

7 PRACTICES OF POSITIVE LIVING

August 1, 2021

Rev. Richard Maraj

Rev. Richard Maraj: So there were these two brothers who were the richest and the most powerful individuals in this small town. And even though everybody knew that they used some questionable business tactics – cheating, lying and intimidating – no one said a word out of fear. Yet the brothers always tried to get people to believe that they were kind, generous and honorable.

One day one of the brothers unexpectedly died, and then the other brother went to the local pastor and made funeral arrangements. And he said, *“I’ll give you \$1 million, but the catch is: you need to say that my brother was a saint.”* And the minister was in a little bit of a quandary, what to do ... because the church could really use a million dollars: all the repairs that could have been done; all the good they could have done to give to poor families. And he didn’t want to lie; he didn’t want to say this guy was a saint when he was the furthest thing from it.

So the pastor was praying: what to do? What to do? Lie and get the money? Or tell the truth and not. And then it started getting ‘round to a few of the congregants, and they were wondering: what’s the pastor gonna do? What’s the pastor gonna say?

Finally the funeral comes. The place is packed, and the eulogy begins. And the pastor says, *“As all of you know, the departed was a horrible, horrible man! He was a despicable individual that cheated, lied, intimidated and bullied countless people in our community! But, compared to his brother, he was a saint!”* [Congregation laughs] Alright. [Rev. Maraj laughs]

So today we’re talking about positive living: living a positive life. So how many people would agree that being positive is a necessary part of living a happy and successful life? How many people here would consider yourself a very positive person? How many people have something in your life right now that you know you could probably handle a little more positively?

You know, every one of us has heard about the power of positive thinking: the importance of having a PMA – a positive mental attitude. We’ve all heard the value and the importance of having a positive mindset, having positive thoughts, speaking positive words, having positive emotions, having positive self-talk, being positive, feeling positive ... I mean, positivity has gotten so popular that it has its own segment in psychology called “positive psychology.”

And there are two things that all the studies that they’ve done – two major things they found out. Number one: positivity works! That when you are positive, it helps your attitude. It helps your mindset. It increases your health, reduces stress. I mean, it helps your work efficiency; improves the quality of your relationships; self-confidence; all kinds of things. Positivity works. That’s the first thing they found out.

The second thing they found out is: positivity doesn’t work. And it doesn’t help in certain situations. They developed a term I’ve never heard before, and that’s called “toxic positivity.” [Congregation laughs] That is when you’re so positive, you gloss over the pain, and that you minimize and deny and invalidate people’s feelings. So that someone’s affirming like, *“I am strong and successful; I am powerful and prosperous,”* and when it’s not happening, they feel bad about feeling bad. They feel bad that they’re screwing up and not getting it right.

Positive thinking is good; optimism is good. But sometimes there’s more than that. When we gloss over the mental and emotional factors, and then the practices needed to sustain and support being positive and living a positive life. And sometimes it doesn’t work. Living a positive life – having a positive mindset – really requires a shift in our consciousness. It needs a mental framework needed to support keeping and continuing that level of positivity ... like new wine in old wineskins. I mean, you can’t put new ideas in an old mindset; it doesn’t work that way.

So here's a good question: What, to you, is positive thinking? What, to you, is living a positive life? I would say positive living and positive thoughts are based in a mindset of hope and optimism with the intention to bring out the best in the situation and the circumstances, and to bring out the best in ourselves. By seeing the good and positive in the situation and learning and understanding what to do better and how to get better and make things better.

Every single one of us wants to be more positive. Every single one of us wants to live a more positive life. So today I want to share with you the "7 Practices of Positive Living."

The first one is: to be positive, you've got to **BE RESPONSIBLE**. Sometimes we don't like responsibility. It sounds like a burden. It sounds like it's heavy. It sounds like it's really difficult and even really hard. And responsibility seems so unpleasant to us that we would rather avoid responsibility and run away from responsibility. We would rather spend more time thinking of excuses, blaming and projecting the fault on something outside of ourselves – even if it's the weather, the government or the economy – to explain why we're unhappy and life isn't going as well as we want. We'd rather spend time in all these excuses, rather than just accepting responsibility.

What we don't realize is: when we don't accept full responsibility, we unwittingly give our power away. We put the power of our own happiness in the hands of others and other things, rather than ourselves.

Responsibility is actually not a burden; it's a blessing! It's a gift that is liberating and empowering. Accepting full responsibility would sound like this: no matter what happens in my life, I have the power, the resources and the ability to change and improve things, even if it's just my outlook and my attitude. Whatever happens in your life: it's your responsibility. Whether it's fair or unfair, right or wrong, it's your responsibility. You're the one that's got the power to choose, to change, to learn, to discover, to seek help and to improve the situation.

Being responsible is really about owning your power, and standing firm in your divine nature. You are a child of God! You were created in the image and likeness of God! You are the light of the world! 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." It is our responsibility to use this great power positively and wisely.

Rabbi David Harmon said this: "To be a spiritual person is to not be afraid of responsibility." And I'll flip that around to say, "To be a spiritual person is to fully accept your responsibility." The responsibility to live the quality of life that you came to live and bring out the best in yourself. And to use the gifts, the powers, the principles to be able to transform situations. To bring healing. To bring reconciliation. To fulfill your goals and all your dreams. We have the power and the responsibility to do that.

If we want to live a positive life, the absolute foundation is to be responsible: to accept full responsibility for our lives. Own our power.

And the second thing to be positive and live a positive life is: you've got to **BE PRESENT** to all aspects of your life. Sometimes we think being positive is about getting things perfect, and it isn't! Life is not ever perfect. And sometimes we think: "If I'm positive enough, everything will go my way, and things will all be smooth and easy." Not true! A lovely thought, but absolutely not true!

And what I'm saying here is: to be positive, to be fully present to when life is going well and it isn't. To the ups and downs, the highs and lows, on the rainy days and the sunny days. To be positive and present when you're feeling on top of the world, and also be present when you're feeling like newspaper in the birdcage of life, if you know what I'm saying. [Congregation and Rev. Maraj laugh]

And the fact is: all of these experiences are part of life that we need to embrace and accept and be present to all of them. Not try to check out or fast forward or deny or pretend; they're all aspects of life. Jesus said, "In this life there will be trials and tribulations, but be of good cheer." What he's saying is: Life is a great thing, but there's some struggles. There are losses. There are challenges and disappointments. You have to walk through some valleys in this life experience.

And being positive is about how you handle those times. How do you handle the parts where you're struggling and you're hurting. And it is about being mindful. It is about being engaged. And it's about being fully present to all of the experiences of life. Because there are going to be wins and losses. There are going to be successes and failures. And to be positive – and living a positive, full life – you've got to be present and fully embrace all of these experiences.

Just like the changes in the season, there are certain changes and challenges that happen in life. They come and they go. The question is: How well do you embrace them? How well do you handle them? And are you fully present for them.

So the third thing that helps us be positive is: to **BE CLEAR**. You know the hardest times for us to make decisions is when we don't know what we want. When we're not clear about what we want. In fact, we make poor choices when we are not clear about what we want. Sometimes many of us are not sure about what we want. If we ask ourselves the question: *"What do I want?"* Sometimes my answer, *"Well, I'm not quite sure! Well, I kind of like this; but, you know, I kind of like that, too!"* We have all this kind of stuff going on.

Anyone in here ever been indecisive? *[Congregation laughs]* Anybody ever second guess yourself? You know, the fact is: sometimes, in life, we live in a state of ambiguity and uncertainty more than we live in clarity. Ask yourself the question: *"How clear am I about what I want?"* Even sometimes, *"How clear am I about who I am?"* And is there anything in your life right now that you are not clear about? Because to be a positive person requires that we get clear.

The Bible says over and over – it talks about clarity. It talks about having a vision. In Job it says, *"Decide upon a thing, and it will be established for you." "Ask and you shall receive; seek and you shall find; knock and the door will be opened unto you."* Every one of those is speaking about getting clear. Take time to get clear about what you want to ask for. Be clear about what you are seeking. Be clear about where you are knocking.

Are you willing to take some time in those areas you aren't clear about and get clarity? And most of the time, it's about asking your higher self: *"Is this really for my best? Is this what I really want?"* Sometimes you've just got to sit there and listen, and let the clarity come. It may not come at that moment, but it will come as a result of those moments.

And sometimes we can fall into the cultural idea all the time. *"What do you want?" "Well, I want more of this; I want more of that. I want more of this."* No; you've got to go deeper than that. I would recommend a five-minute little thing of writing: What do I want? What does my heart want? What does my soul want? And what does God want?" Because sometimes you go right to the superficial initially. But if you sit with it a little longer, and go – *"What does my heart really want? What does my soul want? What does God want?"* – I guarantee you, the clarity will come.

If you want to be more positive, we need to be clear.

The fourth thing about being positive is: you've got to **BE FORGIVING**. We can't be positive if we aren't willing to let go of the negative. Of the hurt. Of the upset. Of the regret. Of the judgement. Of all the things that we sometimes hold on to that are not healthy for us. Letting go of the past. You know, forgiveness is really about removing the emotional baggage that we hold on to sometimes. Sometimes those negative and toxic emotions: they get trapped and stuck in us, because we're holding on to some grudge or to some regret or hurt.

In Aramaic – the language that Jesus spoke – the word forgiveness means "to loosen or to untie," which gives this idea to free ourselves. To just free ourselves from the past. Free ourselves from the pain and from the hurt. One thing I always tell everybody: you do not need to know how to forgive; you just need to be willing.

If there's some place you're stuck – holding on to something – are you willing to forgive? Are you willing to let it go? Because I guarantee you: If you're willing to let go, and you're willing to forgive, God will heal your heart. God will heal the hurt. The question is: Are you willing?

Remember when Peter asked Jesus, *"How many times should I forgive, Master? As many as seven?"* And he said, *"No; as many as 70 times seven!"* You know, the number 7 in the Bible represents completion. And so, when he's saying 70 times seven, he's talking about: forgiveness isn't a one-shot deal or an occasional thing. It is a consciousness of consistently – a willing to release and let go of the hurts. Feel them. Feel them, process them, learn from them. But then let them go! Release them!

Somebody once said, *"You don't have to forgive all the time; you only have to forgive in the times that you want to feel peace and happiness."* [Congregation laughs] A little delayed reaction on that, but I'm so glad you laughed. Thanks! [Rev. Maraj laughs]

And so, if you want to be positive, letting go and forgiving is a huge aspect of living a positive life.

Number five: to be positive, you've got to **BE GRATEFUL**. To me, being grateful is one of the most positive things you can even do in life. Because it recognizes the good and acknowledges it. It appreciates it and enjoys it. There's almost this magnetic energy about being grateful and thankful. And just practicing gratitude is one of the most positive practices that you can engage in.

You know, last week I was grateful for something – we probably all were: all that rain! I loved it! The thunder, the darkness! It was cozy and fun! Last week I went to a movie for the first time in a long time. I was so grateful to be back in the theater eating some popcorn, large screen; it was really fun! As I mentioned, I'm going on vacation. And I'm grateful for that opportunity. I haven't been in a plane in two years, and getting to visit Canada and my family, as well. So that's going to be a lot of fun.

You know, the fact is: When you practice gratefulness, you will realize there is a "great fullness" in your life! And it is absolutely the truth. Here are some ways to practice: The next time you feel grateful, just sit in the gratitude for a little bit longer. Let it linger. Bask in it! Soak in it! So if you're grateful for the weather, or grateful for whatever, just sit in it, and let it go just a little bit deeper. Because the deeper you let it in, the more consistently that pattern will come up of being thankful.

Another one is: Just think of three things you're grateful for, and maybe, like, once a week – like Sunday at dinner – that the family ... have everybody go around and say three things you're grateful for. I mean, that would be a cool thing! Or maybe every night do a little gratitude list.

And the final one I want to say is: Begin and end your prayers with gratitude. To begin before you pray – to give thanks for all the good in your life – is a great way to open your heart to God and to feel that connection when we pray. And then to end your prayer by giving thanks and being grateful, even grateful in advance that the things will work out that you want to work out. These are powerful, powerful practices of positivity.

The sixth thing to help you be positive and live a positive life is: to **BE BOLD**. WH Murray said, *"Whatever you can do or dream you can, begin it. Boldness has genius, power and magic in it!"* In 1994 Jeff Bezos had a really good job with a financial firm making a lot of money. Very successful. Loved his boss. And then he came up with this idea of selling books on the internet. He had a talk with his boss and said, *"Do you think that's a good idea?"* And the boss said, *"Yeah; I think it's a good idea if you don't have a job! But you've got a job, and it's a really good job!"* [Congregation laughs]

So, even though he was dissuaded to do it by his boss, obviously Jeff Bezos did pretty good starting Amazon. He was bold again back in 2005, when he launched the Amazon Prime. People did not think that that would work, but it has! To the tune ... Is he the richest man in the world? He is a bold bad boy, I'm telling you! That is an amazing thing!

Tom Brady: I think it was a bold move to leave the Patriots at 42 years old, I think he was! Go to a new team, and ends up – that boldness! They win the Super Bowl and become the first team in NFL history to win the Super Bowl on their home turf. I think that was pretty bold!

Freddy Mercury wrote “Bohemian Rhapsody” – it was over six minutes long. Back then, they only played songs that were three minutes. That was the norm. And his producer didn’t even want to put it on. Radio stations weren’t going to play it. Somehow he worked his magic, and his words in the movie were: “*Fortune favors the bold.*” Those who are willing to be bold! To step out, to dare greatly, to give it a shot, to do what we are called to do in spite of what other people think. Those individuals will be favored; good things will happen.

One more: Simone Biles. The most decorated of all gymnasts: 31 medals, I think, in world championships and Olympics. And being bold enough to say, “*I’m not okay, and I need to step down.*” That’s pretty bold! She’s been criticized and all kinds of things. But being true to yourself: that’s a part of the boldness. What are you called to do that is yearning and burning in you? And are you willing to step out and do it?

Now I’ve given you some big examples, and you don’t have to be that big. Sometimes being bold is just saying, “*Yes!*” Sometimes it’s just saying, “*No!*” Maybe it’s a dream a little bit bigger than you’ve allowed yourself to dream. Or feel a little more worthy than you’ve allowed yourself to be. Maybe it’s to speak up and say what you want. Maybe it’s to ask a question. Maybe it’s to do something new or try something different. Maybe it’s to admit that you need help. But what is that bold step that you’re being called to take? It’s not to just quiver and walk away; it is to say, “*This is the thing I’m called to do. This is the thing that’s burning in me.*” And being willing to be bold enough to do it or to try it. Fortune favors the bold!

If you want to live a positive life, you’ve got to be bold.

And the seventh thing about being positive that you need to do is: to **BE SILENT**. Cardinal Robert Sarah wrote a book called *The Power of Silence*. And he said that there is strength in silence. He said silence is the most important of all human work, because it connects us to God and helps us express God. Silence is the most important of all human work!

We live in a crazy, fast-paced world. Everything is go, go, go; rush, rush, rush; get all this done; do, do, do. And the fact is: Silence is one of the most powerful things we can do to bring peace to our minds; brings levels of clarity. It opens us up to creativity and solutions, wisdom and ideas ... to all the positive possibilities that are available to us. Because the more we immerse ourselves in the Mind of God, the more we open ourselves to the fullness and the goodness of God.

You know, they’ve even found that regular periods of silence helps your brain function improve! Edison and – what’s that smart guy’s name? Einstein! [*Congregation laughs*] – realized that, when they wanted to solve problems and come up with certain ideas and formulas, that quieting the mind was the best thing they could do to get in the state where creative ideas and solutions came. Einstein did it in the form of taking a nap; that was his way to quiet his mind, and creative ideas and solutions came.

I mean, why is silence important? Because we’re connecting with the very Source that makes everything possible! To the positive possibilities that are available for us and our lives. Silence is the most important of all human work, because it opens up the door to the unlimited abundance, goodness and possibilities of God.

So these two hydrogen atoms walk into a bar ... [*Congregation laughs*] And one says, “*I think I’ve lost an electron!*” The other says, “*Are you sure?*” And the guy replies, “*Yes; I’m positive!*” [*Congregation laughs and moans*] Okay ... Okay; I’m positive I could have come up with a better joke, but ... [*Congregation laughs*]

The point is: Being positive works! It is helpful. It is powerful. It is beneficial. And it is an amazing blessing. Being positive is not just about having a positive thought here and there, or saying some affirmations here and there. It is about a larger intention of the positivity, and creating a framework and a foundation to support it. And that framework and foundation is: To be responsible. Be present. Be clear. Be grateful. Be forgiving. Be bold. And be silent.

If you want your life to get better, more positive – to improve in any way – I encourage you to use the “7 Practices of Positive Living.”

God bless you all!

[Congregation applauds]

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