

WHAT I LEARNED ON MY SUMMER VACATION

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Rev. Richard Rogers

Rev. Richard Rogers: So I want to start tonight by saying thank you. You know, sometimes when you get away from your life, you get to really look at it, and I am so thankful for this ministry. I'm so thankful for you; I'm so thankful that I get to do this work with you, and that we get to share our spiritual journeys together. And I'm just very, very thankful. I'm thankful that I got away. I mean, usually when I take time away, I do a speaking engagement or I do coaching, or I do something. And I just gave myself 30 days to shut up. *[Congregation laughs]* And it was fabulous! Right? No more yammer, yammer, yammer. It was fabulous! So I thank you for that. Really, I thank you, and I'm very grateful for this ministry.

So one of the things I know to be true is that travel creates a window into our spiritual life. That traveling is an activity that can open our soul. How many of you have ever had like an interesting experience through travel? Right? Where you got to see parts of yourself that maybe you weren't altogether happy with? Or you got to see places where you stepped into your fears or your worries or your story or your drama?

And what I feel like is: There's something that, when we're away from the life that we know, that kind of brings up our stuff. And I really believe that that's why, for thousands of years, spiritual people have taken pilgrimages. And we really think of taking pilgrimages like: we're going to pay homage to this place. Christians and Jews have gone to the Holy Land. People of Islam have gone to Mecca. Buddhists and Hindus have gone to India. And we think, like, we're going there to offer our prayers or to offer our offerings to this holy place, as if the holy place needs our offerings. Right?

But really what happens is: In the journey, we get to be blessed. Right? In the journey, we get to look at ourselves in a new way. We get to have experiences. Because I think when we're away from what we know, sometimes Spirit speaks to us in a way – in the busyness of our lives – we don't hear. So it gets us out of our routine, and it opens us to see things and feel things and know things in a deeper way.

And also, by disconnecting from what's normal, it requires to really look at our own inner connection to the Spirit of God within us. That sometimes when we get so wrapped up in the busy-ness of our lives, that getting away from that really requires that we walk in our faith in a greater way.

And if you've ever traveled anywhere, one of the first experiences that you get in travel is the sense of losing control. Anybody ever had a flight cancelled or missed? Or a rental car reservation go to pot? Or, you know, what happens when you get on the road is: A hundred things that you didn't ask for and didn't want, you really have to be ... you're confronted by. And it really invites us to really look at, you know, *[laughs]* how much we like to be in control. Anybody here have a little control issue?

And when we get into travel, right? When we're outside of the norm – when we're outside of all the things where we eat and the way that we always do it, and where we/how we live our life – once we get outside of that little circle, it brings up a level of vulnerability. It's like: "Am I gonna be okay?" Right?

And one of the other things I want us to look at is that, one of the ways that we confront that is: Most of us tend to over pack. Do we have any over packers in the room? The idea of over packing is: If I bring my whole house with me, I'm going to feel safer. Right? *[Rev. Rogers and congregation laugh]*

I remember the first time we went to Europe. Right? We had these roller bags that I think we could have stuffed Jimmy Hoffa in. *[Congregation laughs]* I mean, they were so big; they were so heavy! And you know, on international flights ... Domestic flights you get, like, 50 pounds. On international flights, you get 75 pounds. But if you try to take a 75-pound bag around Europe, you have back strain by the end,

because you're trying to throw that on to trains and busses. And it's exhausting! And it was like: *"I'll never do that again!"*

And what I really got to look at was my own fears and insecurities – and even lack of faith – that I really believe that I needed everything to be safe. Right? And when you really move into that experience of faith: If God is really our Source, how much do we need? Right? If God is really our Source, do we really need our entire closet, because we might need that outfit? Right? Or 15 sets of AA batteries in case something goes askew. Right?

And the other point is that, when we travel, we're outside our norm. You know, I'm gonna share what happened with us. But we drove to Michigan and back. And on the way home, we went through a route that we'd never been through – on a road we'd never been through – and it cut through the panhandle of Oklahoma and the panhandle of Texas to go back into New Mexico. Right?

And we stopped – as we were in Texas – to gas up and go to the restroom and, you know, get snacks, or whatever it was. And I'm putting gas in the car, and Jill goes into the convenience store – the truck stop – and comes out and goes, *"We are definitely in Texas!"* [Congregation laughs] And I said, *"Why is that?"* She said, *"A young man opened the door for me, and I was probably 15 feet from the entrance. And he held the door 'til I got safely in the building."* It wasn't one of those ones where they kind of let it slap and bang me on the head as you go by!

And she said, *"And then a different young man!"* She said, *"These guys were in their 20s!"* She said, *"And then a different young man, as I was coming out, held the door not quite as long! But held the door!"* And she said, *"I like it here!"* [Congregation laughs] Right? *"I like it here!"* Because there was a level of common courtesy that is refreshing! Like, she was loving it! And I really had to take my game up the rest of the trip! [Rev. Rogers and congregation laugh] I really; I had to show up in a much better way, or felt like I was going to be replaced by a 22-year-old Texan before I knew it, right?

And one of the things that happens when we travel is: You get to kind of experience other cultures. And some of the things we experience we realize is better! You know, that really takes us to another level.

And then the last thing about travel that I really like is that you have to come home. I guess, technically, you don't have to come home ... but most of us, when we go on an odyssey – when we go on an adventure, when we go on a pilgrimage – you have to come back to where you started.

Anybody read the Harry Potter series, or watch the Harry Potter series? One of the things I loved and found very almost problematic was that, in the first book of Harry Potter ... Now, if you haven't read it, and you're going to read it, this is a spoiler alert. Right? But in the first book about Harry Potter, Harry – as a young man – doesn't know his magic. Right? And he goes off to Hogwarts and he learns his magic. And he spends the whole book discovering that, not only does he have great magic, but his parents had great magic.

And he was raised by his aunt and his uncle, and they were "Muggles." And Muggles are people who don't know their magic, right? So he was raised by Muggles. And so he spends this whole year at Hogwarts learning about his magic: learning to be that he's a powerful wizard, or whatever he was. And then, at the end of the year – like, after he spent all this time learning his magic – he had to go back to live with his Muggles for the summer.

And I thought, *"How awful is that!"* Like, you come out; you find yourself. You discover your power. And, it's like, it seems so wrong to have to go back to live with the Muggles. And I really believe that that's one of the things – that when we have a spiritual experience ... And if you look at all the "Hero's Journey" – all the mythology – the hero always comes back. Or the heroine always comes back to where they started. And the reason that I believe that is, is so that they can see the growth that they've attained through the pilgrimage, through the journey, through the odyssey that they went on.

And oftentimes in our lives, we want everybody else to change. Have you ever had somebody in your life that you were really wishing they'd show up differently? *[Congregation laughs]* Right? But our spiritual life is really not about them showing up differently. Our spiritual life is really about us showing up differently. Us showing up in a more loving, more powerful, more wise, more kind, more compassionate way. And as we show up differently, then the teaching is that our world evolves. That our life is transformed from the inside out. Right? But it's from the inside out; it's not from the outside in. Right?

And how many of you remember the last scene of *The Wizard of Oz*? Right? Where does Dorothy wake up? Do you remember? Another little spoiler alert! Where's Dorothy wake up? In her own room in her own bed with her own family all around her! Right? That she goes on this magical, wonderful experience, and she ends up right where she began!

And that's what a spiritual odyssey does for us. Like, if we went to a new place and then, when we came back, everything was different, we'd kind of miss the whole point. Because the real point is that we're different! That we've been transformed! That we're showing up in a more godly, a more loving, a more kind, a more transformed way. And that's what really moves our world forward! I mean, it would be great if everybody did the work, and you didn't have to. *[Congregation laughs]* I mean, who wouldn't sign up for that?!? Right? But the real work is that: If I'm changed on the inside, everything's different.

So this year, Jill and I made a commitment to go on vacation. And, honestly, we hadn't been on a real vacation in years. About seven years ago, she was diagnosed with breast cancer. And I don't tell a lot about her story. She was diagnosed with breast cancer; she went through all the treatments. And the last thing they did was give her this drug that, for zillions of women, has no effect. But for her, it was to lower her hormone level ... Not that you need to know that, and please ... If you see her, don't say, "*Your husband was talking about lowering your hormone level!*" *[Congregation laughs]* Let's just ... Let's just kind of ... Let's just forget that part, okay? Let's just move on. Right?

So for millions of women, it has no effect. But for her – and a very, very, very small percentage – it actually damages the sheathing around your nerves. So what happened to her was that she got hypersensitive: visually, sound. And when it comes to elevation, she's hyper – she was hypersensitive. And so it's been a many – almost seven – year process of her healing from that. And so this was the first time where we felt like she could handle the stimulation of going on a trip.

So we've been working on this idea of this trip – to be gone for a month – for the last several months. And it was the idea that: We knew one of the things that sets her – that becomes problematic for her – is elevation. And the thing that she really wanted to do was to go back home. She wanted to go back to Michigan. She wanted to go back to the house she was raised in. Her mom and dad are still in that house; it's a cute little farmhouse on the edge of town ... a little Michigan town. And she wanted to go back. And she just wanted to be in her room, and experience her mom and dad while they're still in the house.

And so we made this plan. And we knew that – to get from Arizona to Michigan – there's a significant elevation rise. And that you can't get out of Arizona without a significant elevation rise. And that's one of her triggers. And so we actually got the map out and Googled all the ways to get out of town with the least amount of elevation gain. But pretty much – at one point or another – you're at over 7,000 feet, because the Continental Divide is pretty much at 7,000 feet any way you go.

So we knew that there was a probability that this might be a three-hour vacation. That, when we got to that altitude, it would become problematic – it would be an issue for her – and we'd have to turn around and go back. And we've been praying about it. And the word that we were given for this trip was ACCEPT.

Now, I don't know what your relationship with acceptance is ... but mine has been rocky. *[Congregation laughs]* Right? I am a hard, Type A, "make-it-happen" personality. And acceptance ... oh, my gosh! Do I

know that it's a spiritual process? Yes. Do I loathe it? Yes! [Congregation laughs] Right? So if you're a hard, Type A personality, the idea of going into any situation and just "accepting" it. No!!! Right? My ego [laughs] is far more developed than that, right? My life has been about: If you want it, make it happen. Right?

And so the idea that both of us, individually, in our time of prayer were given the word "acceptance" was a little disconcerting, right? It was a little problematic, right? Because it's like, "*I don't want to accept.*" I just want to go. I want to have a vacation with my wife. I want to get there; I want to come home. And I want to do it the way I want to do it. Can I get an "Amen"? [Congregation: "Amen!"] Right?

I just want to do it the way I want to do it! Anybody who's ever been on a trip ... You don't book a flight and think, "*Well, whatever flight's close to that is fine.*" Or, "*Whatever hotel is around there is fine.*" You don't book an ocean-view room and say, "*Well, if there's something in the basement, that's fine.*" You don't do that, right? You book what you want; you expect to have it. And your ego gets involved in the outcome! Right?

So the idea of acceptance – and I'm probably going on too long – but the idea of acceptance is challenging for me. I'm sure not for you, but for me.

So we got in the first day. We got in the car. We broke up the journey. We were going to stop in Missouri along the way, but we broke up the journey in six-hour drives. So we'd do six hours at a time. And six hours from here would place us at Albuquerque at about 5,200-foot elevation. And until you get mid-way into Kansas, you're at over 2,500 elevation. I mean, you have to go all the way into Kansas before you get below 2,000 elevation. So we knew that she was going to have two days at elevation. Right? No matter how we did it.

So the six-hour drive, I-40 was stopped. So our six-hour that first day was nine hours. Right? And we would look at each other and go, "*Okay; what's our word again?*" [Congregation laughs] It's like, "*Hello! Can I get a second opinion? Is there another word that we can pick at this point?*" Right? And it was "accept," right?

And so we did our very best. Right? And finally one of us – and I don't remember which one it was – said, "*Well, what does ...*" You know that app, "Waze," that can kind of route you different ways? Well, we got out Waze, and I've never used it on a long trip. We got it out, and it routed us around the I-40 blockage. And it was beautiful! It just zing, zing, zinged us around, and so ... It was still three-hours longer than we wanted, but it worked!

So then the next day we thought, "*Well, if it worked one day, let's try Waze again!*" Because we had it in our mind how we were going to get there. And Waze said, "*Sailor, just sit down; you're not going that way.*" And it routed us around a highway we'd never been on. It routed us to northern New Mexico, right? And we got ... And it was the most beautiful, beautiful drive!

And what I want you to hear is that, every time there was a bump, if we didn't resist the bump, there was a blessing on the other side. But we couldn't get to the blessing until we accepted the bump. Right?

Have you ever been in that place where you're just mad about the bump? And you never get to the blessing, because you're just so mad about the bump? That our mind has this ability to say to us, "*It shouldn't be this way.*" And sometimes when we have that thought – that this shouldn't be this way or you shouldn't be this way or the moment shouldn't be this way

The moment that we get that idea that "*It shouldn't be this way,*" that thought actually stops us from moving forward. Because the reality is: It is this way! And no matter how much you want to argue, "*It shouldn't be this way,*" it was that way! And it wasn't until we could really make peace with the I-40 was actually stopped ... Right?

Can you imagine two people sitting in their car going, *"You know, it shouldn't be this way!"* [Congregation laughs] And they would do that for an hour! Right? They would do that for maybe two hours, right? Just committed to the fact that, *"It shouldn't be this way!"* And it wasn't until one of us said, *"Well, what does Waze say?"* that we could actually move beyond that.

And, over and over again, on this whole trip, there'd be a bump. And there were all kinds of bumps. We finally, you know ... A few days later, we get to Michigan, and there's a factory that had opened up in the last couple of years just on the outskirts of town. Just over the city line. And her folks live on the edge of town. And so it was probably less than a quarter of a mile away. And this factory: it's a factory. And it had this vibrational hum that sounded like fingernails on a chalk board. [Congregation moans] Right?

So we drove across the country so she could sleep in her room, and we could have the whole family experience. And we tried the first night to spend the night there, and that was it. I mean, she was going down for the count. Right? This was just not going to work, right? And so then Option B was to find a hotel out of sound range. Right? It was fabulous!!! Right? It was fabulous! They live about 20 minutes from Michigan State. Michigan State has a world-famous executive development program. They have a hotel there, golf course, Olympic swimming pool. And it's all for this executive – like the NBA – executive leadership program. And this summer it was completely closed, but the hotel was open.

So we got this great rate. Kitchen in the room. Olympic pool. Golf course. And we could only go there – to her parents' house – for so many hours each day. [Puts both hands on his heart] [Congregation laughs] I was tearing up! You know! If I timed it right, we'd hit lunch and dinner, and then we'd have to go, right? Because her mom can cook; that lady, she can fry stuff like you've never seen before! She is just a fabulous cook, right? But if we hit it right, we'd go in for a couple of hours and kiss kiss, love love, *"Great seeing you all!"* and we're back in the hotel in time to watch the Suns! And it was fabulous! And awful ... I wept, right? Right? [Congregation laughs]

But every time there was a hurdle – every time there was a bump – there was something on the other side that was better!

Have you ever spent eight days with your in-laws? [Congregation laughs] I haven't, either! [Congregation laughs] I haven't! And I love 'em! I mean, they're fabulous people! Eight days; I haven't! Right? It was fabulous!

So here's what I want you to see. This is what I really want you to play with. I want you to pay attention to those things in your life that you are committed *"shouldn't"* be this way. I want you to really pay attention to when your mind focuses on any area where you're convinced it shouldn't be this way. Because my statement to you tonight is: I think you're blocking a blessing. I think you're denying that good wants to give you. I think the moment you think, *"It shouldn't be this way,"* you're actually stopping the grace of God from filling your life. And that the moment we think that thought, we are now in resistance, and we are not accepting the full goodness that God has for each and every one of us.

So I want you to pay attention to that. I want you to pay attention to the people in your life. When we say about another person, *"They shouldn't be this way,"* or, *"This moment shouldn't be this way,"* or, *"This situation shouldn't be like this."* Or, *"My finances shouldn't be like this"* or, *"My work shouldn't be like this,"* or, *"My kids shouldn't be like this."* That, the moment we think that thought – that it shouldn't be this way – it actually moves us out of the moment. It moves us out of reality, and we're now just swimming in our own thoughts. And not really living in the grace that God has for each one of us.

Two: When we think the thought, *"I shouldn't be this way,"* what I want you to see is how much your gratitude diminishes. Like, nobody gets up and goes, *"Woo hoo!"* Right? *"It shouldn't be this way!"* That every time we're in resistance to any aspect of our life, our gratitude is going downhill fast. But when we move into acceptance, and we hit the bump – we feel the bump, we acknowledge the bump, but then

we're willing to not resist it, but actually accept it – we actually go over the bump. And we get back to grace! And then our gratitude goes through the roof! Like, our gratitude expands, right?

So, over and over again, when we're in resistance, there's a low level of gratitude. When we move into acceptance, we move beyond the bump back into the grace of God, and our gratitude goes through the roof.

Three: We cannot be in judgement and in love in the same moment. So the moment we say or think the thought, *"You shouldn't be this way,"* our heart closes to them. And I'm going to let you try it, right? I want you to think of somebody in your life that you love to judge. It could be a family member; it could be a neighbor. It could be a co-worker; it could be a politician. I want you to think of somebody that you love to judge. And I know that everybody in this room is so spiritual, that we don't judge anybody. But we're just going to pretend, right? *[Congregation laughs]* You're just going to practice. You're just going to see if that works.

I want you to think about somebody that you just love to judge. And I want you to see if you can be in your full judgement of them with an open heart. Is your heart open or is your heart closed? And I guarantee that, when you're judging any other person – including yourself! – that your heart closes. Because your heart is designed that, when you're scared – when you're in judgement, when you're in fear – your heart automatically closes. That, when we're in resistance to any moment – when we're in resistance to life; when we're in resistance to another – we're living with a closed heart.

And four: I want you to see that, no matter what you think your life is supposed to be like – no matter what you want it to look like; no matter what your intention is – it's a little window that you're looking through. But the possibilities for God are endless. They're infinite. They're all around you! And the moment we move into acceptance, we go from this little box to a life that is infinitely good.

So are you ready for your homework? I want you to look at your life. Where is your resistance living now? Is there any part of your life that you're in resistance to? Are you in resistance to your body? Are you in resistance to your finances? Are you in resistance to your relationship? Are you in resistance to your family or your neighbors? Where does your resistance lie? And I want you to decide today that you're willing to take one significant step to move beyond your resistance. I want you to look at taking one significant step to move beyond the bump so you get to be blessed.

Now, do you have a God-given right to be miserable? Amen, right? We all have a God-given right! Because we've been given free will, we all have a God-given right to be miserable. But it's really a choice. Like, every time there's a bump – and I promise, in your life, things are not always going to go the way you expect them to. That is the good news! Because how many of you can think of something in your life that you didn't want, didn't ask for, that became a great blessing in your life? Right? That it's a great blessing! So every time we are willing to move beyond the bump to the blessing, it's because we accepted the bump.

I accept all the bumps in my life! Will you say that with me? *[With congregation]: "I accept all the bumps in my life!"* And I am ready for their blessing. Together: *[with congregation] "And I am ready for their blessing."* I accept all the bumps in my life! Together: *[with congregation] "I accept all the bumps in my life and I am ready for their blessing!"*

Let's take that into prayer:

I invite you to open your mind, your heart, your soul to the activity of God that is right here, right now. That there is one – one presence, one power, one God – here for each and every one of us. So tonight we give thanks. And we enjoy all the blessings of our God. And so it is. Amen.