

BACK TO SCHOOL

Week #1 of a New 5-Week Series

Sept. 16, 2020

Rev. Richard Rogers

Rev. Richard Rogers: Hello! I'm Richard Rogers, and this is Wednesday night service at Unity of Phoenix Spiritual Center. And I am so glad you're here! I hope you enjoyed last week, where we did our World Day of Prayer, and I did a service. We got a little "two-fer" out of us!

So this week I'm going to focus on a lesson about going back to school. I know that, in Arizona, we go back to school in August, but historically most of us grew up going back to school in September. So that's where we're going to go today. So I want you to open your mind, your heart, your soul as we move into this time of meditation.

MEDITATION:

Take a deep breath. And I want you to feel your spirit – your presence. I want you to feel the activity of God that is in you and all around you. And there's something that happens when our soul is receptive to the divine activity of Spirit. When we are teachable. When we are willing to learn.

For many of us, we can think of a time in our life where our ego was driving our life. Where we knew everything that we needed to know. That we were in charge. That we were making things happen. And, no matter how great they were or how badly they turned out, our ego was squarely in charge. And then there's a moment where your ego takes a breath. Where it actually gives up, or decides that it's going to put its full focus on God and become teachable. That it's willing for God to show us the way.

So tonight we're going to go back to school. We're going to open our mind, our heart, our soul to be teachable again: what the Buddhists call "the beginner's mind." Where we don't move into the experience knowing what's going to happen next. Where we actually just open a space to be amazed. To be surprised. To be blessed. Today let there be a gap and, in that gap, allow God to show up in brand new ways. Let the Universe surprise you. Let the Universe bless you. And the ultimate prayer from that teachable space is simply, "*Thy will be done.*" And how scary it is for our ego to pray that prayer! How scary it is for us not to be in control! But when we pray the prayer, "*Thy will be done,*" we're actually inviting the highest level of good into our life. "*Thy will be done.*" Thy will be done!

Holy Spirit, reveal all that I need to know. Show me my path; show me my way. Reveal all that I need to do to heal, to be blessed, to be transformed, to live in alignment with the highest level of good. Holy Spirit, I release all the places where I've been and desired to be in control. And I allow my soul to be receptive. To be soft. To be open to receive. I am willing to learn again. I am willing to let go of all I've already known: the truth that I've accumulated through the course of my life. I let it go! I don't allow yesterday's good to keep me from the higher level of wisdom that is available for me today. I let it go. I am willing to unlearn my past. I'm willing to unlearn my preconceived ideas. I let go of all the old limitations; all the old erroneous beliefs. I am willing to go back to school. I am willing for my soul to be open and receptive, and to step into being fully teachable in this moment. To be lifted higher than I've ever been before.

Show me the way, God; show me the way! Thank you, God, for all the truth that you are revealing to my soul this day. Thank you, God, that all the erroneous ideas and patterns and belief can be released for me. That I am set free to higher and higher levels of God. That old ideas no longer keep me trapped. I am open; I am receptive; and I am ready to go to school. God, show the way! In the name and through the power of the Living Christ, it is so good that we say thank you, God; thank you, God; thank you, God! Amen.

SONG:

Todd Herzog: 'Living a Lie'

Ooooooh Ooooooh ...
I've been living a lie
And it's time that it was found
Now the moment has come
To put my feet back on the ground

Don't care if it's the season
Gotta do what I believe in
I've been looking for signs
Now the time has come around

No more can I pretend
Will I defend or justify
No more can I go on singing this song
This is my life

So I'm starting again
To return to all my dreams
I've uncovered the lens
Now I'm letting myself see

Don't know which path was harder:
the savior or the martyr
So I'm opening up
to the part of me that's free

No more can I pretend
Will I defend or justify
No more can I go on singing this song
This is my life

Ooooooh Ooooooh ...
I've been living a lie
And it's time that it was found
Now the moment has come
To put my feet back on the ground

Don't care if it's the season
Gotta do what I believe in
I've been looking for signs
Now the time has come around

I've been living a lie
and it's time that it was found

[Light applause]

MESSAGE

Rev. Richard Rogers: That was fabulous, Todd! Craig, thank you so much! We so appreciate it! Todd, it's great to see you again. And Craig, as always, boom! Out of the park. It was fabulous. Thank you!

Alright! I want to take you back to school. You know, part of our spiritual journey is to be teachable. And there seems to be this constant conversation going on within us where we have a certain level of information. Where we understand the way that our life has worked. The way the Universe works. The way our spiritual life works. And sometimes that half understanding – or that half-truth – keeps us from a greater truth. Keeps us from a greater knowing.

And in the Buddhist community, it's called "the beginner's mind." And the beginner's mind teaches us to be willing to be open and receptive in each moment – in every moment – for the higher level of truth. For the higher possibility. And so, today, I'm going to invite you to come back to school. I'm going to invite you to come back into that learning, growing mindset that allows us to let go of old ideas. To allow those old ideas to be soft, so that they're not hard, inflexible. We actually open our mind to a higher possibility.

So I'm going to take you back to school. So when you were a kid – and you were going back to school – do you have a favorite memory? Do you have a favorite memory maybe, if you had a new pair of clothes, or a shirt or a dress that you just loved? That you were so excited to go back to school! Or maybe it was a favorite memory of going back to school might be in seeing friends or maybe if you had a favorite subject. Or maybe going back to school was kind of a scary time for you. Maybe you were shy and you really didn't like meeting new kids. Or maybe school was hard for you. Maybe there some subjects that you just hated. Or maybe you were teased at school.

You know, one of the things I want us to look at is really celebrating all the good, but also healing all the pain of the past. And I think for many of us, when we think about school and being school-aged, and going back to school ... for many of us, we are still holding on to some pretty painful memories. Some memories that really have defined a time of our life. Where we have really lived out of those memories year after year after year. And I even want you to go back to school in going back to school. I want you to heal the pain of school – if there was any pain for your school-age years – I want us to heal that now. Because I want us to be open and receptive to, truly, all the good that God has for us.

And, during this time, I want us to be holding in prayer all the teachers across the country that are having to teach in ways that they've never taught before. Or having to teach through Zoom. Or the kids that are trying to go back to school in college, and colleges are being closed right now. And kids are being sent back home. You know, our educational system right now absolutely needs our prayers and support. Teachers, administrators, students: they need our love and support as we move through this time. Because an educated public is a better public. A public that is educated and can make good decisions and make good choices is a stronger public. So we need to see that our public education system just actually strengthening and blessing all of our children. All of our children!

You know, for me, going back to school was kind of a bittersweet time. We lived right behind my elementary school, so our back fence was the back fence for the elementary school. So in the summer time, what would happen is: my dad would put a big ladder over the fence. And so we could just kind of climb up one side and down the other. And so all summer long, the whole school playground was our playground. You know, we had basketball courts and swing sets and everything that the school offered: when they had recreational programs. They were all a part of our summer experience. We'd just climb up over the ladder and we'd spend most of the summer playing in the school yard.

We even had a basset hound. And this old basset hound: you would never think this dog could do this. But this old basset hound actually taught himself how to climb the ladder. And he could get to the top of the ladder; he never figured out how to get down! He never figured out how to get over to the other side. But he'd get to the top of the ladder, and then he'd see my brother, my sister and myself playing in the school yard; you could hear his howl! He would howl so loud! Because he didn't like the fact that we were in the schoolyard without him! So he would howl and howl until one of us came. And he was a big

– big belly! He was a big dog! So, when we were kids, lifting him over and carrying him down the ladder. And then he was so happy, because he could just run and run and run, smell every smell. And then we'd have to carry him back over to the other side. But he loved it! And, for me, going back to school was the last Sunday of summer. Dad would bring the ladder back over, and we'd put it down, because the principals really didn't like us jumping the fence to go to school. We had to walk all the way around the block.

And I remember when my kids went to elementary school. You know, their little elementary school was right in the center of our community, and so all the parents would kind of walk their kids to school. And it was just a great time of seeing parents that you hadn't seen all summer. And it was just ... it was good!

So, it's also from my children's school that I learned the concept of being a life-long learner. And I hadn't really ever heard that expression before. Part of the school's creed – part of their purpose – was to create life-long learners. And one of the things that I love about Unity is: we really support that idea of being life-long learners through our classes, through our workshops, through our Sunday morning lessons. Through everything we're about is really supporting people in being life-long learners. Because your spiritual journey is a process of education. The more we know, I think the better the choices that we can make.

And so, we really support around here you being a life-long learner. To really feel like you're going to be learning and growing through the whole course of your life. I want even on your last day for you to have a realization. I want you to actually move through this life as a life-long learner.

One of the things I also think is helpful is to go back on some of the classic spiritual books that have made a difference in your life. So this fall, I'm going to begin a series based on the work of Emilie Cady: *Lessons in Truth*, Unity's fundamental textbook. And there were a lot of great spiritual books I could have picked. I thought about maybe doing *Illusions* by Richard Bach or a Wayne Dyer book or a Chopra book. Charles and Myrtle Fillmore have many books. Imelda Shanklin has *What Are You?*, which is a classic Unity book. But I picked *Lessons in Truth*.

Flo Dibblee – Rev. Flo Dibblee – who, for many, many years, has been our adjunct minister here. One of the things Flo says is that every year you need to go back to Cady. You need to go back to Emilie Cady. You need to go back to *Lessons in Truth* and really discover what Emilie Cady wants to say to you now. Because there's really two ways to go back through a classic book, right? You can do the "greatest hits," you know? [Laughs] And I love doing the greatest hits! The greatest hits is when I read the things that I've underlined multiple times. And I read them today, and it's like, "Wow; that's just so good!"

The other way – and I think probably the more powerful way – is to say, "What does she have to say to me today? What is the wisdom that she has to say to me today?" Realizing that the words haven't changed over the last 100-plus years, but my consciousness – the evolution of my soul – has absolutely changed over the last year. And so when I read that book today, I hear it from a brand new place. I hear it from my new understanding. I hear it from a higher spiritual point of view. And it can be exactly the same word, but I don't hear it the same way. I've evolved, and I can hear the text – or the message – evolving so that I can greet it. I can hold it. I can understand it in a new way.

So, during this fall season, I'm going to invite you to pick one of your favorite spiritual books. And I'm going to invite you to re-read it. I want you to go over it again. And so, for the next few weeks, I'm going to go over *Lessons in Truth* with Emilie Cady. Because there are some classic statements that really are just ... they're just transformative. Just true! And when we hear them again, it's just like, "Oh! That's just right! It's just true!" So that's what we're going to be in: *Lessons in Truth*.

The first chapter is entitled: “Bondage or Liberty, Which?” First paragraph; I love the first paragraph. It says this: *“In entering upon this course of instruction, each of you should, so far as possible, lay aside, for the time being, all previous theories and beliefs.”*

I love this idea! What she wants is you to give it a clean slate. What she wants you to do is not come into it with your preconceived ideas, but actually take on that idea of “a beginner’s mind.” Actually take on the idea of: What if I looked at this without any disagreement? What if I don’t debate it? What if I just receive the spiritual good that is available?

She goes on: *“By so doing, you will be saved the trouble of trying, all the way through the course, to put ‘new wine into old wineskins’ (from Luke 5:37).”*

Now, this is a teaching that Jesus used. At the time when Jesus was teaching – the time when Jesus lived – the idea of creating wine was you put the elements of the wine in a new wine bladder. A goat’s bladder. And, as it fermented, it would expand. Now, that worked out perfect, right? But if you tried to use the same bladder more than once, it has already expanded once. It couldn’t expand again. So what would happen is: as that wine would begin to ferment, it would actually rip the bladder, and it would spill out.

And the idea, the teaching, here is that we want to actually give the Universe – we want to give Spirit, we want to give God – a place of expansion within us, so that we can hold a new understanding. So that we can hold a new spiritual truth. That we’re not trying to contain it in our old understanding. In our old ideas.

“If anything ...” She goes on to say, *“If there is anything, as we proceed, that you do not understand or agree with, just let it lie passively in your mind until you have read the entire book, for many statements that would at first arouse antagonism and discussion will be clear and easily accepted a little further along the path. After the course is completed, if you wish to return to your old beliefs and ways of living, you are at perfect liberty to do so. But, for the time being, be willing to become as a little child; for, said a Master in spiritual things, ‘Unless you ... become like a little child, you will not receive the kingdom of heaven.’ If at times there seems to be repetitive, please remember that these are lessons, not lectures.”*

So here’s the whole idea, right? If we’re going to go back to school, we have to go back to school from the idea of being teachable. We have to be open. We have to be receptive. We have to allow spiritual Truth to speak to us in a new way.

Now, if we’re clearly just living out of our ego – if we clearly already have all the answers; we’ve solved all the problems; we know everything – our receptivity to new ideas is really limited! Because we’re not open and receptive to all the good that God has for us, because we already know. We’ve been there; we’ve done that; we’ve already got it solved. That we are clearly in our place of control. We are clearly in our ego. But being a child is that we’re being receptive. That we’re always in that place of learning and growing and expanding. That we are open to new ideas. That we are willing for Spirit to reveal that which we have never known before.

Like, if there was an idea that could literally change your life, would you want it today? If there was an idea that could change your relationships, it could change your finances, it could change your health ... If there’s an idea that could radically change your world, would you want it today? And I can’t imagine most of us saying “No” to that! Most of us would say “Yes, I want it!” But most of us assume there isn’t that idea out there. Most of us assume that there isn’t an idea that’s so radical – that’s so transformative – that it really literally could transform everything in our life. So we actually don’t believe it’s there. So we actually close our mind to the possibility. See, you have to actually believe it’s possible for an idea to change your life! You actually have to believe that there’s ideas out there that are

quantum leaps: that are radical leaps forward that could actually change everything in your life! And that's what I want you to be open to!

You know, it's great to get an idea that moves us 5% forward. It is! It is fabulous! But what about an idea that would move you a million times forward? What about an idea that would so transform your life that everything would become brand new. Those are the ideas that I'm going to invite you to open your mind to, your heart to, your soul to. To really allow Spirit to drop in some game-changers. Because I believe there are game-changers! Available to each and every one of us. That, if we are willing to lay hold of it – if we are willing to entertain – would literally change everything in our life!

So in paragraph six. And I want to give you the paragraph number for each of these quotes, because if you go back to *Lessons in Truth*, there's many, many different editions. But if I give you the paragraph numbers, you can actually see where it is. Alright?

So paragraph six. It says – and this is my favorite line in the whole book! Here it is; paragraph six: *“Sometime, somewhere, every human being must come to himself.”* Or herself. Right? I love that idea! That there's gonna be a time in your soul's evolution ... There's going to be a moment where you “come to yourself.” It's that same line that Jesus used in the Prodigal Son, where he said, *“And he came to himself.”* And it's that idea that we're struggling in lack and limitation, or we're struggling in a situation, or we're living a life that's beneath us ... and then we come to ourselves. And the lights come on! We get that *“Aha!”* experience.

And when we come to ourselves, we come to the power that's within us. We come to the possibilities within us. We come into the life that's been pre-ordained for us. And I want you to hear that: that in your DNA is every potential for who you could be. In your DNA is not only your physical possibilities, but it's also your spiritual possibilities. Your divine possibilities. That you've been pre-wired for all the good that God is. You've been pre-wired to live the highest and the best life.

And if we come into this paragraph – paragraph six – sometime, somewhere, every human being comes to himself! That we come into a fuller understanding of who we are, and the possibilities for our life.

The next line is: *“Having tired of eating husks, we will ‘rise and go to my Father.”* Like, uhhh! Have you ever had that experience? Where you're living a life, and you've just been eating, you've been living, you've been thinking in a way that's so beneath who you truly are, and then you come to yourself. And you say, *“Why? Why am I doing this? Why am I making this choice? Why am I settling for this?”* And at that moment, your life radically changes.

Paragraph nine: *“Each man must sooner or later learn to stand alone with his God; nothing else available. Nothing else will ever make you master of your own destiny. There is an indwelling Lord of all life, all health, all strength, peace and joy, all wisdom and support that you have ever need or desire of. No one can give you any of these but your indwelling Father. He is the spring of all joy and comfort.”*

Have much time have you spent looking for the solutions of your life? Looking “out there,” thinking that this person, that situation, this teaching is going to have the answers for me? And what Emilie Cady is so committed to in this first chapter is clearly defining where your support comes from. That it's always, always, always about going within. Coming to that power – that place of God – within you that is the source of everything that you could ever want. That whatever you're looking for “out there,” the answer, the path, the way is within you.

Paragraph ten: *“Heretofore you have believed that you were helped and comforted by others, that we received joy from outside circumstances and surroundings, but it is not so. All joy and strength and good spring up from a fountain within one's own being, and if we only knew this Truth, we should know that,*

because God is the fountain within us out of which springs all our good. Nothing that anyone does or says, or fails to do or say, can take away our joy and good."

I love that! I just absolutely love that! Because we fear so much! There's so much anxiety in the world that somebody could take our good away from us. That somebody could keep us from our good. That somebody has the way to keep us. And spiritually what is true is that, when you move your focus off the external – off the anxiety, off the fear – and you place it on the presence and power of God within you, everything begins to open up.

God in me is my source! God in me is my way! God in me opens doors of possibilities! God in me provides everything I need! No one "out there" can take away the good that God has placed within me.

Paragraph #35: *"If we have the courage to persist in seeing only God in all, even in the wrath of man, we shall invariably turn it to our advantage. Joseph, in speaking of the actions of his brethren selling him into slavery said this: 'As for you, you meant it for evil, but God meant it for good.' To them that love God, 'all things work together for good.' For them who recognize only God, all things work together for good. All things! Every circumstance in your life that seem heartbreaking evils will turn to joy as you focus your eye and steadfastly refuse to see anything but the goodness of God within."*

God in me is my path! Like, I want you to really look in your life right now: Where are you anxious? Where are you afraid? And we've talked a lot about this during this pandemic. We've talked a lot about that during this time. To really look at your anxiety level. Look at your fear level. And, over and over again, to move the focus to the presence and power of God within you. But if you don't believe that you're connected to God – if you don't believe that there's this fountain of infinite possibilities within you – then you, by definition, have to look outside yourself for the answers. For the solution. For the path. And God in you is the way! God in you is the door to the infinite blessings of God!

And, today, I want you to once again examine your anxiety. I want you to feel it. I want you to feel the places where you felt victimized. I want you to feel the places where you feel like someone has taken your good away from you. Or someone could take your good away from you. And I want you to put your full focus on the presence and power of God in you that will set you free! No one can keep you from God! I want you to hear that! No one can keep you from God. Will you say that with me? "No one can keep me from God! No one can keep me from God!" One more time: "No one can keep me from God!"

No one can keep you from God. And if they can't keep you from God, they can't keep you from good. If they can't keep you from the presence and power of God within you, they cannot keep you from any good thing. For your source of goodness – your source of blessings; your source of love and peace and abundance and health – comes from within. No one can keep me from God. No one can keep me from good. That's just the Truth. It is the absolute spiritual Truth!

And when we come back to those fundamental truths that change our lives, because we know that no one – nothing! – can keep you from God. That's the good news! That God is in you! You're not screaming to a God "out there" somewhere and hope that He takes pity on your soul and grants you your desire. That is the old paradigm. That is the old understanding. In Unity, we believe that the presence and power of God is within you. That no one can keep you from your center. No one can keep you from your core. No one can keep you from your relationship with the Divine. And if no one can keep you from God, no one can keep you from your good. No one! No situation can keep you from your good.

And the more that you look to God – the more that you look to your center – the more that you depend on your core, you are set free. For there is a deep level of peace that comes over your heart, your mind, your soul when you know your oneness with God. It changes everything! It literally changes everything.

Last paragraph; paragraph 40: *"The ultimate aim of every man should be to come into the conscious of the indwelling God, and then, in all external matters, to affirm deliverance through and by this Divine One. There should not be a running to and fro, making human efforts to aid the Divine, but a calm, restful, unwavering trust in All-Wisdom and All-Power within one as able to accomplish all things."*

God in you is your source. God in you is the core of who you are. God in you is your source of all good. When we come back to these fundamental ideas of Unity, they literally change our relationship with life. Every place where you believe that someone outside you can keep you from your good, spiritually is untrue. It may look like it. It may feel like it. You may believe that they can. But the spiritual truth is that God is in you. And if God is in you, no one can keep you from your good.

Would you pray with me?

I invite you to open your mind, your heart, your soul to the activity of God that is right here, right now. That God in you is your source of infinite good. That I know the presence and power of God in me. I know God! I know God intimately well. I know that my spirit is connected to the Divine presence. I know my spirit is an expression of all that God is. As I turn within, I discover the door to an infinite level of good. God in me is my source! And God in me makes all things possible. Thank you, God; thank you, God; thank you, God! And so it is. Amen.

COLLECTION

This is a time of giving of our gifts and tithes, and I invite you to hold them in your hand as we bless them together. And even though I know many of you are giving electronically – and I so appreciate your tithes and your offerings that you are offering to this ministry week after week to really allow us to continue to do the spiritual work that we're doing. So our offering blessing again is: *"Divine love, through me, blesses and multiplies all that I give and all that I receive."* Together: *"Divine love, through me, blesses and multiplies all that I give and all that I receive."* And so it is. Amen.

CLOSING

God bless you all; thank you for your generous support of this ministry! Thank you for the way that you are living your spiritual truth every day during this time! As more and more of us awaken to the power of God within us, we really create a new dimension, a new possibility, a new reality. We're creating the kingdom of heaven – the kingdom of brotherly love – right here, right now. God bless you, friend, and I look forward to being with you next week.

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