

## GRATITUDE FOR ANCESTORS

Week #3 of the 5-Week Series, "Gratitude"

Nov. 4, 2020

Rev. Richard Rogers

**Rev. Richard Rogers:** Hi! I'm Richard Rogers, and I want to welcome you to Unity of Phoenix Spiritual Center. You know, I'm actually recording this on Halloween; so I recorded it last Saturday. And I know that there are a lot of things that are going to be happening between Saturday and Wednesday when you hear this. So I want you to just open your mind and heart, and we're going to talk today about how to walk through these times of uncertainty. How to walk through times. Sometimes there's upset!

Right now in our country, there are people who have really strong opinions one way or the other, and sometimes we don't get what we want. In fact, I think that sometimes when it comes to politics, we often don't get what we want. And what happens in our country is that we find the middle ground.

So today we're going to talk about gratitude. And I have one more step that I want us to take in gratitude. But I also want you to know that we are joining everyone in our country right now in prayer, holding for the highest and the best. And trusting that God is at work – right here, right now – doing a mighty work, whether we understand it, or even if we like it or not. That the activity of God is greater than our opinion. Alright?

So let's move into our time of meditation.

### MEDITATION:

I want you just to join me as we pray for our nation. You know, with the election yesterday, there's so much going on in our world right now. There's so much change. That so many people worked so hard for this election. People wanted it to go this way or that way. They wanted it to go to the right or the left. And then life happens. And that we have to trust – right here and right now – that God is in charge. That our God is greater than the election, is greater than our politicians. That we are a country of the people, for the people, by the people. This is our country. And even though it looks like we are so divided right now, what we do is we breathe in, and we breathe out. And we trust God. We trust God: right here, right now.

So it's okay if you're feeling just overflowing joy. And it's okay if you're feeling just a deep sense of sadness. That whatever is going on for you today, we just breathe in, and breathe out, and trust God. We just breathe in, and breathe out, and trust God.

There may be a part of you that says, "*But this isn't the way it was supposed to be; this isn't right. This is wrong! This is bad! This is awful!*" And we breathe in, and we breathe out, and we trust God. And maybe you're feeling tonight that this is the best thing that could have ever happened, and that your prayers were answered and you got everything that you want. And if that's the case, we breathe in, and breathe out, and trust God.

That, really, no matter what's going on in our life, it really just comes down to this simple process. We breathe in, breathe out, and we trust God. And the more that we trust God, the more we live in peace. The more we relax. The more we stay in the flow of the Divine. And so we breathe in; we breathe out. And we trust God. With your family, with your friends, with your finances, with your health, with your neighbors, with your co-workers, with the economy. We breathe in, we breathe out, and we trust God.

Sometimes our spiritual path gets very, very simple. That when we make living in the presence of God simple, it becomes easier to do it over and over again. So we breathe in, we breathe out, and we trust God. There is a peace within you that is deeper than you've ever touched before. So we breathe in, and we breathe out, and we trust God.

Thank you, God. Thank you, God, for this day. Thank you, God, for this country. Thank you, God, for all the people that believe like I do. And thank you, God, for all the people that believe differently than I believe. Thank you, God, for all the people that believe and want what I want. And all the people that don't. Today we just keep coming back to our breathing. I breathe in, and I breathe out, and I trust God.

In the name and through the power of the Living Christ, we give thanks. And so it is. Amen.

### **SONG:**

***Charity Lockhart: "We are a Family" (accompanied by Craig Bohmler on the piano)***

It's more than you; It is more than me  
No matter what we are, we are a family  
This dream is for all of us  
This one can be real  
And you can't stop us now  
Because of how you feel

It is more than you; it is more than me  
Whatever dreams we have, they're for the family  
We're not alone anymore, now there are others there  
And that dream's big enough  
For all of us to share

So don't think you're going  
You're not going anywhere  
You're staying and taking your share  
And if you get afraid again, I'll be there

We are a family, like a giant tree  
Branching out toward the sky  
We are a family, we are so much more  
Than just you and I

We are a family, like a giant tree  
Growing stronger, growing wiser  
We are a family, like a giant tree  
Reaching out for the sky

We are a family; we are so much more  
Than just you and I  
We are a family, like a giant tree  
Growing stronger, growing wiser

We are growing free  
We need you  
We are a family

### **MESSAGE**

***Rev. Richard Rogers: [clapping] Charity, fabulous! Fabulous, fabulous, fabulous! Craig, as always: the maestro! Fabulous! Thank you; thank you; thank you! God bless you; we love you both!***

Alright! So here's the question that I have for you tonight. The question that I have for you: Who are the people that have helped form and shape your life?

You know, when I look at my own life, I look at all the people who have helped form and shape my life. All the people that have given me support and direction and taught me and led me and opened doors for me. You know, I think of all the people who have gone before me to lay a spiritual foundation that I get to teach into.

You know, it wasn't too long ago – maybe a couple hundred years ago – where some of the things that I teach on a regular basis would have gotten me banished. They would have gotten me crucified. They would have gotten me flogged. Right? That, over and over again, what I want you to see is that people have gone before you to blaze a trail for your life to make your life easier and better and more rewarding.

So today – as we're moving through this 40 days of gratitude – I want us to give thanks for all the people that have been our ancestors. All the people that have been our family. All the people that acted like our family, even though we may not have any blood relationship, but they made a difference in our life. I want us to acknowledge those people that have really helped – not only give us life – but have helped shape and form our lives. Who have made life better.

You know, because I really see that there's two gifts that we live in all the time. Right? Every day we live in this gift we call "life." You know, we were all given life. That we have this gift of life. And sometimes during this pandemic – and the last year – it really brings to our awareness how precious life is. When we see what's going on – and people struggling to live and breathe and to move through every day – it really reminds us of how deeply, profoundly sacred life is. That life is just amazing!

And so we want to give thanks for all those people that have worked and struggled so that we have life. And we also want to acknowledge all the people that helped us learn how to live. Because what's interesting to me is: Life is, like ... You know, life is like getting a car! You know, just because you were given a car doesn't mean you know how to drive it! Just because you were given a fishing license doesn't mean you know how to catch a fish. Right? That sometimes we get a gift, and we don't really know how to use it. Or we don't know how to use it at the highest level.

And so today, I want to give thanks for both of those things. I want to give thanks for all the people that brought you into life, and then I want you to thank all the people that have taught you how to live.

You know, when I looked at my own story – when I looked at my own family – how I came into life ... You know, the story of my life is really interesting. My mom's side of the family: my mom's into all the genealogy stuff and Ancestry.com. And she's plotted out our family back even beyond the Revolutionary war. And that was a big thing for her: that we had roots all the way back to the Revolutionary War. And so there's a degree of joy and pride that our family goes back that far in this country.

But the truth is: you know, we've had some really interesting members of our family! You know, I had an uncle that was a gunfighter who, by the time he was 15, had already killed a man. He'd killed multiple men through the course of his time. I had another uncle that was also an outlaw. You know, I had a grandfather – great grandfather – who drove the 20-mule team in the Borax mines. And that was the first generation of my family that moved west – far west – went all the way to California. And I think that we were actually driven out of the East Coast. Right? I think we were, by and large, pretty much pretty bad lot! *[Laughs]* Right? We were often outlaws! We were often asked to leave! So my mom's side of the family is pretty clear. We have a clear family tree.

My dad's side of the family: not so much! When I was in my 20's, I found out that my dad was adopted. And it was kind of quiet; it was a secret in the family. It was kind of a bit of a family shame about the story of my dad's birth. Nobody really knew; nobody ever talked about it. Nobody really ... You know, I didn't even ... Nobody knew! So, in my 20's, I found out that my dad was adopted.

Later, as an adult, I found out the whole story. The whole story was incredible! My great aunt had a relationship with a man who was visiting Los Angeles from Canada. He was there – this was the last '20s – he was there trying to find a job. And he had a relationship; they had a relationship together. And she got pregnant. And he had found a job. Went back to Canada with the idea that he was going to get all of his stuff and move back to Los Angeles. And that never happened; he never came back.

So my aunt – as the story goes – she was, as you can imagine, quite upset. And she didn't know what she was going to do about raising this child. You know, my family's actual roots go back to Toledo, Ohio. My great, great grandfather was the editor of the *Toledo Blade* newspaper. And, as a young man, he died very unexpectedly without any life insurance. And so my great, great grandmother had four kids to raise, and she moved them from Toledo, Ohio. They had a very large house, very wealthy family. And by the time they lost everything, she took what money they had when they sold the house, and she moved to Los Angeles. And she started doing hair. And that's where my grandfather met my grandmother; she worked at the same place that my great grandmother worked. And they were doing hair in Los Angeles.

And my aunt had this relationship. By this time, my grandparents had both been married, and they could not have a child. And so my great aunt ... My grandparents adopted my father from my great aunt with one caveat: that it would never be talked about. That he would never know. And that's how it happened. And so my father knew who his biological mother was! He never knew the story of that.

He didn't learn the story until about five years after my grandparents had both passed. And he gets a letter from my great aunt, who was always his favorite aunt. He'd always loved going to her house. And he gets a letter from here saying that, "*I fulfilled my commitment to your parents, and I need you to know that I am your biological mother.*" And it freaked my dad out; I mean, it was just so hard for him. I think he's probably rolling in his grave right now that I'm even telling this story in public! But it just freaked him out. He just didn't know what to do with it; it was just a very difficult situation for him.

And for us, as a family, it was always something that: the more information we got, the easier it was to deal with. And I think of my great aunt. And I think of my great aunt, and I think about how hard that must have been in the late '20s: to be pregnant and to not know what to do or not know how to take care of this child. And what she did was she gave my grandparents a child.

And I think about my brother and my sister and my dad. And my kids, and now my grandkids. And all of that came out of what was my great aunt's greatest shame! And I think that that's so interesting. Right? That her hardest, most awful, most terrible moment – because of that – we have generation upon generation of Rogers now, that are carrying on: that are living, that are prospering, that are successful because of that one act!

And I think about all of us – all the things that it took – for each and every one of us to receive the gift of life. Like, it was ... There was a hope; there was a dream; there was a fear. That generation upon generation upon generation .... That the next generation: that we were given the gift of life! And then sometimes that life was hard! And people had to pay big prices for that! And they had to go through things – and hardships and pain – with a hope and a dream, by and large, that the next generation would have it better than they had it. That they would have a greater life than they had.

And I think about, today, as we celebrate our season of gratitude ... I want to give thanks for every generation. I want to give thanks for my ancestors. And I want to give thanks for every generation that has gone on before me, that has given me the gift of life so that I could be here today. So my brothers and sisters could be here today. So that my children could be here today. So that my grandchild could be here today. That gift is the requirement of everything!

Like, every other gift that I have – and every other blessings that I have – is from this gift of life! That my father was given life! And then my brother and sister were given life! And generation after generation. And I don't want us to miss this!

So today, I want you to think about the people that sacrificed – whether it was intentionally or unintentionally; whether they did it consciously or unconsciously. I want you to think about all the people – your ancestors – all the people that worked so hard to bring the next generation in. That sacrificed so much to give us the gift of life. And how special – how sacred, how important – it is for this gift of life.

And we can talk about all these spiritual things, and all these spiritual ideas. But the whole thing happens when life happens. When we're given the gift of life.

So who do you need to thank today? Who are the people? And maybe you don't know their names. Maybe you don't know the generations upon generations of people that have sacrificed to bring you into this world. But I promise you that there are generations and generations and generations. That your lineage is all the way back to the beginning. That you started in the beginning! That, no matter where you come from – no matter what country, no matter what race, no matter what nationality, no matter what religion you are – that generation upon generation upon generation gave you life so that you could be here today. So that you could enjoy this experience.

And that, today, we need to celebrate! All the people that have gone before us. All the people that have sacrificed to make this moment possible.

And then, when we were given life ... See, it's not enough just to be given life if you don't know how to use the gift! And I think of all the times when I lived – all the choices that I made – that I didn't make the highest and the best choice. But that I was learning how to live: I was learning how to practice the art of life. And over and over again, what I noticed is that there were people all along the way that taught me how to live in a better way. There were people that had written books or were doing workshops. Or I had friends or family members. I remember another aunt that I had that gave me a job interview, and it opened a door that I couldn't even imagine. And it's like all these people that have actually helped me learn how to live.

And if you had to think about maybe the two or three most important authors ... What are the most important books that you have read over the course of your life that really taught you how to live? You know, what are the teachings? What are the principles? You know, maybe it was a teacher in school that taught you something that just really changed your life. Or maybe it was a minister or a spiritual teacher that taught you about how to live in a way that really made a difference in your life.

**Today what I want you to see is that you have been given the gift of both life and the knowledge of how to live.** And both of those are game-changers! Both of those are fundamentally important!

In fact, there's two quotes today that I want to share with you. First one is: Jesus said, "*I lived so that you could live also.*" You know, that's a line that I use in my memorial service. And there's something about that line that just always gets to me. "*I lived so you could live also.*" And I see the long line of people that have spoken directly to me – to my soul; to my essence – that said, "*Richard, I lived so you could live also. I lived so you could live also.*"

And then Jesus also said this. He said that, "*I came that you might have life, and have it more abundantly.*" And, you know, that's all the people in our life that taught us how to live a more abundant life. That taught us how to live a more gentle life. A more loving life. A greater possibility of life. I think of all the people that inspired me!

I remember walking into Jack Boland's ... Many of you know Jack Boland was a Unity minister from Detroit, Michigan. Actually it was Warren, Michigan. And I remember walking into his office. And at the time, I had been talking to the people at Unity of Phoenix about coming here and being the minister. And Jack said, "*You will go there, and you will do things that they will not even believe.*" And that was such a big vision for me: that somebody would speak directly to that.

And I think about all the people that have come that I might have life more abundantly. That I could live more joyously, more happily, more satisfied. All the people that taught me how to live.

Ralph Waldo Emerson said this: "*All life is an experiment. The more experiments you make, the better you are.*" Right? How many of you felt like that, if you made a mistake in life, that it was the end of the world? How many of you have any level of perfectionism in you? Think that it has to be right; it has to be right all the time? And the problem with being a perfectionist is that it really limits the amount of experimentation we need to do. Because if we're going to live a greater life, we also have to be willing to experiment! That, as we try things – and they don't work out – we can make a new choice! That there's no shame in experimenting with life!

Now, we can shame ourselves or other people can shame us. But part of life is experimenting! Some of the biggest mistakes I've made have turned out to be the best thing that I've ever done! Because what happens is they just reveal a bigger life. Mark Twain said, "*Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things that you didn't do than the things that you did do.*" Right?

Today what I want you to see is that you've been given life. And oftentimes we probably live too small. Worried that we're going to make a mistake. Worried about we're going to do it wrong. And, in reality, the people that have made the biggest difference in our life gave us permission just to play at life. To experiment: to live a life that is truly big enough for all of us. That is big enough for me to really be who I am.

And not everybody thought that was a good idea! I can think of times in my life where my inner desire – my soul desire – to live a bigger life was not always met with a standing ovation! There were times when people wanted me just to be back in the life that I was living. Like, "*It's fine, Richard; just deal with it.*" Right? But my soul knew that I came for more than that! And in living that bigger life, life becomes more and more interesting.

You know, there's a quote from Kevin Welch that says this: "*There'll be two dates on your tombstone and all your friends will read them. But it's not going to matter. Only the little dash between them.*" And I love that idea! Like, this is the day I come in, and this is the day I'm gonna go out ... but there's this dash! There's this space between them. And the space is where my life has really happened. Right? This is the day where I was given the gift; this is the day where the gift is complete. But in between is how I choose to live it! How I choose to live it day in and day out.

Am I living a life that's big enough for my soul? Am I living a life that's big enough for me to celebrate all that God is? Am I living full out? And all the people that came beside me and said, "*Richard, go bigger.*" All the people that came beside me and just whispered in my ear that I don't have to settle for that have changed me.

Okay? So here's your homework. I want you to give thanks today for all the people that had the dream of you. All the people with a hope and a dream and a desire that you would have life. Maybe they didn't even know who you would be. Maybe you were just a glimpse and a possibility on the horizon. But all the people – generation upon generation upon generation – that have struggled and have worked and have hoped and have dreamed for you. That you are generation upon generation.

Maya Angelou – we had her here speaking many years ago. And she said, “*We stand on the shoulders of giants.*” And I want you to see all the people whose shoulders you stand on today that you might have life.

And I want you to also give thanks for all the people that taught you how to live. All the teachers. All the books. All the authors. All the people that – friends and family members – that whispered a bigger possibility to you. That gave you room enough to live your life.

Will you join with me in prayer?

I invite you to open your mind and your heart to the activity of God that's right here, right now. There is only one presence and one power: God the good. And we truly are willing to live today: live the fullness of who we are. Live the best version of ourselves. That we are going to take this gift that we call “life” and we're going to live it fully, completely full-out all the way. Thank you, God, for life. And thank you, God, for all the people that taught us to live. That living and life truly are our greatest blessings. Thank you, God! And so it is. Amen.

#### **COLLECTION**

Alright, this is the giving of our ... the time for giving of our gifts and tithes. I want you to hold them in your hand as we bless them together. Our offering blessing 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.*” So in the name and through the power of the Living Christ, we give thanks. And so it is. Amen.

#### **CLOSING**

God bless you, friend! I hope you have a fantastic week! Thank you for being a part of this ministry. And I want you to just remember today: breathe in, breathe out, and trust God. God bless you, friend!

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