our current experience of love, this is what it looks like. If we don't really learn that God loves us – if we don't feel God's infinite love for us – the planet is never going to get better. Because we're trying to love each other out of our humanity – or through our humanity – instead of downloading Divine Love to each other!

And I promise you: the moment you experience the full power of God's love for you, every one of your relationships gets much, much better. But if you keep trying to love people from your humanness – from your intellect, from your story, from your drama – nothing ever changes. We have to go do this spiritual work. We have to let ourselves experience the fullness of God's love.

Together:

**[Congregation and Rev. Rogers:]** *"God loves me."*

Let's take it into prayer:

I invite you to open your mind, your heart, your soul to the activity of God that is right here, right now.

God loves me. God loves me! We open the door to all the love that God is. To the love of the entire Universe. We surrender to it. We call it forth. We allow it to bless us and heal us and restore us and prosper us. That love is it! It's the only thing that's real. And we go days and weeks and lifetimes without it. God loves me. GOD. LOVES. ME. So in the name and through the power of the Living Christ, we are ready for love: pure love. Divine love. God love. And so it is. Amen.

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