

THE GREAT MULTIPLIER

Final Week of the 2-Week Thanksgiving Series, "Living in Abundance"

Nov. 22, 2020

Rev. Richard Maraj

Rev. Richard Maraj: Good morning, everyone, and welcome to Unity of Phoenix Spiritual Center's Sunday virtual worship celebration. I'm Rev. Richard Maraj, and so glad that you have joined us! Also, just want to continue reminding you that every Sunday at 9 and 11 we are LIVE outdoors on our event lawn. So when you're ready, we would love it if you would join us.

A reminder that this Wednesday is our Thanksgiving Eve service. It will be held outdoors in the courtyard. It will begin at 7 p.m. We will also be doing a virtual version that will be posted at 7 p.m., as well. And then Rev. Rogers' advent series will be posted immediately after that on Wednesday, as well. We'll continue doing Wednesdays and Sundays virtually on an ongoing basis.

Also want to remind you that this Wednesday, also, is the deadline for your information and photographs of anyone that you want to be honored in our Remembrance Service, which is Tuesday, Dec. 1. So the deadline is this Wednesday, November the 25th, for our service on Tuesday, Dec. 1, of remembrance.

Rev. Lori is now going to lead us in a time of prayer and meditation.

MEDITATION

Rev. Lori Fleming: I invite you to join me in a time of prayer and meditation. A time of quiet contemplation. As we close our outer eyes, take in a deep, cleansing breath and release it slowly. Begin to relax your body; begin to relax your mind. As we move our awareness within, letting go of any busyness we've had so far today. Gently letting go. If there's something heavy on your mind, release it now. God can fix it. God can take care of it; just gently let it go, and open a space in your heart for divine love.

In this quiet space within, we recognize our own divinity. That we are spiritual beings here to do a great and important spiritual work. Using our own innate gifts and talents: each one different from the other, but each one important, for it's what we came here to do. As we open that space of unconditional love more fully within our own being, we recognize the amazing diversity on this planet. Each and every unique life form is an important part of the whole, created by God the Good. And each one of us is part of the web of life: a beautiful strand in an intricate pattern of wholeness.

We know that God is blessing us now and that, in this Thanksgiving season, we count those blessings. For every blessing that we acknowledge, we receive more blessings: enough to share and enough to spare, for we live in an abundant Universe where all of our needs are beautifully, harmoniously met as we open our souls to the Divine. Our good comes from God, and it is our blessing to share it with each other. In this Thanksgiving season, we are grateful for everything: for the lessons and for the blessings. They come hand in hand.

And so, as we move more deeply into the silence, we recognize the Spirit of the Divine within.

SILENCE

Sweet Spirit, we come in gratitude for each and every blessing we have in our lives. We thank you for bringing more good to us right here and right now. We thank you for creating us; for creating every cell of our body with divine light and love; and bringing us to wholeness in body, in mind and in spirit. And so we say thank you, God; thank you, God; thank you, God! And it is so. Amen.

MESSAGE

Rev. Richard Maraj: Thank you, Rev. Lori; that was fabulous! Really appreciate it.

So there's these two guys. And they got lost and wandered into an open field, where they came across an angry bull with really sharp horns that just started chasing them. And they ferociously started running towards a fence only about 50 yards away to get to safety. And while this bull was just gaining on them, one of the guys – who was not religious at all – said in desperation to his friend, *“Quick! Say a prayer! Say a prayer! We absolutely need a prayer!”* And his friend yells back at him and says, *“I can't think of a prayer!”* And he said, *“Think of anything! Any prayer you can remember ... even as a child!”* And his other friend – as the bull's horns were coming just right behind them – started the prayer, *“Lord, for what we are about to receive, make us truly thankful!”* [Laughs]

Love that joke! So, you know, when I was a kid, a real highlight – I absolutely remember it so clearly – was when I learned how to count to 10. And then counting to 20 and – it took a while! – but counting to 100. You know, I had an interesting relationship with math when I was young. I loved addition, but didn't like subtraction. Didn't like division, but was in absolute awe of multiplication. I thought multiplication was the most magical, transformative thing I'd ever seen. I think it was an incredible that they could take smaller numbers and make them into really big numbers. I mean, $10 + 10$ is 20 ... but 10×10 is 100! And I always was in awe, and amazed and excited, about multiplication. Multiplication to me was like a rock star! It was like the Michael Jordan of arithmetic, I got so excited about it!

And while we know that learning multiplication is an important part of our mental development, I also believe learning and understanding multiplication is an important part of our spiritual lives. Here are a number of references of multiplication in the Bible for us. In 2 Corinthians it says: *“And God provides seed for the sower, and bread for eating; and will also provide and multiply your sowing, and increase the fruits of your righteousness.”* In Deuteronomy, it says: *“God will love you, bless you, and multiply you.”* And in Genesis it says, *“And I will make my covenant between me and you, and you will abound and multiply exceedingly.”*

So what that says to me is that we have access to a connection to this multiplying, magnifying power, because we are connected to God. And the nature of God is expansive! The nature of God is unlimited! The nature of God is abundant! The nature of God is an all-providing Spirit and presence that wants to express more good in all areas of our lives. God is the multiplier! And we are created in the image and likeness of the multiplier! That means, through the spiritual laws and spiritual practices, that we can multiply the good in our lives.

Last week we started a series, “Living in Abundance,” and it was called “How to Live in the Flow.” And the way to do that is to develop a mindset of abundance; to practice giving, because giving activates the flow; and also be a joyful receiver, because our receiving continues the increase of circulation. It's our responsibility to be good receivers, because we allow more good and more God in our lives, and also through us to bless others.

Today we're going to wrap up “Living in Abundance” by looking at “The Great Multiplier.” And the “great multiplier” is the practice of **GRATITUDE**.

Did you know that it has been scientifically proven that gratitude has a multiplying increase, expanding, positive impact on the quality of our lives? There are at least seven different areas of our lives that are benefitted by us practicing gratitude on a daily basis. There are physical benefits. It helps our immune system. It reduces levels of pain and aches. It helps our mental well-being: it helps us turn away from toxic thoughts to more positive emotional states. We sleep better. We feel better about ourselves. We feel more optimistic; more joyful; more connected; more satisfied; more social. And, overall, we feel happier. Literally, gratitude is this powerful multiplier of our joy and levels of happiness if we are willing to practice it on a regular basis.

You know, Plato had a powerful line when he said, *“A grateful mind is a great mind, which eventually attracts to itself great things.”* And that’s really talking about the Law of Attraction. That, when you have a grateful mind, you will attract more good. And the opposite is true! Because when we focus on what we don’t have, we will attract more lack.

You know, one of my favorite parables is the Parable of the Loaves and Fishes, because that is an amazing example of the multiplying power of gratitude. So there’s a situation where there’s not enough food for the 4,000 to 5,000 people that are going to hear Jesus talk. There’s only a little bit of bread; little bit of fish. And so what does he do? He looks up – looks away from the lack and limitation – and then he blesses and acknowledges the good that’s present: the bread and the fish. And then he gives thanks.

And, you know, when we give thanks and appreciate, it raises our vibrational level. It really raises our energy and creates a magnetic force that attracts more good. And what happens in that story? Somehow they had enough bread. Somehow they had enough fish. They don’t even tell you how it got there ... and it doesn’t matter! It is illustrating the magnifying power of gratitude that will attract the things that we need. We have that magnifying power; it’s not just bread and fish! It will magnify our joy! Gratitude magnifies the level of love – the level of goodness – in all of its various forms.

Gratitude is a powerful, powerful, powerful thing. You know, one of the things that holds us back from experiencing gratitude is that consciousness I talked about: the consciousness of “not enough-ness.” But when we practice gratitude, it will multiply us from thinking there is not enough to know there’s more than enough. From focusing on the negative to focusing on the positive. From focusing on lack to focusing on abundance. Gratitude is a powerful multiplier in in our lives.

So, on a scale of 1 to 10 – 10 being high – how much of a grateful mind, and how much of a grateful person are you? How often do you feel grateful and thankful in your life? You know, are you happy with the level of gratitude and grateful mind you have? Or is there room to actually expand and become a more grateful individual? And be practicing gratitude and thankfulness more consistently every day?

So today, we’re going to look at what can we do to use the multiplying power of the practice of gratitude in our lives.

The first one is to not look outside, but to look inside, and to **GIVE THANKS TO THAT SPIRIT OF GOD WITHIN US**. Listen to what it says in Colossians. It says, *“Rooted and built up God, established in faith, we will abound in thanksgiving.”* You know, there’s a wonderful line in Corinthians that said, *“We are here to increase our thanksgiving to the glory of God.”* You know, 21 times in Scripture it tells us to be thankful to God. Give thanks to God. And what it’s really saying is that, when we are thankful to God, we will abound in thanksgiving for life. That the more we’re connected to God, we’re more thankful to the Source out of which all of it is possible. It’s a high level and depth of gratitude. That’s an overall gratitude that is thankful to God for life. For hope. For possibilities. For forgiveness.

When we give thanks at that higher level, it’s hard not to look through the eyes of our lives and abound in thankfulness for how good our lives are. Scripture even says that when we enter the presence of God, we must enter with thanksgiving. And it says, when you pray, pray with thanksgiving.

It is a powerful thing to start your prayer by giving thanks for what you’ve got in your life, and ending it by giving thanks. That’s what Jesus did with the loaves and fishes! It’s a powerful, powerful practice. Gratitude and prayer literally magnifies that prayerful energy.

And to show you how powerful gratitude is, I want to talk about what happens when we aren’t grateful. In the Book of Timothy, it says this: that when you are ungrateful, it is the same as being unholy, unloving, unforgiving, disobedient to your parents, selfish and abusive. And what that’s saying is: when we are not grateful, that we not only deny ourselves the ability to see the good in our lives, we deny our

connection to God. And that, literally, not being grateful robs us of the multiplying effect and power of gratitude in our lives. It denies the blessings and goodness that's always there. It denies that connection to God.

And so, you know, I love that line: *"Rooted and built up in God, established in faith, we will abound in thanksgiving."* So the more connected and conscious of our connection of God, the more we see and express gratitude in our lives much easier. We don't have to force it, because it will just express and radiate from us.

The second thing to use the great multiplier of gratitude is to **COUNT OUR BLESSINGS**. I am sure we've all heard that: count your blessings; count your blessings! You know why you hear it so often? Because it works! Counting our blessings acknowledges the good in our lives. It changes our perspective; it changes our attitude; it changes our vibration; it changes our energy.

You know, it's easy for us to take things for granted in life. It's easy to focus on what we don't have. And counting our blessings literally refocuses our mind on how good our lives are. Refocuses our mind on the blessings and on the goodness.

You know, in mental health, they were trying to figure out: How do we make our therapy and our psychological counseling more effective? And cost-effective? And do you know they thought the best supplemental thing to complement therapy is the practice of gratitude. That they literally think that's the best way to improve our psychological well-being. And the cool thing is: it is effective and it's free! It's cheap! We can practice gratitude any time, and it will enhance any kind of aspect of mental health and well-being in our lives.

And so, if you were to practice writing a list of gratitude of 10 things, what would be on your list? Here are a couple from me. I am grateful for my family. I am grateful for my friends. I am grateful for my health. I'm grateful for the cooler weather. I'm grateful for my house. I'm grateful for my fabulous job as senior minister at Unity of Phoenix. I am grateful for a delicious bowl of miso soup with ramen noodles that I just enjoyed so much. I'm grateful I found a new restaurant locally that I enjoy. I'm grateful that my brother – who had emergency surgery – is doing okay. I'm grateful I had a good chiropractic appointment. I'm grateful I had a wonderful interview that's posted online with Daniel Nahmod that was just so much fun. I'm grateful that I got to look at the moon and the stars. And I'm also grateful for sugar-free hazelnut coffee creamer! It's a beautiful and delicious thing!

You know, after service this morning outside, a lady came up to me and said, *"You know what I'm grateful for?"* I said, *"No."* She said, *"I'm really grateful for Nutella!"* [Rev. Maraj laughs] *"I love that hazelnut flavor!"* And it's a beautiful thing!

And so, all kidding aside, what are the things that you're most grateful for? What are the things that make your gratitude list? Things that make you feel blessed? Things that make you feel cherished? Things that make you feel supported? Because the more we do that, you know what happens? We aren't just grateful for the good things in our lives, but we develop a grateful mindset by counting our blessings that helps us see good, even in the situations that aren't as affirmative or successful as we'd like them to be.

Let me give you an example from Steven Pressfield, who wrote the book, *The War of Art*. He said:

"The first professional writing job I ever had, after 17 years of trying, was on a movie called "King Kong Lives." I and my partner-at-the-time, Ron Shusett (a brilliant writer and producer who also did "Alien" and "Total Recall"), hammered out the screenplay, and we loved it; we were sure we had a hit. We even thought so after we'd seen the final film; we were certain it would be a blockbuster. So we invited everyone we knew to the premiere; we even rented out the joint next door for a post-

triumph blowout that we would have afterward. 'Get there early,' we warned everyone; 'The place is gonna be mobbed.'

Nobody showed. There was only one guy in line other than our immediate guests, and he was muttering something about loose change. In the theater, our friends endured the movie in muted stupefaction. When the lights came up, they fled like cockroaches in the light.

Next came the review in Variety: 'Ronald Shusett and Steven Pressfield; we hope these are not their real names, for the sake of their parents.' When the first week's grosses came out, the flick barely registered. I still clung to hope. Maybe it was only tanking in urban areas; maybe it was playing much better in the burbs. So I motored to an Edge City megaplex. A youth was manning the popcorn, and I said, 'How's 'King Kong Lives'?' He gave an emphatic thumbs-down and said, 'Miss it, man. It really sucks!'

I was crushed. Here I was, 43 years old, divorced, childless, having given up all normal human pursuits to chase my dream of being a writer; and, now, finally I've got my name on a big-time Hollywood production starring Linda Hamilton, and what happens? It bombs! I'm a loser, a phony; my life is worthless and so am I.

My friend Tony Keppelman snapped me out of it by asking me, 'So are you gonna quit?' I said, 'Hell no!' He said, 'Then be happy. You are where you wanted to be, aren't you? So you're taking a few blows. That's just the price for being in the arena and not on the sidelines. So stop complaining, stop whining, and be grateful.'"

And just being grateful – even though he had a bomb – he was able to see what a great life he really did have. He really was living his dream. And being thankful for it helped shift his perspective on what happened, and he ended up learning and developing. And a year or so later wrote a new movie called *The Legend of Bagger Vance*, that I believe starred Will Smith, and was a great success.

And it isn't always about the success ... but it was about him being able to appreciate how great his life was, even when things don't always go our way. That's the benefit of counting our blessings. It doesn't just change our perspective in the moment, but it actually helps us to have better clarity to see good, even in situations that aren't going our way.

The final aspect about using gratitude as a great multiplier is to **EXPRESS OUR APPRECIATION**. Mike Robbins was a long-time baseball player. His whole life he dreamed about playing in the Big Leagues. He was pitching since he was seven years old. When he graduated from high school, he was a huge prospect, and the New York Yankees drafted him. He decided to go to college, instead, and went to Stanford. After Stanford, the Kansas City Royals drafted him, and he was in the Minor Leagues, like most baseball players start out. And in his third year, he threw a pitch and it threw out his arm, and his career was over.

He was absolutely devastated. And he kept thinking about his regrets. He kept thinking about all kinds of things. And he realized: he didn't regret that he didn't try enough. He didn't regret all the different things, the years. But what he did realize he regretted was that he didn't really appreciate or enjoy the experience while he was having it. He was so focused on getting ahead – getting better, being a star, all these things: even worrying about not being good enough – that he didn't appreciate his experience.

And that really shook him up so much that he got this curiosity about appreciation, and started studying appreciation. And he wrote a book called *The Power of Appreciation*. Spent his career traveling around actually talking about appreciation in all the different ways. And he realized in baseball he didn't get the appreciation he was hoping for. And he realize that, when you do appreciate individuals – whether they're on a baseball team or in a business or in a relationship ... When there is appreciation – of showing how you value and cherish and care about who someone is – he said productivity goes up

amazingly high. That great things start happening. The relationship, our energy, our connection, our trust of one another really, really goes up. To feel valued and appreciated is the gift of expressing your appreciation to people in our lives.

And I bet we all have a lot of people who do a lot of things that we like, but we never actually say, “I really appreciate that.” Or, “Thank you.” Or, “You really make a difference in my life.” Or, “Who you are makes a positive in my life.”

So the question is: Who in your life could you express more appreciation to? Your assignment for this week is to appreciate three people. And as simple and any way you want to do it. It just needs to show how you value them, and it needs to be genuine and sincere. Something not rote that you would say, but something that really touches you about the impact or the quality of that individual in your life.

And the second important thing to express appreciation is to express appreciation for yourself. Sometimes we're, you know... Some don't think we're worth it. Or we think it's selfish. But it's important to appreciate ourselves. You know, appreciate what's wonderful about us. What do we do well? What are we contributing to our family and to our work? And to life itself. We feel like it's such a terrible thing to appreciate ourselves, but it's a hugely important thing. Because if we don't appreciate ourselves, we cannot multiply and magnify the joy and happiness in our lives. That, literally, self-appreciation is a foundational thing we need to actually lift our level and increase the level of happiness and joy in our lives.

So what are the things that you appreciate about you? And will you at least acknowledge it and express it to yourself?

I heard a fabulous quote, and it says: “*This isn't the year we get everything we want. This is the year we learn to appreciate everything we have.*” And I would say that is very, very true. At this Thanksgiving time, I think it is a reminder that we need to kick up our level of appreciation and gratitude for all the areas of our lives.

It's easy to take things for granted, but when we use gratitude – like multiplication increases numbers – that gratitude will increase the level of joy and fulfillment in our lives. And the three practices are to abound in thanksgiving to God; give thanks to God. Acknowledge God in all ways. Second one is: Count your blessings. Write down 10 of them every single day. And particularly look at the areas in your life where things aren't working, and be grateful for the good that is there. And, finally, express your appreciation to three people in your life, but especially appreciate yourself.

When we practice these practices of thanksgiving, our lives will change in amazing ways ... because gratitude truly is “the great multiplier.”

God bless you all!

OFFERING

Rev. Lori Fleming: It is that time in our service to give of our gifts and our tithes and our offerings. We know that giving is a spiritual practice that brings us closer to God, and we're so grateful for all the ways that you give to our spiritual community here at Unity of Phoenix.

Our offering blessing is: “*Divine love, through me, blesses and multiplies all that I have, all that I give, and all that I receive.*” And so we say thank you, Mother/Father God, for these gifts, these tithes and these offerings. We know they are given in love, they are received in love, and that they move through this ministry with the energy of divine love out into the world as good. And that each giver is blessed – heaped up, pressed down and overflowing – for that is the Law. And so it is. Thank you, God! Amen.

CLOSING

Rev. Lori Fleming: Well, it's been so good to spend time with you online! We're so grateful we have this platform to reach people who can't come physically to be here at Unity of Phoenix. We thank you for all the good you give us; we thank you for being with us. We just say thank you, thank you, thank you! And it is so.

And will you affirm the Prayer for Protection with me?

The light of God surrounds us;

The love of God enfolds us;

The power of God protects us;

The presence of God watches over us.

Wherever we are, God is. And all is well!

Have a blessed week!

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