

EMOTIONAL AND PHYSICAL PROSPERITY

Week #2 of the 4-Week Series, "The Way of Prosperity"

Feb. 28, 2021

Rev. Richard Maraj

Rev. Richard Maraj: Good morning, and welcome to Unity of Phoenix Spiritual Center. Welcome to our Sunday worship celebration! I'm Rev. Richard Maraj, senior minister, and so glad that you are joining us this morning.

You know, I'm really excited about us kicking off our "Spiritual Allies for Dismantling Racism" program. We hope you will join Rev. Lori and I. The meetings begin on March the 10th, and they'll run every other week for five sessions. All the details are on the website; you can check it out and register if you're interested to be an exciting part of this program.

Also want to let you know that, on Easter, we are having outdoor services. We are having our 6 a.m. Easter sunrise service; we'll have a 7:30 service outside, as well, and a 9 outside, as well. Right now these are the only live services we've got planned, but we are excited about being together for Easter ... especially for the sunrise service at 6 a.m. One of my favorites! *[Laughs]*

So right now, Rev. Lori is going to lead us in a time of prayer and meditation. But first, we're going to listen to the choir as they sing "Surely the Presence."

MEDITATION

Rev. Lori Fleming I invite you to join me for a time of prayer and meditation as we close our outer eyes and take in a deep, mindful breath, and release it slowly. Beginning to relax your body; beginning to relax your mind – letting go of any busy-ness you've had so far today. Just gently breathe in and breathe out as we begin to move our awareness within. Breathing in a sacred breath, and then letting it go: letting go of everything that's bothering us. Just give it up to God. God will take care of it.

As we move into this quiet, still place, we recognize the Spirit of God within. We know that God is everywhere: in us, as us, through us. As close as our own hearts, and as vast as the cosmos. Because God is all it is, and we are one with God. And so, as we continue to breathe in and breathe out slowly, quieting our minds, moving more deeply into that very center of our being. Into the calm, still place of peace that passes understanding. For God is peace, and the more peaceful we become, the more peaceful the world becomes. This is the peace that passes understanding.

With God, nothing is impossible. With God, all good comes our way. For truly, God is willing to give us the kingdom of heaven right here, right now. In this very place where we stand. And so we open up our minds to ideas for new ways to create good in our lives. Good that brings us more abundance, more prosperity, more deeply loving relationships with those we already know, and those we don't yet know. As our love spreads across the planet, allowing each and every person to feel God's unconditional love within them, for God is good all the time. And God is showering us with prosperity in each and every moment: as much as we are willing to accept.

And so I invite you to open your mind and your heart to God's good right now. Open your minds and your hearts to God's abundance and prosperity in this very moment. Open your minds and hearts and receive!

SILENCE

And so, Sweet Spirit, we come in gratitude for all the amazing goodness we have in our lives. For you love us so much, that you're willing to give us everything we ask for: everything we request. Thank you, God, for your great abundance. Thank you for your unconditional love. Thank you for all of our blessings,

each and every one. Thank you, God; thank you, God; thank you, God; thank you, God. And it is so. Amen.

MESSAGE

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

So we are in the second of a four-week series on abundance entitled “The Ways of Prosperity.” I’m really doing this for two reasons. First, we’d all like to live a more prosperous life; I mean, who wouldn’t like to have more of a flow of abundance in at least one or two areas of life? And the second reason is: sometimes we don’t really know how to do it.

And I think there are really two things that really hold us back from experiencing prosperity. And the first one is: we have a limited view of what we think prosperity is. In our culture, if you say “a prosperous life” or “a life of abundance,” automatically we think about having more ... and, particularly, more money, more “stuff” and more things. And there’s nothing wrong with possessions; there’s nothing wrong with money. But it really has a limited ... it limits our experience of what true prosperity is.

First: to experience prosperity, we need to cast a wider net of what our awareness and belief of a prosperous life really looks like. Because prosperity includes experiencing love. And kindness. And caring and sharing. And fun and good health. And passion and creativity. And having a sense of meaning and purpose for your life. A prosperous life includes feeling worthy and being true to yourself. A prosperous life includes being able to overcome and let go of the past, and move forward to new possibilities. It includes having nurturing, supportive relationships. Great and wonderful friends. Generosity and gratitude. I mean, there’s so many wonderful things: enjoying the beauty of nature. Prosperity really is living a full and joyful life.

And that’s why we are looking at eight different areas of prosperity. Last week, we looked at spiritual prosperity and relationship prosperity. Today we’re looking at emotional and physical prosperity. Next week we look at financial and professional prosperity. And then we will wrap up with mental and social prosperity.

You know, when Jesus said he came that we may have life, and have it more abundantly, we always think that abundance means more in terms of quantity. But I really believe when he said a more abundant life, he was also talking about a greater quality of life. That he came that we may have a richer, deeper, and more meaningful experience of life that includes embracing the vast differences and experiences that we have: the mystery, the challenges, the adventures, the opportunities, and even living through the endings and new beginnings. Prosperity, to me, is about living consciously and living whole-heartedly in every situation in our lives.

And the second important thing for us to know about prosperity is: it takes work! God might have a plan for great prosperity for us, and might provide for us, but we have got to put it in action and do the work.

The story we’re using for the series in the Bible is from Luke, Chapter 5. And it’s about the fishermen who were fishing all night, and couldn’t catch a thing. And Jesus said for them to, “*Cast their net on the right side of the boat in the deep waters.*” And when they cast their net, they caught an abundance of fish. I mean, the net was almost bursting; they had to pull it in.

And the cool thing ... They got that great catch that was given freely. But they had to do the work! They had to cast the net. They had to pull it back into the boat. Get back to the shore. Take it out. Do all the sorting of the good and the bad. They had enough to have, to give away, and also to sell. And they had an abundance ... but it took work.

And we – just like the fishermen – have an ability to experience abundance, but we have to do the work. And God has given us the tools, but we still have to put it in motion.

And so, what is the starting place? I think Chapter 3 in the third letter of John says it beautifully. It says, *“Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers.”*

And so, what it’s saying is that, for us to have a prosperous life, first we must focus on prospering our soul. And the tools that God has given us to prosper our souls are meditation and prayer, and being still, and listening to the still, small voice of God. The more we quietly contemplate and meditate on the fullness of God within us, the more abundance flows in our lives. As Jesus said, *“The kingdom of God is within you.”* And he also said, *“Seek ye first, and all these things will be added unto you.”* Cultivating a consciousness of God, and the fullness of life and more prosperity will come forth from that.

The second thing we looked at last week was how to prosper in our relationships. You know, relationships are hugely important to a happy life. I believe the quality of our lives is related to the quality of our relationships. The level of our joy and happiness is related to the quality of our relationships.

And for the relationships that aren’t going well, God’s given us the tools to help them heal and get better, which include acceptance, compassion, understanding and forgiveness. And also, sometimes, just letting go, distancing, and setting greater boundaries.

Other relationships that are really good can get better by using the practice of giving more of ourselves. Giving of our time, giving our encouragement, giving of our appreciation. And, finally, with relationships, you’ve got to acknowledge, celebrate and appreciate all the people in our lives that make a difference: ones that we know well and we don’t. All because people really make our lives better, and it’s good to appreciate and to celebrate that.

Today we’re going to look at two more aspects of prosperity, and they are emotional prosperity and physical prosperity. And if I could just narrow this down – what those two levels of prosperity mean – I think it comes down to how well we take care of ourselves. How well we take care of ourselves emotionally, and how we take care of ourselves physically. I mean, do we take the time to acknowledge and honor the emotions and feelings that we’re having? Looking at our needs? I mean, how well do we process through the painful emotions of life? And also, taking care of our health, our bodies and our levels of fitness.

It’s really about honoring our emotional and physical well-being. I ask you: on a scale of one to 10 – 10 being the highest – how well do you practice self-care? How well do you care for yourself emotionally? And how well do you care for yourself physically?

I would say most of us are not good – or not as good – in self-care, because at some level I think we go, *“Self-care equals selfishness.”* We have this resistance and fear of really taking care of ourselves, and putting ourselves first. Sometimes we’re chasing success and prosperity so much – and trying to please people so much – that we literally sacrifice ourselves. We sacrifice our well-being; we sacrifice sleep and exercise, our goals and our dreams. But, you know, running ourselves to the ground – burning ourselves out and not caring for ourselves – is not success. It is not prosperity. And it doesn’t help the other people in our lives, either.

In 1 Corinthians it says this: *“Do you not know that you are God’s temple? That God’s Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy that person. For God’s temple is holy, and you are that temple.”*

And so, what this is saying is that we are the temple of God! A part of our spiritual work and our daily practice is taking care of God’s temple! And that, when we don’t take care of it, it will destroy us. Destroy our health, destroy our well-being, destroy our joy, and destroy our enjoyment of life. You know, I really believe that the level that we take care of ourselves determines how much prosperity we can experience and enjoy our lives.

So what is one thing you can do to take better care of yourself? What is one thing you can do to take better care of yourself emotionally? And what is one thing you can do to take better care of yourself physically? So let's dive a little deeper into both of these.

First, let's start with emotional prosperity. You know, life just has a huge range of emotional experiences. Really! From exhilaration and joy and happiness and fulfillment to, also, anger and anxiety and jealousy and resentment. You know, there are a whole bunch of feelings that are pleasant and unpleasant. And we think to ourselves: emotional prosperity would be feeling only the pleasant. Or feeling an overwhelming majority of the pleasant. Sometimes we think that emotional prosperity would be like just feeling happy all the time, feeling good all the time, and feeling positive all the time.

And we go to point where we will avoid or pretend or deny or suppress or try to affirm over pain and some of the difficult, unpleasant emotions. But what we don't realize is: when we avoid those emotions, it actually reduces our ability to feel as fulfilled and joyful.

You know, emotional prosperity is about learning how to feel, how to acknowledge, how to understand and utilize all the range of emotions that we feel in life to help us make better decisions, interact better, and have better relationships. And also, to feel good and more complete within ourselves.

You know, sometimes in Unity and in positive thinking, we can think, *"Don't feel any of the bad; don't acknowledge any of the bad."* But the truth is: Jesus acknowledged all of his feelings. He got angry. He got frustrated. He felt grief. And he wept. In the Beatitudes, it says, *"Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted."* And if you just flip what that means, *"Blessed are they that mourn,"* that would mean cursed are those who do not mourn. When we do not cry – when we bury emotions and feelings – that it actually hurts us. We are blessed when we grieve, when we have a good cry, when we let out emotions. Because it helps us heal. It helps us process so we can really move forward.

The Book of Ecclesiastes puts it this way: *"For everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to weep and a time to laugh; a time to mourn and a time to dance ..."*

So let me ask you a question. So what is your relationship with the difficult and unpleasant emotions in your life? Is it something you feel and willingly process? Or is it something you kind of bury and kind of want to gloss over? The 23rd Psalm says, *"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil."* And see, we have to walk through some valleys in our lives. When we have loss and grief and difficulties, we have to walk through those emotions. They're a part of a full and rich and abundant life.

You know, studies show that it is not intelligence that is the number one indicator of success and happiness and healthy relationships; it is actually how well we handle our emotions. They call it "emotional intelligence," or the "emotional quotient" vs. the IQ.

And so, the ways that handling our emotion helps us is that we tend to not get thrown out of balance when difficult things happen. We tend to be more calm. We tend to be more resilient. We tend to adapt with the changes and transformations of life. And so that they include dealing well with success, but also dealing well with loss. Dealing well with winning, as well as dealing well with losing. Dealing well with aging, doing well with big changes in our life. Both the trials and tribulations, as well as the triumphs.

Again, "EQ" is our ability to recognize and be aware of our own feelings, understand them, and then use them in a way that will make the best decisions and bring out the best in ourselves. And "EQ" also helps us have empathy for other people: to be willing to see what their side is, and then to use that to help improve our relationships.

And so, let's do an example. So let's say anger. Nobody likes to feel anger; everybody ... it usually gets a bad rap. Think it's rage. But what it is: it's a response to our own inner perception of something we think is a threat. Like, if somebody disagrees with us, we can sometimes just get angry. And the responses could be to shut down, to deny or pretend, or to just kind of "lose it." I mean, there are all kinds of

different ways that we have. We have these ideas like, *“Spiritual people should never get angry.”* Or, *“Not getting angry is a really good sign of how emotionally mature I am.”* And it’s actually not the truth.

Here’s an interesting study. It says when we let ourselves feel our anger in a healthy way – and really feel and process it – it leads to increased optimism, increased creativity and increased effective performance in our lives! So what it’s really saying here is, like, we have all these feelings. We need to not judge them, call them or label them “this or that”; they’re a part of life. And, as we process them, we actually become healthier! It actually brings out more of our good stuff by getting out some of those frustrations.

So what we do is: we pay attention to what triggers us, notice how we maybe could have handled it a little bit better, and then utilize that information to express ourselves better. Nobody gets it right all the time, but it is a way and a process to help us be more emotionally healthy.

And so, think of a time – the last time you got mad – and it didn’t go as well as you’d like. And look back on that and think: what threat did I perceive? What can I understand about myself? What compassion could I have for myself? And then maybe think about what empathy you could have for the other person. Because there is a balance where we can feel fully what we feel, and do it in a way that doesn’t create more harm for ourselves or others.

And sometimes it’s good to see a therapist, do some journaling, talk to someone and say it out loud, or pause and take a few deep breaths, or pray and ask God for guidance. But I guarantee you 100%, if you want to have a more prosperous life, emotional prosperity – which is seeing, handling, feeling and utilizing all the feelings in our life – actually helps us live more consciously and whole-heartedly.

So the next one we’ll look at is physical prosperity. So, how well do you take care of your body? How well do you eat? Do you eat as well as you know you could? How well do you sleep? Are you getting enough sleep? And are you getting enough exercise?

There is overwhelming proof and research that exercise is a great and amazing thing for us. It increases our health, our energy. Improves our immune system. Makes our mood better. Exercise actually helps us perform in so many better ways. People miss less days at work. I mean, there are all kinds of things! They feel more confident about themselves. Exercise absolutely make a difference! And yet, 35% of people are overweight in our country. Forty-three percent meet the cardio measurements for being healthy. Twenty-two percent meet strength. And only 18% meet them all. I mean, it is a tough thing in our society to say that we are so busy “succeeding” that we really aren’t taking care of ourselves!

And so, we all know this stuff, but I’m going to run through some of them anyway. You know, a doctor told me that the worst thing we could do for our health is smoke. Second worst thing you could do: nothing. Not exercising. Deterioration, disease, all those things come into play.

Gary Player, the famous golfer, at 82 was doing 1,000 push-ups and sit-ups every single morning. I saw this bodybuilder: he’s 80 years old. He started – looks fabulous! – started lifting weights in his 50s. I have a friend whose mother, at 84, was still teaching water aerobics. Why do I bring this up? Because it’s never too late to start exercising!

You know when the best time to plant a tree is? Twenty years ago! You know when the next best time to plant a tree? Today! So today, if you don’t have an exercise program, you know ... just go for a walk. Go for a hike. Maybe go swimming; it’s a little cold in the water, but maybe you could do that. Maybe yoga. You know, some people play racquetball. I hear pickle ball is quite the big hit now. But, in some way, get your body moving.

And if you’re already doing it, then add a new dimension to it, like stretching. Stretching for five minutes. Nobody likes stretching! But stretching is a good thing. Somebody once said, *“If God intended me to touch my toes, he would have put them right next to my knees!”* See, we don’t like stretching! But

that would be a cool way to add a new dimension, for those of you who are already doing regular exercise.

Another one is eating. How well are you eating? What's one thing you know that you're eating that may not be the healthiest for you that you could stop eating? And second, what's something you don't eat – or don't eat regularly – that it would be really good for you to start eating? Blueberries? Avocados? Veggies? A salad a few times a week?

And then, the final one is sleep. Just making sure ... The body needs rest to restore and rejuvenate. Making sure we get enough sleep. Not giving up our sleep. Because it really does help us be at our best.

You know, the thing is: I know we all know this! But sometimes we can be like the Apostle Paul, who said, *"My own behavior baffles me! I find myself not doing things I know I should do, and doing things I know I should not do."* Can you relate to that? So really, what this comes down to: when we know everything that we're supposed to do, and don't do it, it really comes down to that word we don't like. And that is: discipline. Or self-control. That is the thing it really takes to have great self-care.

In the Book of Timothy, it says, *"God has not given you a spirit of fear and timidity, but a spirit of power, love and self-discipline."* God has given us the tools to do the things we know we ought to do. We just need to use them! And the fact is: taking care of our body temple is an important part of our spiritual work and our life work. We absolutely have the tools. And if you need to get a workout buddy, or create a to create a schedule – whatever would encourage or support yourself to do these things – it will make a huge difference.

Practicing good self-care – taking care of your emotional well-being and your physical well-being – truly is one of the keys to living a more prosperous life.

God bless you all!

SOLO

Guest artist Kirsten Plambeck sings, "Thrive"

Here in this worn and weary land
Where many a dream has died
Like a tree planted by the water
We never will run dry

So living water flowing through
God, we thirst for more of You
Fill our hearts and flood our souls
With one desire

Just to know You and to make You known
We lift Your name on High
Shine like the sun; make darkness run and hide
We know we were made for so much more
Than ordinary lives
It's time for us to more than just survive
We were made to thrive

Into Your word we're digging deep
To know our Father's heart
Into the world we're reaching out
To show them who You are

So living water flowing through
God, we thirst for more of You
Fill our hearts and flood our souls
With one desire

Just to know You and to make You known
We lift Your name on High
Shine like the sun; make darkness run and hide
We know we were made for so much more
Than ordinary lives
It's time for us to more than just survive
We were made to thrive

Joy unspeakable, faith unsinkable, love unstoppable, anything is possible
Joy unspeakable, faith unsinkable, love unstoppable, anything is possible
Joy unspeakable, faith unsinkable, love unstoppable, anything is possible
Joy unspeakable, faith unsinkable, love unstoppable, anything is possible

Just to know You and to make You known
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Shine like the sun; make darkness run and hide
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It's time for us to more than just survive
We were made to thrive
We were made to thrive
We were made to thrive!

OFFERING

Rev. Lori Fleming: It's that time in our service to give of our gifts and our tithes and our offerings. 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, Mother/Father God, we say thank you 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: And so we are so grateful you could be with us right now, enjoying the message and the music and the meditation. Will you join me in our "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 out as we listen to the choir singing the "Peace Song." Have a blessed week!

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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