

## THE SADNESS OF SELF-IMPROVEMENT

Week #1 of the 3-Week Series, "Stop Fixing Yourself"

April 25, 2021

Rev. Richard Maraj

**Rev. Richard Maraj:** Good morning, everyone, and welcome to Unity of Phoenix Spiritual Center! Welcome to our Sunday virtual worship celebration. I'm Rev. Richard Maraj, and I am so thrilled that you're here!

Getting really excited about rebooting our LIVE Sunday services in the Sanctuary on Sunday, June the 6th at 9 and 11. Youth & Family Ministry will also begin on the same day, and they will begin at the 11 a.m. service.

We've got a wonderful class coming up I'd like to let you know about. It's called "Sacred Relationships." Jeanette St. Germain has got three classes in a row that will share about the power and the impact that relationships have on our spiritual evolution and our spiritual process.

Right now, we are going to enter a time of prayer and meditation. And to prepare us for that experience, we will now listen as the choir sings "Surely the Presence."

### ***Unity of Phoenix Choir sings "Surely the Presence"***

Surely the presence of the Lord is in this place  
I can see God's mighty power and God's grace  
I can feel the brush of angels' wings  
I see glory on each face  
Surely the presence of the Lord is in this place

## MEDITATION

**Rev. Lori Fleming:** I invite you to join me for a time away: a time of prayer and meditation. As we move our awareness within, I invite you to close your outer eyes, take in a deep, mindful breath, and release it slowly. Beginning to relax your body. Beginning to relax your mind. Breathing in and releasing your breath. Settling in your chair. Feeling that wave of calm energy wash over your body. Relaxing your head and your body and your arms and your legs and your feet. And take in another deep, cleansing breath ... and, as you release it, begin to move your awareness within: into the center of your being. Move your awareness into your heart space: that space of unconditional love where the essence of the Divine resides. In our very hearts; in our very souls!

As we begin to feel our hearts expanding, our love flows out, lifting us up into a consciousness of pure, unconditional love: love for ourselves; love for our families; love for our friends; love for our country; love for the whole world. Because love is all there is, and love is the unifying, healing force that brings us together. Letting go of the desire to fight and, instead, opening our hearts to understanding. Opening our hearts to the differences that each and every one of us bring to the table. Each and every one of us is a unique and unrepeatable expression of the Divine, here for some great and important purpose that only each of us can do ourselves. This is why we are here: to be God's hands and feet, right here, right now, spreading unconditional love to everyone. That love lifts us up out of old ways of thinking – old ways of doing, old ways of being – to create a new consciousness that opens a space for a world that works for all.

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

SILENCE

Sweet Spirit, we come in gratitude for this time together as we grow in community: as we spread our love lavishly all around, lifting each and every one of us up into a higher consciousness of a world that works for all. Thank you, God, for all of our blessings. Thank you for each other. 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 fabulous meditation. Really appreciate it!

So what if I told you that there is not a single moment in your life when you do not have everything you need to be happy? There's not a single moment in your life when you do not have everything you need to be happy! Do you believe that? I just want you to take a deep breath, and just open your mind and consider: does that ring true for you? That you already have everything you need – in every moment of your life – to be happy?

Now, I'm guessing most of us would like to believe that; we want to believe that. There's a part of us that kind of believes it. But I think, for the majority of us, that doesn't quite resonate or ring as true. I would be, for some of us, we're having a little bit of inner resistance in thinking of moments and circumstances in our lives where we're sure we did not have everything we need to be happy!

But let's just say that that is true: that we always have everything we need to be happy. Then the question would be: Why are we always striving and struggling and working and praying to be happier? Why are we always trying to "fix" ourselves and transform ourselves and change ourselves and better ourselves so we can be happy?

You know, in Buddhism it says that all suffering from frustration and anxiety to worry and loss – all of our struggles – stem from one thing, and that is: attachment. That we are significantly attached to certain beliefs, attached to our possessions, and attached to people. We are very attached to how we think the world should work, and how we think people should behave. We're attached to power. We're attached to money. And when we don't get what we want – of the things that we're attached to – it can be devastating and disappointing. It can have us feel sad and miserable and unhappy.

Anthony De Mello, in his book, *Stop Fixing Yourself*, says that we are actually programmed to be unhappy. We are actually conditioned to – not just be unhappy – but frustrated and anxious, as well, because we believe some unhealthy, false truths about what happiness is all about. And here are the four false beliefs about happiness.

The first one is that our happiness necessarily depends on having something that we currently don't have in our lives. And so that would be if we don't have enough money. Or if we don't have the promotion. Or we don't have our ideal home or the sports car we desire. Or we don't have or have not met our soul mate. That our happiness necessarily depends on having something that we currently don't have.

The second false belief is that happiness is in the future. That happiness is always when I get that thing. You know, when I get married, when the kids leave. That it isn't now; happiness is never now! It's always some distant thing in the future: "*one day I will be happy.*"

The third false belief is: happiness requires that we change our circumstances and change the people in our lives. That we'll be happy once we change, rearrange, eliminate or add. And if we change something and aren't happy, we just change a little bit more. If we just keep changing things, eventually we'll be happy.

And then the final one is: if I get all my desires, then I will finally be happy. And this is the idea that we are always having to work on ourselves – always work on our lives. Like little hamsters on a wheel, we're constantly chasing it. But the problem is that we're always feeling tense and anxious trying to get somewhere, hoping that it will make us happy.

So with those false beliefs, can you see why we struggle with happiness? Can you see why we are constantly trying to fix ourselves to be happy? It is because we are conditioned that life is always “not right” or “not good enough” now, and that we have to keep working to, one day, be happy.

Meister Eckhart said this: *“God is not found in the soul by adding, but by a process of subtraction.”* Spiritual growth is all about letting go. And it’s really about unlearning some of the things we have been conditioned to believe so we can actually be happy.

The truth is: we were born happy! We were born peaceful! We were born joyful! Happiness is our natural state! And what we need to do is to let go of the beliefs and the ideas and the false truths that stop us from experiencing our natural state of happiness.

So today we begin a three-week series called “Stop Fixing Yourself: Wake Up, All is Well!” And it’s a wonderful book by Anthony De Mello. And so we’re going to look at three things today that we can do to stop “fixing” ourselves and try and experience – allow ourselves – to experience greater happiness.

**And the first point is to understand our attachments.** Every one of us has attachments: things that we’re attached to that we absolutely believe we need to have in order to be happy ... and that, if we lost them, we wouldn’t be happy. And they range from the attachment to being in control or the attachment to always being right. Or the attachment to approval or praise or recognition. It also could be the attachment to power. And money. Or the need to be seen in the most positive light by people.

And we cling to these different attachments strongly, because we believe that they are necessary to make us happy. And, initially, we’re excited and positive and thrilled to have them. But, after a while, we begin to feel a fear that we might lose them. Or someone might take them away. Or we need to protect them or defend them. And the stronger we get attached to them – thinking we might lose them – the further it takes us away from peace and happiness ... the very things that we are seeking! Attachments rob us and deprive us from enjoying life in a fuller and richer way.

Do you remember in the Bible when it says that, *“It is easier for a camel to get through the eye of a needle than it is for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven?”* What that’s talking about is that, when we are so possessed by our possessions – when we are so filled and consumed by them – that we really can’t feel the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom of peace and love and joy. Because we are so attached and consumed by the things we think we need that will make us happy.

Our lives are filled with different attachments. And the thing is that, when we have them, they actually distort and skew our view of life. Like, for instance, if someone is driven by power – and that is the thing they’re attached to – their decision-making and their ability to see everything in life and make the best decision is hampered. You know, when a businessman is so focused on money, there are certain decisions and perspectives that he might not see because he is so focused on money. If we have the need to always be right, there are certain things and perspectives and experiences we miss out, because we are so overly focused on that. When we are so focused on our attachment, it actually blinds us to see the fullness and the beauty of life.

You know the interesting thing about attachments? They’re not facts! Attachments are our personal belief and what we think will make us happy. And the good thing is: we learned and were conditioned into those, so that means that we can unlearn, and become detached from those things.

Detachment is about liberating and freeing ourselves from that stress and that need and that feeling that we have to have something to make us happy. And it actually frees us to enjoy everything in life freer, and more joyfully, and more easily.

So here’s what I would like you to do. I want you to think of: what are three attachments you have? Three things you think you must have, absolutely, to be happy? And if you’re having trouble figuring it out, here’s how you do it is: look at the areas of your life where you feel the most amount of anxiety and worry and anger and frustration. Because those are the reactions that we have when we don’t get what

we are attached to. And then, when you figure it out, I just want you to say a simple line like this ... Like, let's say mine is the need to be in control. It could be this: *"I understand that I have an attachment to control, and I am willing to release it."* Or, *"I understand that I have an attachment to money and power, and I am willing to release it."* *"I realize I have an attachment to approval, and I am willing to release it."*

Just observing and understanding those areas that we're attached to – that we think we have to have to be happy – just that, alone, begins to reduce some of that inner tension and stress and struggle that we feel inside as we pursue our goals in life.

**The second thing we need to do is to cultivate love within ourselves.** Most of us struggle and don't think we're good enough. We're always dissatisfied with ourselves; always think that we don't measure up, thinking that we're inferior or inadequate. And, whether it's with our education or success, or our finances or our work, we think we're not smart enough, lovable enough, good enough, rich enough, tall enough.

And one of the areas that we can often struggle with in believing we're good enough is with our bodies. So often, we want our bodies to be different than they are. We want our hair to be different. Our nose to be different. Our lips and our hips, our eyes and our thighs. There are parts of us we wish were bigger; parts we wish were smaller. And we're constantly dissatisfied with ourselves, thinking, *"I wish I could fix myself. I wish I could make myself look different and better, and then I will be happy."*

Can you see how we've been conditioned to obsessively always work on ourselves? And make ourselves better? And fix ourselves? Self-improvement is a good thing, but it's a sad thing – in a way – when it is always a belief that, right now, I'm not good enough! And, right now, my life isn't good enough for me to allow myself to feel happy. To feel a sense of joy.

And the underlying struggle here – about fixing ourselves – is that, at some level, not just believing we're not good enough, but it's to not believe that we are loved. Is to not love ourselves; not feel like people love us. You know, the Bible talks about love: loving God, loving others, and loving ourselves. And I would say, for most of us, loving ourselves is probably one of the hardest things. We think it's selfish; we think it's narcissistic or egotistical.

And the truth is: it is probably our first and foremost responsibility. We are the vehicle – we are the body temple of God! We should love and appreciate and celebrate and cherish and give thanks for who we are. God made us unique and wonderful. You know, nobody's got your smile. Nobody has your personality and your gifts and talents. And your ability to bring light and beauty and joy into the world.

And so, can you find a space to just love yourself a little more? To be accepting and appreciating of who you are, and how you are? And how God made you to be? I mean, a simple little meditation of opening your heart and just saying, *"God loves me. And I love myself just the way I am! God loves me, and I love myself just the way I am."* If you want to have a fuller and richer life, we need to love who we are. We need to cultivate that love from within ourselves. Because if we don't, we start looking outward for feelings of acknowledgement and approval and validation.

Anthony De Mello has an interesting thing: he calls them "worldly feelings" and "soul feelings." So tell me the difference between these feelings. So remember the last time you got praised? And validated and acknowledged and approved of? Remember that feeling? Now compare that to your feeling – that feeling you got – when you looked at the sun set or the sun rise. The feeling you feel when you're walking out in nature, or you see a beautiful garden. And compare that with the feeling of when you win a game, or when you win a bet, or when you win an argument. Or when you feel you've got power. And then compare that with the feeling of how much you enjoy your work. Or how it feels to help someone. Or how it feels to get through a really tough time. Or how it feels when you're finally able to let go of the past. Or how you feel during your meditation.

You know, “world feelings” are feelings that we hunger and yearn for, because we feel we need them to make us feel happy. Where “soul feelings” are feelings of joy that just come from within ourselves. You know, feelings that just bubble up within, where we cultivate our own level of happiness and our own level of joy.

And so the second thing is: we need to cultivate love within ourselves by simply just meditating that, *“God loves me, and I love myself just the way I am.”* And then cultivate soul feelings of letting ... because happiness really is an inside job! And love has to come within us, and that happiness has to come within us. And allow ourselves to feel those feelings. Just feeling happy and blessed just for the sake of it. We don’t need outer things to make us feel happy and loved.

**And the final thing we need to do is to choose to be unconditionally happy.** You know, the fact is: the kingdom of God is within us and all around us ... which means the kingdom of joy is in us and all around us. It’s just waiting for us to take possession of it, to claim it, and to acknowledge it.

Anthony De Mello says that every one of us is happy; we just don’t realize it yet! And so, what we need to do – since we are programmed to not be happy and frustrated and anxious, as he says – we need to unlearn that by making a daily commitment to choose to be unconditionally happy. To not let anything stop us from being happy. Not thinking we need something – or not have something – to be happy. We get to choose happiness!

And so, if the kingdom of joy is within us, we can make a declaration to the world that says: *“I choose to be unconditionally happy! I choose to be unconditionally happy!”* Say it with me! *“I choose to be unconditionally happy!”* So if you get a flat tire, take a deep breath and say, *“I choose to be unconditionally happy.”* If you get an unexpected bill, say, *“I choose to be unconditionally happy.”* If you’re going through a break-up, say, *“I choose to be unconditionally happy!”* If you’re feeling a little lost about your future, say, *“I choose to be unconditionally happy.”* If you meet a new friend, say, *“I choose to be unconditionally happy.”* If you win the lottery, say, *“I choose to be unconditionally happy.”*

And I’m kind of joking with that, but the truth is: we can allow ourselves to choose happiness in any situation and any circumstance. Because happiness really is an inside job.

One of the sad things we do to ourselves is: if one thing isn’t working in our lives, we paint the brush of our entire lives to say we’re not happy. Or things aren’t going well. And that’s just not true!

Abraham Lincoln once said, *“Most people are as happy as they choose to be.”* So the question is: How happy are you choosing to be? And are you willing to choose to be unconditionally happy, regardless of what’s going on around you? The fact is: even when things don’t go the way we like, we can still choose to be happy. Like, when I tell jokes, and nobody laughs at them – which happens pretty frequently! – I choose to be unconditionally happy. And it works! Let’s test it right now!

Why did the egg get sent to the principal’s office? Because he was cracking too many yolks! [*Simulates “rim shot” drum roll*]

How do lumberjacks work from home? They log in!

What kind of vehicle does Frankenstein drive? A monster truck!

Why did the chicken cross the playground? To play in the sand bok-bok-bok-bok-box! [*Simulates “rim shot” drum roll*]

What is that I hear? Total silence? Well, even in spite of that, I choose to be unconditionally happy!

You know, life isn’t going to go our way all the time. But we always have the choice! We can choose to be unconditionally happy!

You know, the goal for the next three weeks is to do this: is to not be so obsessive and stressed about following these arbitrary rules about happiness, and to let go of this constant need to think we need to “fix” ourselves to be happy.

Many years ago, I read a book called *Release Your Brakes*. You ever drive with your brakes on? Your emergency brake on? The car goes forward, but you can feel all the wear and tear. I mean, it’s really tough on it. Even though it’s moving forward, it’s not a very positive or pleasant experience. But when you release the brakes, your car moves freely and forward and easily down the road of life. And when we let go of these false beliefs about happiness – and these false beliefs about needing to fix ourselves and improve all the time – life will become easier.

We just need to understand our attachments. We need to cultivate that love within ourselves. And we need to choose to be unconditionally loving. Life will get better and better; we can move down the road of life with greater ease, joy and happiness if we are willing to learn to stop fixing ourselves!

God bless you all!

### **SOLO**

***Guest artist Cassie Chilton sings “She Used to Be Mine”***

It's not simple to say  
Most days I don't recognize me  
That these shoes and this apron  
That place and its patrons  
Have taken more than I gave them

It's not easy to know  
I'm not anything like I used to be  
Although it's true  
I was never attention's sweet center  
I still remember that girl

She's imperfect but she tries  
She is good but she lies  
She is hard on herself  
She is broken but won't ask for help

She is messy but she's kind  
She is lonely most of the time  
She is all of this mixed up  
And baked in a beautiful pie  
She is gone but she used to be mine

And it's not what I asked for  
Sometimes life just slips in through a back door  
And carves out a person  
And makes you believe it's all true  
And now I've got you

And you're not what I asked for  
If I'm honest I know I would give it all back  
For a chance to start over  
And rewrite an ending or two  
For the girl that I knew

Who'll be reckless just enough  
Who'll get hurt  
But who learns how to toughen up when she's bruised  
And gets used by a man who can't love  
And then she'll get stuck

And be scared of the life that's inside her  
Growing stronger each day  
'Til it finally reminds her  
To fight just a little  
To bring back the fire in her eyes  
That's been gone  
But used to be mine

Used to be mine  
She is messy but she's kind  
She is lonely most of the time  
She is all of this mixed up and baked in a beautiful pie  
She is gone but she used to be mine

#### **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 are contributing online and sending your checks in; you're keeping all of the good things we're able to do at Unity of Phoenix going.

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, and 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:** We're so grateful you could join us online. We hope you've been uplifted by our music and our meditation and our message. Will you join me now 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 join us as the choir sings our 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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