

GRATITUDE FOR HUMOR

Week #2 of the 5-Week Series, "Gratitude"

Oct. 28, 2020

Rev. Richard Rogers

Rev. Richard Rogers: Hi! I'm Richard Rogers, and I want to welcome you to the Wednesday night service at Unity of Phoenix Spiritual Center. You know, we are on a 40-day series right now based on the power of gratitude. And, really, gratitude is the thing that transforms our life maybe more than anything else. That when we develop a grateful heart, we really open our minds and our hearts to all the good that God has for us. And so we're going to focus on one of my favorite aspects of gratitude tonight. And I think you're absolutely going to love it. Sally Jo is going to knock it out of the park with, just, great music. So stay tuned; you're going to love it!

I've got one announcement for you tonight. We are now doing two services beginning this Sunday, November 1. Two services at 9 and 11 – outside on the lawn. So those of you that know, we've been doing 9 o'clock, and now we're doing a 9 and 11. Two shows; no cover. We hope to see you there!

Alright, let's move into our meditation. And we're going to do a smiling meditation. I know we've done this before, and it's really one of my favorite meditations.

MEDITATION:

So I want you to close your eyes. I want you to take a deep breath. And I want you just to smile. I want you to feel how it feels when you're smiling. I want you to feel the muscles in your face as you begin to smile. And just feel what happens to your shoulders, to your entire body, as you begin to smile. Feel how your back relaxes. Shoulders relax. Feel how there's a level of calmness that comes over you when you smile.

Take a deep breath, and today just smile! No matter what's going on in your life – no matter what you're feeling, no matter what you're thoughts have been – I want you just to smile. And I want you to imagine sitting in front of yourself, so that you're actually looking at you. And I want to see if you can just smile at every aspect of you. Just smile at your face. I want you to smile at your body. I want you to smile at all the things that you've gone through. All the things that you've done. All the things that you've accomplished. I want you to smile at who you are! And give yourself a gift: smile!

And now I want you to imagine that your smile actually has healing powers, and you're going to smile at every cell of your body. You're going to smile at your heart and your lungs. All your internal organs. You're going to smile at your skin and your joints and your bones. You're going to smile at all the muscles. You're going to smile at all the ways that your body heals, moves, restores itself, blesses itself. You're just going to smile. Smile!

And now I want you to smile at your past. All the things – all the ups and downs – all the things you've been through. I want you just to smile at everything, because you know that you're going to overcome every bit of your past. So just smile at it. Just see your past – without shame or regret – and see if you can just smile at your past. Smile at all the stages of your life, from the smallest child up to today. Smile at you!

And now I want you to turn in your mind's eye, and I want you to smile at your future. I want you to smile at all the things that have been accomplished. All the blessings. All the opportunities. All the doors that will open for you. All the little serendipities. All the miracles. All the healings. All the good that is on its way to you right now: I want you to smile at all of it. Smile!

Smile at your job. Smile at your family. Smile at your bank account. Smile at your neighborhood. Smile at your church. Smile! And know that, every time you smile, you are blessing whatever is right in front of you. In the name and through the power of the Living Christ, we give thanks. And so it is. Amen.

SONG:

Sally Jo Bannow: "I Love to Laugh" (accompanied by Craig Bohmler on the piano)

I love to laugh
Loud and long and clear
I love to laugh
It's getting worse every year

The more I laugh, the more I'm filled with glee
And the more the glee
The more I'm a merrier me; it's embarrassing
The more I'm a merrier me

Some people laugh through their noses
Sounding something like this
Some people laugh through their teeth, goodness sakes
Hissing and fizzing like snakes

Some laugh too fast
Some merely blast
Others, they twitter like birds

Then there's the kind
That can't make up their mind

When things strike me as funny
I can't hold it inside
And I squeak as the squeakelers do
I've got to let go with a ho ho ho ho
And a ha ha ha ha ha ha, too

I love to laugh
Loud and long and clear
I love to laugh
It's getting worse every year

The more I laugh
The more I'm filled with glee
And the more the glee
The more I'm a merrier me

It's embarrassing!
The more I'm a merrier me!

[Laughter]

MESSAGE

Rev. Richard Rogers: Sally Jo; oh, my gosh! Thank you; thank you; thank you! Was that the most fun we've had on a Wednesday night in a while? Craig, as always; you're the best! We appreciate you. Both

of you: thank you; thank you; thank you! Sally Jo, how do you do that? I mean, that was ... Was that crazy? That was fabulous! Fabulous!

Okay, so tonight we're going to talk about gratitude. We're going to take one more step in this journey of gratitude. And I want to talk – I want to start – tonight by talking about my experience when I was in seminary. When I was in seminary, they would give you a very long list of expected reading. And what was interesting about being in seminary is: It's a small environment. I think I had about 30 classmates. The class ahead of me had about 30. So there was about 60 of us in this seminary experience in Unity. And an extensive reading list.

And what's interesting is: Really, none of the books on the reading list are available in a library. You know, their campus had a library, and the books were there. But you've got 60 students; I mean, there weren't enough in the library to go around. So it meant that you were buying books. And you were buying lots of books. And, as you can guess, we were buying books on the Bible... not just the Bible, but we had to buy books about the Bible. We had to buy books on church history and church management. Metaphysics. And then all the Unity books that we had to read and know and understand. Those were given to us by Unity School. Unity School would give ministerial students all the books, because they wanted us to actually [*laughs*] know what we were talking about. You know, what a concept! Right?

So, you know, when I graduated from seminary – when I went into my first ministry – I had this huge library of books that I collected while I was in school. And, over the last hundred years, you know, those books that I originally got – those, you know, some of those things were just Bible encyclopedia. Some of those things have just kind of ... And as Google has come out, you know, some of those things were just not necessary. So, over the last many years, I have just kind of dwindled that library down to, probably, there's about maybe a half a dozen. I've only got a half a dozen books still from when I was in seminary.

And one of those books is the book that I want to focus on tonight. See, the book that I want to focus on today is *101 Things to do during a Dull Sermon*. Now, because we're online right now, I know that during a dull sermon, you can just turn me off! Or you can just fast forward to, like, "*Let's see if he gets better in five minutes.*" Or two minutes, or 10 minutes. "*Let's see if he closes strong*" or "*That really was the best part of the whole talk, and now I can move on with my life.*"

But when you're here – when you're in the room; when you have to be in the room – most of the people that I've known for a while don't get up and walk out. You know, occasionally there's somebody that walks out, but most people love me enough that, just ... "*It's Richard just having a bad night.*" And they stay for the whole thing. Right?

So I want to give you a few things that I feel are appropriate to do during a dull service. And maybe some of these things you'll just bring with you to church when we get back to going to Wednesday night. But you'll just bring them on a regular basis, just in case! You know, as a little preventative measure! Little thing.

[*Reads from book*] So number six of *101 things to do during a Dull Sermon*. Number 26: flash cards. Make a set of score cards like they use in the Olympics or any sporting event, and judge this week's sermon on categories: quality of monotone; use of obscure vocabulary; lack of [*laughs*] interesting illustrations; or the number of irrelevant points. Or maybe just – maybe you could just measure how long I go on a tangent before I come back to my main point, right?

So I really think that if people started holding up score cards, you know – a 5 or a 6 – you know, I'm not really going to want to see a 5 or a 6. So if I see an audience that there's a 5 or a 6 out there, I'm going to really take up my game! You know, if I'm not at least at an 8, you know I'm going to be working harder!

Because, really, 8 or better is what I'm going for each and every week. When I get a 10, thank you very much! But, you know, an 8 – or at least an 8 or better – every week: that's what I'm shooting for! And if you give me a 2 or 3, you're just going to break my little heart. *[Laughs]* Really. You would just break – a 2 or 3 – you would break my little heart.

So that's one thing. I've got a few more for you. Number 48: a misplaced "Amen." And most of you know that this already works for me. You should a loud "Amen!" at the conclusion of a sentence that isn't particularly inspiring. You watch to see whether anyone else chimes in with their own "Amen," or whether the sermon suddenly becomes livelier in response to your response.

I will tell you that, every time I get a Baptist in this church who starts giving me an "Amen," my talk gets better. It's like, "Oh, we've got somebody to play with. Come on!" And my talk just gets better.

Now 46 is really my personal favorite, and especially if you don't tell Lori about 46. Rev. Lori about 46. Number 46 is: Using your prayer request card located in front of your chair – in front of you, on the rack in front of you – to compose some rather juicy little piece concerning torrid love affairs, absurd habits, shocking confessions. But then, don't sign your name. Right? *[Laughs]* Or, better yet – and this is what really gets me – sign somebody else's name. Put somebody else's name on that prayer request, and just see what happens to our prayer chaplains when they're praying for, just, some crazy stuff. And know that you've brought a little bit of light – a little bit of joy. And know that maybe we'll get some emails and some phone calls about it.

And the last one I want to share with you is number 82. It's called "mind control." Practice the power of ESP on the person sitting in front of you. Start with simple tasks like, "Scratch your head." By thinking over and over again, "Scratch your head; scratch your head; scratch your head." And once you've developed this power, imagine more complex tasks like, "Throw your hymnal; throw your hymnal; throw your hymnal." Or, "Take your shoes off and put them on your hands." Or, "Take your shoes off and put them on your head." "Take your shoes off and put them on your head."

See, I really think in this crowd – in this community, in this ministry – I know that we have some powerful thinkers! Right? And I know that you could actually begin to practice to see how well you do.

You know, last week we began our 40 days of gratitude. And what I want you to see today is: One of the things that I am the most grateful for is humor and laughter and giggles and fun and playfulness and smiling. And Sally Jo's song tonight! I want us to celebrate the full power of humor and laughter and smiling and taking life lightly. Because I really believe that a sense of humor is a spiritual thing.

And I really don't understand people that don't have a sense of humor. Like, I don't understand that! Like, how can you get along in life without thinking things are funny? In fact, the funniest person I know is me! Right? I continually crack myself up! Because I think ... Now, it doesn't really matter if anybody else thinks I'm funny; I think I'm funny! *[Laughs]* And I know *[laughs]* ... see? I know that my day is better when I make myself laugh! I know that I'm having more fun when I make myself laugh.

You know, most of you know that one of my favorite Scriptures is from the letter of James. It's James 1, Verses 2 through 4. I want to share it with you. "Count it all joy, my brethren, when you meet various trials. For you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect: that you may be perfect and complete and lacking in nothing." That you may be perfect and complete and lacking in nothing!

And I want you to hear that that state of spiritual awakening – that state of spiritual awareness: of knowing that you are perfect and complete and lacking in nothing – happens ... The first line is: By counting it all joy! Like, the way that we move forward spiritually isn't by getting wound up; isn't by

getting upset. It's count it all joy, my brethren, when you face various trials, for you know the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.

See, a lot of us have believed that joy is kind of an immature, silly, stupid, little thing. Right? That smart people – well thought-out people, well-read people, people that understand how scary life is – that we should all be freaked out together. But it takes a degree of faith to be in joy. It takes a degree of faith of knowing that God is in charge of your life to actually allow yourself to be in joy no matter what's going on in your life. It actually takes faith to be happy in troubled times!

See, I'm not saying there aren't troubled times. I'm not even saying that we're not living in troubled times! But what I am saying is that learning to find joy, even in the midst of troubled times, is a sign of spiritual mastery. It doesn't diminish the troubles that we're in. It doesn't pretend like they don't exist. But it says that my soul – that my relationship with God; my connection with God – is actually greater than the troubled times that I'm in right now.

“Count it all joy, my brethren, when you face various trials, for you know the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect: that you may be perfect and complete and lacking in nothing.”

Jesus went on and said it this way: *“Have I told you this, so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.”* Like, I don't think we have complete joy yet! *[Laughs]* Like, I'm looking at people thinking, *“You haven't mastered joy yet.”* Right? And there's times in my life where I get way too serious. Where I get too scared; I get too anxious; I get too fearful. And that's the opposite of faith! That, when we live from faith, we have so much more fun, because we know that God is in charge!

See, if you really know that God is in charge of your life, you're going to giggle more. Right? Because you know that it's all going to work out! You know you're going to be blessed! You know you're going to be healed! You know you're going to be transformed! You know that whatever life throws at you, you're going to overcome it. So why stress the small stuff? Why stress the little details?

And, over and over again, what I want you to see is that it's okay to trust God! It's okay to live in faith! And it's okay to be happy, even in troubled times!

You know *[laughs]*, one of my favorite stories in ministry was the first year I was here as the senior minister. You know, it was like 50 years ago. And there was one Sunday, and I was trying to make the case that God has a sense of humor. And I was trying to make the case that, if you don't think God has a sense of humor – and I said it out loud, and the room was kind of going with me. You know, when the room's going with me, I kind of keep going and keep going. And, you know, I'm willing to kind of stretch the boundaries a bit if people are laughing and we're having fun and it's a good time.

So I said, *“If you don't believe that God has a sense of humor, I want you to go home today”* – and this was a Sunday morning – *“I want you to go home today after church. I want you to take off all your clothes, and I want you to stand in front of the mirror.”* And I said, *“If you look at the human body, that's just funny! I mean we've got parts sticking out here and parts sticking out here. We've got parts drooping down here, and parts drooping down over there. It's just funny!”*

And, you know, the room was hysterical! People were falling off the thing. They couldn't believe a young minister would say all that. And, you know, it was a grand time. It was just fun.

The next Monday morning, I received a call from a lady who wasn't even at the service. She wasn't even there! She had lunch Sunday afternoon with her friend who was there; they both regularly attended, but she missed the service that day. She had lunch with her friend, and her friend went on and on about what a funny talk it was; how everybody was laughing; it was fun. And she said ... And then she told the

story that Richard said that we should go home, take off all our clothes, stand in front of the mirror, and that we would really find God had a sense of humor in looking at our naked bodies.

Well, when I got the call, she said, “*Young man...*” You know, you can hear... Now, like, I was like 30-something when I got here. I was a young man. She said, “*Young man, I do not believe that nudity – or even joking about nudity – belongs in the church.*” And I said, “*Oh!*” And I said, “*Well, you know, I wasn’t trying to be provocative; I was just having fun, and maybe I went a little too far. You know, but life is funny! I mean, we’re funny! You know, life is funny! Stuff is funny! You know, the human body is funny! I mean, things are just funny!*”

And she said, “*Young man ...*” [Laughs] And I knew I was going down. [Laughs] Because, literally, when I got here a hundred years ago, the average age of this ministry was pretty close to a thousand. And the average hair color was blue. Right? And so, I knew I was going down!

So she said again, “*Young man, nudity does not belong in the church.*” And then she said this line that I will never forget. She said, “*If God wanted us to be naked ...*” And then there was complete silence. Because she realized where she was going with that sentence! That where she was going with that sentence was, “*If God wanted us to be naked, he would have made us that way!*” And she got halfway through that sentence, realized where she was going, and all I heard was silence.

And a better human being would have just dropped it. Right? I couldn’t. I said, “*Yeeesss?*” And then I hear on the other end of the phone, “*Well, I’ll never be coming back!*” And slammed the phone in my ear. And I busted out laughing.

Now, I don’t know who that woman was. You know, nobody’s ever said to me, “*Richard, that was me who called you years ago.*” I mean, I had no idea. I have no idea whether she came or not. But I want you to see how disconnected we get from our funny bone. Like, if our funny bone and our spiritual self are not connected, we think things are out of catawampus. Things are really weird. We really need to bring ourselves back to a level where we can laugh at ourselves! Laugh at life! Life is funny! If you’re not regularly having a good laugh, you’re missing the point!

You know, what we know – on a regular basis – is that adults laugh, on an average, six times a day. Six times a day. The average child laughs about 300 times a day. So Jesus said that if we want to inherit the kingdom of heaven, we have to do it as a small child. So maybe this is one of the ways you can really see if you have the faith to live in the infinite goodness of God: by really beginning to pay attention to how many times each day are you laughing. Are you a six-laughers a day? Maybe you’re only a two-laughter a day. Are you a 30-laughter or a 300-times-a-day laughter?

Because what I want you to see today is that I want you to give thanks for humor! For all the things that touch your funny bone!

Norman Cousins wrote *The Anatomy of Illness*: wrote a whole dissertation on how humor and laughing was the greatest way to accelerate the healing power in your body. That we have so many things going on in our world right now, you actually need laughter to compensate for the stress and the anxiety that many of us are feeling. You need to be willing to laugh over and over again to just make yourself smile. That it’s okay!

Studies from around the world show that the atmosphere of humor results in better patient care. Less anesthesia and time in recovery. Shorter hospital stays. Laughter causes the release of beta-endorphins in your hypothalamus, which leads to the release of nitric oxides, which dilates your vessels. And there is more nitric oxide as a chemical that also protects you from heart disease and inflammation and prevents cholesterol from forming as plaque in your bloodstream.

So what I want you to see is that there are at least seven major reasons why I think that we need to be laughing more. It automatically – when you laugh – it lowers your blood pressure. It reduces stress and the stress hormones levels in your body. It works out your abdomen; and who doesn't like a tight abdomen, right? It improves your cardiac health. It boosts the T-cell counts in your blood. It triggers the release of endorphins. And it produces a general sense of well being. Like, it actually resets your brain! When you laugh – even if you're completely stressed out the moment before – when you laugh, it absolutely resets who you are!

So how much time are you spending on a regular basis laughing?

You know, today I did the smiling meditation. I first heard about it in the book, *Eat, Love, Pray – Eat, Pray, Love* – by Elizabeth Gilbert. And, you know, it's a Taoist practice. It's about finding your smile no matter what's going on in your life. It's about learning to be the master of your own existence so that you can smile, no matter what's going on.

When you smile, your brain releases tiny molecules called neuropeptides to help fight off stress, and other neurotransmitters that also come into play. The endorphins act as a mild pain relief, whereas the serotonin acts as an anti-depressant. One study suggests that smiling can even help you recover faster from stress and reduce the heart rate. In fact, you might even be worth fake smiling to see what results you get! There's even been evidence that forcing a smile can still bring a boost to your mood and your happiness level.

So here you go! I want you to all fake smile with me! *[Laughs]* See, I can't fake smile without laughing! Because it's ridiculous! It absolutely – we absolutely need to spend more time in joy.

Now, here's why. One of the things that happens in ministry is that you get to walk with people through both their best times and their toughest times. You know, last Friday, I had the ... I was asked to do a memorial service for a woman whose husband was shot multiple times in Dallas, Texas, and died instantly while they were walking their dog. And the gunman turned the gun from him to her, and the only reason she wasn't shot and killed was the gun jammed. And so many of her neighbors and friends came out when they heard the gunshots that the gunman ran off.

And so, last Friday I did his memorial service. And it was serious. It was serious. You know, I'm not saying that there's not pain and disappointment and heartbreak. Like, that's part of life. But it's not all of life. And when we act like the pain and the fear and the disappointment and the heartbreak are all of life, and that we shouldn't be happy and laugh about anything, we've kind of blown this whole thing out of context. Like, there are moments in life that are just hard: that are painful, that are gut-wrenching. But not all of it!

Like, most of life is absolutely fabulous and funny and hilarious and moving and touching and wonderful! And if we don't learn to laugh – if we don't keep our laughter alive; if we're not enjoying humor, and if we haven't developed the faith to know that this, too, shall pass – we begin to skew all the curve down to the negative and the dark and the fearful. And we miss all that is glorious.

I mean, that's why we launch into this whole 40 days of gratitude thing. That, when we spend 40 days over and over again coming back to gratitude – coming back to our faith, coming back to laughter and joy – it actually brings life back into perspective.

So what do you have to laugh about today? What's funny to you? What's humorous? What makes you smile? What makes you giggle? What makes you happy today? I want you focusing on that.

Thank you, God, for everything that makes me happy! Together: *"Thank you, God, for everything that makes me happy!"*

Thank you, God, for everything that makes me giggle! Thank you, God, for everything that makes me laugh out loud with a big, old belly laugh! Thank you, God, for all the ways that we smile and laughter and enjoy life. And thank you, God, for the faith that allows us to enjoy more and more and more of life.

Will you pray with me?

Today we give thanks. We give thanks for all the things that have made me smile, happy, laugh, giggle, rejoice, acknowledge God. There is so much good in our lives; there is so much to be thankful for! There's so much that's funny! There's so much that is amusing and charming and delightful. There's so much that is beautiful and elegant and wonderful that we need to be smiling. And it doesn't mean that there aren't hard moments: really hard moments – sometimes gut-wrenching moments – that take us to our knees. But that's not where life is. That's not where life is all the time. Life is also more than that! Life is giggles and happiness and silliness and playfulness, and remembering that God is in charge. Today I give thanks for all the times when I get to laugh. I give thanks for all the people that make me smile, even when I don't want to. I give thanks for this moment, and how hilarious it is. Thank you, God; thank you, God; thank you, God. And so it is. Amen.

COLLECTION

Alright, I invite you to hold your gifts in your hand as we're going to bless them together. *"Divine love, through me, blesses and multiplies all that I give and all that I receive."* In the name and through the power of the Living Christ, we say thank you, God; thank you, God; thank you, God! And so it is! Amen.

CLOSING

I want to thank each and every one of you for your continuous support of this ministry during this time. Your generosity – whether you're mailing the checks in to the church, or you're doing it online – absolutely allows us to continue to do this work. And I know that very shortly we're going to back together on Wednesday night. I'm not sure when that is yet, but we are going to get back together. And I look forward to seeing you face-to-face, and I can't wait for the day when I get to give you one of my big, old bear hugs and let you know how much you are absolutely loved. God bless you, friend! Have a great day!

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