

RELATIONAL AND SPIRITUAL PROSPERITY

Week #1 of the 4-Week Series, “The Way of Prosperity”

Feb. 21, 2021

Rev. Richard Maraj

Rev. Richard Maraj: Good morning, everyone, and welcome to Unity of Phoenix Spiritual Center! Welcome to our Sunday worship celebration. I’m Richard Maraj, Senior Minister. I’m so glad that you are joining us today.

Just to remind you that tomorrow night I will be teaching “Unity Basics.” It is a required class for becoming a member, but it’s also a great way just to get to learn about Unity basics and some of our practices, as well as our history. You can go to the website and check it out and sign up there.

As you know already, we are starting program called “Spiritual Allies for Dismantling Racism.” And to share some of the details about participating, two of our committee members – Robert Vest and Carol Burnett – are now going to do some sharing with you.

Carol Burnett Vest: Good morning! We are so excited to be here this morning to invite and encourage you to register for a new initiative entitled “Spiritual Allies for Dismantling Racism” – also known as SADR – which is being offered here at Unity of Phoenix for the very first time.

Robert Vest: SADR is centered in a vision of expanding and deepening our understanding of racism in America. In order to do something about racism, one has to understand it. This is part of a global movement that is underway in many churches and Unity centers and communities throughout the country, as you’ve probably noticed over the past year. Our program here at Unity of Phoenix – “Spiritual Allies for Dismantling Racism” – is based on the spiritual work developed and delivered by the Rev. Wendy Craig-Purcell in the “Brave Conversations” community at the Unity Center in San Diego. This program has been in place since 2017.

Carol Burnett Vest: SADR has a three-fold purpose. Number one: to increase racial awareness. Number two: to raise racial literacy. And number three: to help participants become part of the solution by taking meaningful, peaceful, prayerful action to end racism in this world.

Robert Vest: Our mission for “Spiritual Allies for Dismantling Racism” is to invite White Allies and Black Allies from our congregation to work together for the purpose of empowering our spiritual community through safe, courageous, non-judgmental conversations that lead to understanding and education of racial awareness, and to call for spiritual action to dismantle racism.

Carol Burnett Vest: This important program has four phases. Phase One will begin Wednesday, March 10, via Zoom, and consist of attending five interactive 90-minute Zoom sessions to be held every other Wednesday. These sessions will offer opportunities to gain understanding through deep and sensitive conversations after reading books and articles, and watching videos on racism.

Robert Vest: When you register for the Phase One, you’ll notice that you have the opportunity to self-identify by joining either the White Allies group or the Black Allies group. I’m in the Black Allies group.

Carol Burnett Vest: I’m in the White Allies group. In this phase, as we begin our exploration, we will initially meet in two separate meeting venues. We will provide a forum for White Allies, and a separate forum for Black Allies, in order to have sincere and meaningful conversations about the effects of racism in the United States.

Robert Vest: Meeting separately will ensure that each group can hold candid conversations, share honestly and openly without saying the wrong thing or being misunderstood, or feeling judged. This, we feel, is very important in this initial phase.

Carol Burnett Vest: Due to the sensitivity and complexity of this topic – and the unique design of the program – we are requesting that you register only if you can attend all five sessions in Phase One.

Robert Vest: Once both groups have completed Phase One, as Carol mentioned, Phase Two will then begin. In Phase Two, the two groups will join together for the first time to continue their essential work. Here Black Allies and White Allies meet together to dialogue, share insights, explore possible next steps to go further.

Carol Burnett Vest: And in Phase Three, we offer an opportunity for participants to gather together to join the Spiritual Allies Book Club, and discuss racial equality books with fellow congregants. This is an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of racism. Phase Four – beginning this summer and continuing throughout the year – we will invite guest speakers and feature selected documentaries dedicated to dismantling racism. The goal is to offer this four-phase program year after year.

Robert Vest: And, in closing, as Rev. Maraj stated in his 2/14 message, these are not comfortable conversations, but they're important conversations. They're not just political issues, but they're human issues. These are social issues and soul issues. We feel as though it is the work that we're here to do: to love one another.

Carol Burnett Vest: If you've ever asked yourself, "How can I take a stand for justice and equality? How can I be the change that I want to see?", please consider registering for Phase One for the "Spiritual Allies for Dismantling Racism." Please go to Unity's website and register to join us in this important and meaningful journey.

Robert Vest and Carol Burnett Vest (together): Please join us! We look forward to seeing you!

Robert Vest: Thank you!

Rev. Richard Maraj: Thank you, Robert, and thank you, Carol!

And right now, Rev. Lori is going to lead us in a time of prayer and meditation. And to prepare us for that experience, we will now listen as the choir sings "Surely the Presence."

MEDITATION

Rev. Lori Fleming I invite you to join me for a time of prayer and meditation. Close your outer eyes, and take in a deep, cleansing breath and release it slowly, beginning to move your awareness within. And take in another mindful breath. And as you release it, let go of any busy-ness you've had so far today. Gently release anything that's bothering you. Let go of any stresses; just gently let them all go. And take in another deep breath. And, as you release it, move your awareness into your heart space: into that quiet, still place within: into the very depths of your soul.

As we begin to become aware of the Spirit of the Divine within us: that holy presence that's in us and as us and through us. As close as our very own hearts, and as vast as the cosmos. Because God is all there is, and we are a part of that great "allness." In this quiet, still, spiritual communion, we recognize that each and every one of us is a beloved child of God, here for a great and important purpose. And that each and every one of us has come to be God's hands and feet: to love ourselves, and to love each other. To bring love to every person on the planet. Because God is love and, therefore, we are love! And no matter what it seems like on the outer, God is within us: showing us each and every day how to love more fully. To share that unconditional love with each other. To be the presence of the Divine in every relationship and every moment and every space. For love is who we are! Love is what we have come to be.

And so we take just a few moments to move more deeply into the silence as we feel God's unconditional love for us.

SILENCE

Sweet Spirit, we come in gratitude for this time together: for prayer and meditation that brings us closer to you, o God! That opens up our hearts to new ways to love each other. That opens us up to an awareness of how great love really is. Thank you for all our blessings; we have so many, we can't count them all. Thank you for this; thank you for everything. Thank you, God! Amen.

MESSAGE

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

So why do chiropractors make good comedians? Because they crack people up! [*Simulates "rim shot" drum roll*]

Guy walks into a bar. Clink! It was a heavy metal bar.

You know if they started a milk delivery business using drones, they could call it "Dairy Air." Perhaps that wouldn't work, because it would probably end up being the "butt" of many jokes. [*Laughs*]

Okay; so this morning – hopefully, with a smile on your face – we're starting a four-week series on abundance entitled, "The Ways of Prosperity."

So would you like to have a more prosperous life? Or is there a specific area in your life that you'd like to experience a greater level of abundance? What if I told you that I could just snap my fingers, and you could get all the prosperity desires of your heart? What would that look like for you? I mean, if you were living a prosperous life – your fullest, most prosperous life – right now, how different would it look than the life that you are currently living?

You know, every one of us – in some way, shape or form – want to experience a more prosperous and abundant life. You know, in the book of Jeremiah, it says that God says, "*For surely I have plans for you. Plans to prosper you.*" In 2 Corinthians, it says, "*And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things, at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.*" Jesus said he came, "*that we may have life and have it more abundantly.*" And that "*It is the Father's good pleasure to give us the kingdom.*" He even said, "*Ask, and you shall receive; seek and you shall find; knock and the door will be opened unto you.*"

I mean, doesn't that sound fabulous? I mean, doesn't that sound amazing? Doesn't that sound wonderful? I mean, that God has a plan for us to prosper? That God is able to bless us with everything that we need all the time? That Jesus said he came that we may have life abundantly? That we can ask and receive? All these wonderful things about prosperity! And if that is the case, why isn't it easier for us to create a more prosperous and abundant life? What is it so hard? Why is it so challenging – and even elusive – for us to create the life of abundance that we desire.

The truth is that prosperity – in all of its various forms – is available to us. But the truth is that there are ways of prosperity that we must follow – that we must apply. Ways of prosperity, practices of prosperity, mindsets of prosperity that we must practice first before we attract and manifest the prosperity we want. It takes work! It takes effort!

You know, in the Book of Luke, Chapter 5, there's a wonderful story about these fishermen who were fishing all night and didn't catch a thing. And then Jesus said to them, "*Cast your net on the right side of the boat in the deep waters.*" So they got their net and they cast it on the right side of the boat, in deep waters, and they ended up filling up their nets to almost overflowing. There was so much! They had more fish than they had; they could share; they could sell. I mean they experienced an incredible abundance. Their abundance was given freely.

But it took work! The fish didn't just fly out of the water into the boat. They had to do some work. You know, to do the casting. To do the pulling in out of the water, out of the boat. To take it out of the boat

on to the shore. To sort it. To throw away the bad ones. To take it home. To sell it. It took all their strength, their skills as fishermen. And all their abilities and cooperation. The abundance is there – the fish were there – but they had to do some work to get what they wanted.

God's plans for us are prosperous, but it requires that we do some application. That we put some effort and intention and action, just like those fishermen, to draw out the abundance that we desire in our lives.

The fishermen were struggling – didn't catch any fish. And I love that Jesus said, *"Cast your net on the right side of the boat."* And what he is saying: Look at where you're casting. And if it's not reaping what you want, change where you're casting your boat. I mean, casting your net. I mean, when you look in your life, where are you casting your net for the prosperity that you are seeking and desiring?

Sometimes we cast our net into the physical world. Sometimes we cast our net hoping someone else will do it for us. Sometimes we cast our net looking for quick, easy schemes, or hoping to win the lottery. Or all these different ways we hope to get our prosperity fast and easy, and not requiring that it does take work. That it does take effort.

And I love that! *"Cast your net on the right side"* means cast your net – not on the physical – but on the spiritual. To that unlimited abundance and goodness of God that is available that we need to connect with. God gives us all the resources – God gives us all the tools for prosperity – but we just need to work them. And the question we need to ask is: Am I living as prosperous a lie – given what I have in my life at this very moment? Am I using those tools of prosperity to create the good that I desire?

Over the next four weeks, we're going to look at eight different areas of our lives in which we can increase our prosperity, and looks at the ways of prosperity in those specific areas to attract and experience life more abundantly.

They will include emotional and physical prosperity. They will include financial and professional prosperity; mental and social prosperity. And today we will start with spiritual and relationship prosperity.

And the first one is: How do we increase our spiritual prosperity? In the third Book of John, it says this: *"Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things, and be in health, just as your soul prospers."* What this is saying is: If you want a prosperous life, you've got to prosper your soul. And so, what does it mean to prosper our soul? What things do you do that you would say are prospering your soul? Nurturing your soul? Nourishing your soul? Feeding your soul? Because that's where we really cast our net.

God has given us incredible tools to prosper our soul. And the most important ones are prayer and meditation. The practice to quiet our mind, and to consciously connect and commune with the fullness and the allness of God in the quietness of our heart is a powerful way to prosper our soul. You know, being still, and know that I am God, and listening to the still, small voice of God. Delighting ourselves in God. And spending time in the peaceful, pure presence of God's Spirit. These are the key ways that we prosper our soul.

We need to really make it a priority and as the foundation of our lives. Because it is the foundation of making all things possible. That's why it says, *"Seek ye first"* – make it a priority to seek God first – *and all these things will be added unto you.* All these things will begin to flow and open up in our lives.

And when we're prosperous in our soul, we become prosperous in our lives. In Luke 17 it says: *"The kingdom of God is within you."* And what that is really saying is that prosperity and abundance really comes from within. It is an inner awareness. It is an inner fullness. It is an inner consciousness of the abundance and goodness – and unlimited nature – of God.

In Psalm 1 it says, *"Those who delight in the Law of the Lord, and who meditate on his Law day and night, that person is like a tree planted by the streams, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever they do prospers."* And that is absolutely true. The more our soul prospers,

the more our life prospers. We'll feel more peace, more joy, more goodness, more clarity, more wisdom, more understanding.

Now it doesn't mean your life's going to be perfect. But when our soul prospers, that we tend to be more discerning. We tend to be more calm. We tend to see situations in our lives from a higher spiritual perspective. We don't get sucked into the drama. We don't get overwhelmed or consumed with worries. Things seem to happen synchronistically in our lives. We attract the right people and the right ideas at the right time. The challenges and difficulties in our lives we see in a way that it teaches us. That it grows our understanding, our strength and awareness. The more we abide and dwell in the living presence of God, the more our lives are opened up to greater levels of "fish": of ideas, of possibilities of goodness.

Now, besides prayer and meditation being wonderful tools for prospering our soul, there are other ones that God has given us. Holding a vision for our lives is a wonderful prosperity practice. Asking. Seeking. Knocking. Using the power of our word. The power of our thoughts. The power of our actions. These are a lot of prospering tools. The question is: Are we using them intentionally? Are we using them consciously? And are we using them daily?

Someone once said that some people wake up and say, "*Good morning, God!*" And some other people wake up and say, "*Good God; it's morning.*" The "*Good God, it's morning*" side is when we wake up with a limited, worried, anxious, negative view about how our day's going to be, and how our life is. But we cast a wider net by opening our minds, and waking up realizing how blessed we are! You know, how many opportunities. How much love. How much goodness. How much success and happiness that is already in our lives. And have faith that God will expand and bring us an even greater catch.

So here's a practice I want you to do. Besides unifying and connecting, with meditation, with God and the fullness of God in the quietness of your heart, the other one is to wake up every day and choose the power of the words that describe the feeling of what a prosperous life would feel for you. Like a prosperous life could feel: joyful, loving, fun, meaningful, optimistic, energetic, active, adventurous, happy, healthy, kind, caring, grateful, playful, generous, passionate, intimate, beautiful, brilliant, balanced, magnificent, serendipitous, mellifluous, simple, sharing, giving, growing, expanding, learning, unfolding, healing, helping, serving, uplifting, inspiring, creative, expressive, enjoying, unifying, exhilarating ... and hilarious! It could be anything you want! Just to name a few things ...

That's just to show you the mindset we have when we cast a wide net of possibility of how rich and engaging and deep and joyful and playful our lives can be. We really open our minds! And we're really casting on "the right side" to start in the middle of our soul – at the depths of our soul – and connect with Spirit. And then cast that net every day about how/what a prosperous life feels for you.

And so that is the first way of prosperity! It is to prosper our soul, and to use those tools – especially the power of word to speak into existence what a prosperous life feels like for ourselves.

Now, the second area of prosperity is to prosper in our relationships. So what does prosperity in your relationships look like? If you said, "*I'm living a prosperous life!*", what role would a prosperous life play in terms of the kind of relationships that you have?

I truly believe that relationships are the most powerful and important area of our lives that we feel love. That we feel fulfillment. That we feel joy. That we feel care. That we feel cherished and appreciated. I mean, I think relationships are really a huge part of what makes life worthwhile: the love that we care and share with others. It is the most beautiful thing about life! But, in some ways, it's the hardest thing about life! To feel betrayed or broken-hearted. To have conflict and upset. And to dislike one another. I mean, relationships are a huge part of living a prosperous life, and how well we live them.

And you can think, "*Well, a prosperous life means I get along with everybody, and everything's smooth and cool all the time.*" And I don't believe that! Because I believe that relationships – every single one of

them – are here to teach us, to help us to learn, to help us to grow in various ways. Some relationships help us see the beauty in ourselves that we don't see for ourselves. They help bring out the best in us, and build us up and encourage and support us. And some other relationships press our buttons. Trigger our wounds and our pains. Force us to say – to choose to step away, or to set better boundaries. And discover the depths of some things that might need healing within ourselves.

I believe all relationships are a part of a prosperous life. And the question is: What ways of prosperity are we applying in the different relationships to feel more fulfillment and to get the best out of them?

I believe there are three kind of relationships in a very general sense. Relationships that are hard; that are tough. Where there's conflict or disagreement, or things just aren't going well or feeling fulfilled. And the second one is relationships that are good, but we know that it could be better with a little more effort and love. That we want it to be better. And the third kind of relationships are just a general appreciation – a celebration – of the people in our life, and the difference that they make. And to enjoy it and to express it and share it with them.

And so, for the first one – for the hard and difficult relationships – the ways of prosperity and the spiritual tools God has given us include: acceptance, compassion, understanding and forgiveness. Some relationships are there to be healed and repaired and improved. And, sometimes, some relationships are there to teach us to release. To teach us to let go. To teach us to distance ourselves, and maybe set boundaries.

And so, think of one person in your life you may not be having the greatest relationship with, and think of what are the ways of prosperity you can apply to that relationship? Just like the fishermen had to cast their net and do their work to get the abundance, that challenging relationship can actually be a part of our prosperous life, depending on how we work and apply those spiritual tools.

The second area of prosperity to improve relationships that are good is by consciously thinking of giving more, and how can I invest myself more in this relationship? And it could be by listening more. By being more present. Giving more of our time. Be giving more encouragement. Or affirmation or kindness or thoughtfulness. You know, to cherish more and appreciate more.

So think of a relationship in your life that's good, that you would love to be better. And think of what is the way that you can give of yourself? That you can invest more of your spirit in? That you know, if you did that, it would increase the level of prosperity and enrich the quality of that relationship?

And then the third is to really appreciate and acknowledge and enjoy – and really celebrate – the people in our lives that really make a difference. I mean, we all have people in our lives that have just helped us become who we are today! That, in our day-to-day life and sometimes people we don't see as frequently, they have helped us become who we are. And to love and appreciate them in the greatest way possible.

As you know, I am one of 10 kids: there are five boys, five girls. Number eight, youngest boy in my family. We were very close family. And two weeks ago, I got a call from my oldest brother – the oldest child – Derek. And he had shared with me that he had been diagnosed with pancreatic cancer, and didn't likely have the greatest odds, as it is with pancreatic cancer. And it tends to be a pretty painful experience. And so it was a pretty devastating thing to hear that. He just actually had surgery to remove a part of the tumor, and they took a biopsy of his lymphatic system, because they're wondering if it had spread, which would really give an indication of how much time he has or what the situation is.

And so it was a pretty painful experience. And now he's in the hospital and, because of Covid – like with everything else – nobody is allowed to see him, and our communication comes from one sister. And so it's been a really tough time.

But it's also been a time to be able to express our love and learn new dimensions of how to love and support, and to be there for one another. We've had two prayer meetings on Zoom and, on one of

them, he really shared how devastating it was. And it was a cool way to kind of hold space for our brother and support him: just allowing him to share his feelings and how difficult this is for him. And for us to just pray. We're praying for remission. We're praying for a miracle. But we're also opening a space to allow this to be as sacred, and as cherished, and as wonderful a time as possible. For him to know how much he is loved, and the difference that he's made. And to enjoy as many moments as we can: moments of crying together, where we don't know what to say, but just be there for each other to moments of laughter or playfulness. That, even in the devastation – even in the sadness – we don't want this to stop us from enjoying our relationship, and even being able to deepen it.

Leo Buscaglia once said, *"If you miss love, you miss life. And don't miss it!"* And one of the things it made me realize this week, as I was praying, is: I don't want to miss ... As sad and broken-hearted, and as much as I wish this was different, I don't want to miss the opportunities to connect with him, even by phone. Even by Zoom. Even not even vicariously through my sisters! That we want to use this to cherish this. To be as loving, and to deepen the wonderful relationship that we have.

So who are the people in your life that you cherish? That you enjoy? That you love? That help make you who you are? And whether it's a teacher, or whether it's your parent, or whether it's a child, or whether it's a friend or a cousin, take time to celebrate. Take time to appreciate. Take time to express your joy. And, even if you're going through a tough time, I think when we stick together through tough times, love is the thing that helps make us get through it. And I find it even deepens our experience when we've had to hang in there and stick together through those tough times.

I really believe that relationships are absolutely one of the greatest keys of saying how fulfilling and enriching. And how what a prosperous and abundant life we live by being in relationship and appreciating those who make a difference for us.

You know, we're kind of all like fishermen. We're wanting a good catch! We're wanting a prosperous life. And there are ways of prosperity that will say, *"Cast your net on the right side of the boat!"* Start with the foundation of your spirit, and nurture your soul daily. Wake up every day thanking God and realizing how blessed you are. And speak the words of what a prosperous life feels like for you. And also, enrich your life with your relationships, even the ones that are difficult. They're important! And use the spiritual tools to bring out the best in them and the best in you. Use your spiritual tools to invest in the relationships you want to get better. And, for all those people who've made a difference in your life, cherish them. Appreciate them and celebrate them.

Let's go fishing! Let's cast our nets in the greatest way, and do the spiritual work, and follow the ways of prosperity.

God bless you all!

SOLO

Guest artist Cassie Chilton sings, "A Life Uncommon"

Don't worry mother
It'll be alright
And don't worry sister
Say your prayers and sleep tight
And it'll be fine
Lover of mine
It'll be just fine

And lend our voices only
To sounds of freedom
No longer lend our strength
To that which we wish to be free from

Fill your lives
With love and bravery
And you shall lead
A life uncommon

I've heard your anguish
I've heard your hearts cry out
We are tired, we are weary
But we aren't worn out
Set down your chains
'Til only faith remains
Set down your chains

And lend our voices only
To sounds of freedom
No longer lend our strength
To that which you wish to be free from
Fill your lives
With love and bravery
And you shall lead
A life uncommon

There are plenty of people
Who pray for peace
But if praying were enough
It would have come to be
Let your words enslave no one
To the heavens will hush themselves
To hear the voices ring out clear
With sounds of freedom
Sounds of freedom

Come on, you unbelievers
Move out of the way
There is a new army coming
And we are armed with faith
To live, we must give
To live

Lend our voices only
To sounds of freedom
No longer lend our strength
To that which we wish
To be free from
Fill your lives
With love and bravery
And you shall lead

And lend our voices only
To sounds of freedom
No longer lend our strength
To that which we wish
To be free from
Fill your lives

With love and bravery
And you shall lead
A life uncommon

OFFERING

Rev. Lori Fleming: It's that time in our service to give of our gifts and our tithes and our offerings. We're so grateful to those of you who have been sending in your checks. Who are contributing online. Thank you for keeping us going through these rough time. We're so grateful for you!

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 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: We're so grateful you could be with us online! And now will you join me in the prayer for protection?

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!

And now we'll close with our choir singing the "Peace Song."

Choir sings "Peace Song":

Let there be peace on earth
And let it begin with me!
Let there be peace on earth
The peace that was meant to be!

With God as Creator
Family all are we!
Let us walk with each other
In perfect harmony!

Let peace begin with me;
Let this be the moment now!
With every breath I take
Let this be my joyous vow:
To take each moment and live each moment
In peace eternally!

Let there be peace on earth
And let it begin with me!

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