

MASTERING THE INNER CRITIC

Week #1 of a 2-Week "Mastering the Mind" Series

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Rev. Richard Rogers

Rev. Richard Rogers: So my question for you tonight is the realization in life that you only have two options. Right? And those two options are: Either life is going to evolve, or it's going to repeat. And that's really the only two choices. Right? And I want you to think about that for a minute. Like, how much of your life is evolving in new and expanded ways? And how much of your life are you just repeating the old over and over and over again?

And I just love that imagery, right? That in every moment, I'm either going to do what I do -- that I've done a hundred or a thousand or a hundred thousand times before -- or I'm going to have the faith to evolve to the next version of me.

And I want you to see that it actually does require faith to be willing to evolve. Because to evolve means that you are not willing to stay who you have been; you're willing -- like the butterfly -- to become that which you've never been before. So it is a little scary to think about letting go of who you have been. It's because what you know is what you've been.

To evolve means that you're actually stepping into the unknown, and it implies a loss of control. Because you can't truly be in control of that which you don't yet understand. Like, you want to think you're in control, but to really move forward -- to really evolve out of your current environment -- you have to be willing to have the faith to be out of control. To do what you've never done before.

And so, on a regular basis -- I talked about on Sunday -- on a regular basis, I want you to be willing to try that which you've never done before. Whether it's a simple way of going down a street that you've never driven, or try a food that you've never eaten before, or have a conversation with somebody that you normally wouldn't have a conversation with, I want you to be looking for ways to get outside your comfort zone and to go in a new direction.

Scripture for tonight is from Hebrews 6. And I want you to ... [Laughs] This is one of those Scriptures where it's the Apostle Paul, and it's deep. It's layered. And I want to get to the bottom of this one. Right?

It's Hebrews 6: *"Therefore, let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ."* Okay? [Laughs] See, that Scripture just had me right there, right? *"Let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on into maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works."*

So what does that mean to you? A repentance of dead works? Like, the foundation of repentance from dead works? How many of you can see certain areas in your life where you're doing things, even though there's a high probability that it's not going to work? Have you ever woken up to yourself and said, *"Why am I doing this one more time, when it hasn't worked the last 50 times?"* Right? [Laughs]

I remember ... one of my favorite stories is a story of an Italian restaurant where the mama was really from ... didn't speak any English. The pasta that she created was great; it was fantastic! They sold the restaurant, moved back to Italy. The new owners, God help them, they did not have mama's thousands-of-years-of-making-pasta experience. And it wasn't very good. Right? But I kept going back thinking, like, mama was going to cook the pasta one more time. And mama was now in Italy, right? But I kept going back, thinking, *"Yes!"* And it was like "dead works."

It's the repentance from dead works, and a faith toward God. Right? Now, when we have a faith toward God, what does that mean to you? Right? A faith toward God implies -- right? -- that there's a direction that God is. But is God here or "out there"? Right? When we have a faith toward God, we have a belief that God is "out there" and God is somewhere separate from us. Right?

So this repentance from dead works, and a faith toward God ... that all this we do if God permits. *[Continues Scripture]: "For it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened."*

So you can't repent your way into enlightenment. But once you know enlightenment, everything in your life is changed. True? So let's talk about enlightenment, right?

Now, one of the things that I've been on this soapbox for the last couple of years -- and it is one of my soapboxes -- is this idea of spiritual growth. How many of you have ever heard somebody teach or believe this concept of spiritual growth? Right? And it's this idea that we can actually grow our spirit. That we can grow spiritually. Right?

And I believe that our ego loves that concept! Right? Because then it gives our ego something to do. Right? And our ego loves something to do! So when our ego hears the idea that our ego can actually help us grow spiritually, our ego gets all over that! Loves that idea!

Like, it's like this idea -- and I actually heard a speaker one time say -- that we are 7/8ths of the way toward enlightenment as a culture. I thought, "Hmmm." I mean that's so close, right? And yet so far, right? And I have no idea how he came up with this assertion that we were 7/8ths of the way to enlightenment. But our ego loves to hear that! Because our ego hears, "Well, God's created you spiritually, but didn't quite finish the project." *[Congregation laughs]* And our ego is going to step in now and take you the rest of the way home. *[Congregation laughs]* And spiritual growth is this idea that we're going to take you the rest of the way home. So your spirit is close, but it's not quite right. Right?

So what if your spirit -- your spiritual nature ... And for some of you I'm going way too far, but I'm just getting warmed up ... *[Congregation and Rev. Rogers laugh]*

So what if your spiritual nature is whole and complete and lacking in nothing? Right? So that you actually don't grow spiritually. Many times when we think about enlightened individuals, we say that they have "awakened." Right? And it's this idea that they were always that, and one day they came into the realization of that. So it's this idea that you were created in the image and likeness of God -- you're one with God from the moment you were created -- but then something happens, and you actually realize that you are whole and complete. You actually realize that you are one with God.

So it's not really spiritual growth at all; it's awakening to what you've always been. Can you see the distinction there? Because if you're awakening to what you've always been, there's not a whole lot of work to do. Right? There's not a lot of changing or repenting or forgiveness, because you've always been it. You were whole and complete, lacking in nothing, from the beginning. And all spiritual growth is really just the illusion that you're growing your spirit. But actually what you're doing is awakening to what you've always been. Does that make sense? Are you still with me? Right. Okay; great.

Alright. So what we're really looking at doing in spiritual growth -- that really doesn't happen *[congregation laughs]* -- is learning what I want to do for this week and next week ... Is learning to master your mind so that you actually no longer see yourself as broken. Alright? Because the moment you're no longer broken, you can begin to see yourself as a complete spiritual being.

But as long as your mind -- or your perceptions -- continue to show you a broken self, then we keep doing this spiritual work. Right? But really the only work is at the level of mind. Because when you quiet your mind, you actually can just be what you've always been, which is an expression of God. So thought, then, is about learning to quiet our mind so that we can be our essence, not our mental constructs. Right?

And in Unity, 100 years ago -- a 100+ years ago when Unity was created -- the dominant thought in the world was negative. Right? It was pessimistic. It was dark! It was scary. God was scary! Like, the dominant spiritual image was that God was an old guy in the sky somewhere that was -- and I love this

word! -- was going to "smite" us for pretty much everything we wanted to do! Right? Because anything that was fun that we wanted to do had to be a sin, right? And that God was the Big-Daddy-Santa-Claus God that was up in the sky watching us, judging us, and going to smite us for doing it. Right?

So we've evolved spiritually a great deal in the last hundred years, right? We actually feel the presence of God that's within us. We feel the connection as a living expression of God. So that the role of thought then becomes that, historically, we've gone from a dominant negative thought to a more positive thought.

But what I'd like you to see is this next step is actually when we shift into no thought. Because the moment your mind is quiet, you're just going to "be." And what your "being" is the radiant expression of God.

So our work is to really quiet our mind so that our full presence gets to shine. Because it's hard to shine when your mind is telling you, "You're such a loser." Like, if your mind is going on about all your faults and your mistakes, then what happens over and over again is we don't shine for the fullness of who we are. We don't let our spirit be all that it is, because the mental construct that we're living out of is so negative. Right?

So tonight what I want you to begin to see is that, as your mind becomes quiet, right? As your mind -- whether it's through prayer and meditation, or just learning to quiet your mind. I've been talking about this lately. Just learning to quiet your mind, your presence -- your spirit -- just shines.

I am a whole, complete expression of God. Will you say that with me? [With congregation]: *"I am a whole, complete expression of God."* Okay; one more time, like we mean it. [With congregation]: *"I am a whole, complete expression of God."*

Now, does it make sense to you that, once your mind is quiet -- once the chatter ceases -- then your presence becomes your dominant experience? But if your mind is always screaming on the inside, then you never really get to experience the fullness of God as your dominant expression. As your dominant way of showing up. As your dominant "being-ness," right?

So tonight what I want us to look at is: How do we move from the loudness of our inner voice into an experience of a quiet mind? And how do we move beyond the inner critic? And mastering the inner critic?

So let's begin! I know that was a long kind of a thing to get to the beginning, but that's where I want to start. Right?

So I want to look at three levels of awareness. Right? The first level of awareness is where most of us started. And the first level of awareness is when we are unaware. Right? And that, when we walk in darkness [laughs], right? When we don't really see ourselves as we are. We're just unaware.

And in unawareness, there's really two levels of unawareness. There's intentional unawareness [laughs], and there's unintentional unawareness. Right? And intentional unawareness is where we choose not to see ourselves. Right? And why would you choose not to see yourself? Well, if your dominant experience of you is shame, you do not want to see yourself. Right? You don't want to see yourself, because you just have so much shame that anything you see just gets tainted.

The other aspect of why you would not want to see yourself is more of a narcissistic thing, right? Where you just don't want to see yourself. And any time somebody says something about you, you then project that onto them. And if they say, "Well, you're not being kind," you say, "Not me being kind; it's you that's not being kind." Right? And it's this narcissistic throwing it back on people.

So we start from this place of unawareness, right? And then we tend to move ... The next level of awareness is awareness with self-criticism. And awareness with self-criticism can be really ... it can be

harsh! Right? It's like when you want to lose weight and you put the little piggy on the refrigerator, right? *[Congregation laughs]* Right? It's not always helpful to have more awareness if you're just going to use that as ammo to beat yourself up. Right? Because most of us don't need more ammo for making ourselves wrong. Right?

And then so ... We start out with being unaware. Then we move into awareness with criticism. And then the third level is awareness with acceptance. And that's the highest form of maturity. When you see yourself as you are, and there's a level of acceptance. Because in the level of acceptance, you then can decide if you want to change or evolve or grow, or if you want to stay where you are. But until we get into awareness with acceptance, we really can't change. We really can't evolve fully, because -- in the beginning -- we just can't see it.

See, will you say with me, "I can't heal what I can't see." Will you say that with me? *[With congregation:]* "I can't heal what I can't see." Or I can't heal what I won't see. Together. *[With congregation:]* "Or I can't heal what I won't see."

Now, most of us have a few things in our life that we still don't want to see. Right? That we still just don't want to see. Now we have a few more things that we see, and we're not happy about. Right? You know, I won't ask you to make a list, you know. But you could probably have a list of things that you know about yourself that you're still not happy about.

Well, what I want you to see is: I actually want to take you one step beyond that. I want you to get to the point where you actually see yourself as you are and accept it. Because there you can evolve. There you can transform. There you can actually move into choice. At that point, you're actually conscious.

Now, what happens at the realm of the heart is: As you move from unconscious to conscious with criticism, in both of those levels, your heart ... Tart! Your heart ... *[Laughs]* Okay, let me try again. At both of those levels, your heart is mainly closed. Now, it doesn't mean that it's closed to everybody. But it tends to be kind of closed toward you. Does that makes sense?

How many of you know that you have people in your life that it's much easier for you to love them than it is to love yourself. How many of you know that, if somebody did some of the things that you've done, it's actually easier for you to forgive them than it would be to forgive yourself for doing the very same thing? Right?

So sometimes we're actually harder on ourselves than we are the rest of the world. So our heart opens to the world in a very big, wonderful way, but we haven't opened it inwardly toward ourselves in that same wonderful, fabulous way.

So when we're unaware, our heart tends to be closed. When we're in awareness with criticism, our heart tends to be closed. It's not until we get into awareness with acceptance that our heart can actually open. Not only for the whole world, but it can actually open for us. And that's what I want you to begin to play with. Because the more that your heart opens, the more your head gets to be quiet.

Jesus said, "Judge not." Right? That the moment we're in judgement, our heart automatically closes. And I will bet you a dollar that you cannot be in a state of self-judgement, or literally a state of judging anyone else, with an open heart. You just can't do it! But the moment you suspend judgement -- the moment you move into conscious awareness with compassion -- your heart stays open. And at that moment, your mind actually becomes quiet.

And that's what I want. That's what I want for you this week. I want this week for you to practice being aware of yourself with an open heart. Being aware of your choices. Being aware of your decisions. Being aware of your behavior. But I want you to be aware with compassion. I want you to see if you can love yourself right there and, literally, you don't have to change anything. Right? I will give you a note from your minister *[congregation laughs]* that this week you don't have to change one thing about you.

Right? You're not trying to fix anything. You're not trying to solve any of your broken things. Right now, you're just trying to see it with an open heart.

Because, if you can see it over and over again with an open heart, then you can make a new choice. But as long as you see it, and are judging yourself -- or worse, not even allowing yourself to see it because you think it's so unacceptable, or you're in so much shame or disappointment about how you're showing up -- this way we're bound to repeat the same experiences over and over and over again until we can see it and stay open. See it and move into acceptance.

So are you ready for your homework? This week *[laughs]* ... This week, whatever you do, your only response is, "Isn't that cute?" *[Congregation laughs]*

Now, when you get really good about this -- right? -- you can kind of say, "Oh, bless their little heart" or whatever you want to say. But your real practice this week -- just your deepest spiritual practice -- is to look at whatever choice you're making. You can be a jerk on the freeway, or you can just leave your underwear in the middle of the floor. Or whatever it, right? And your only response is: "Isn't that cute?"

Now, it doesn't mean that your spouse is going to find it cute, or your employer's going to find it cute, or your kids are going to find it cute. Right now, all we're working on is you. Right? So all we're working on is you being able to look at your behavior and see it without judgement.

Together: *[with congregation]* "Isn't that cute?" Right? That's it! What I want you to see is: If you can do that, you are on your way to full enlightenment. *[Congregation laughs]* It is! It may seem like the simplest little step, but when you can see your own behavior and not move into judgement, you're really free!

Together one more time: *[with congregation]* "Isn't that cute?"

Now, how many of you were raised in a family that, if you made a mistake, you were never allowed to call it cute? Right? If your room wasn't clean, if you didn't get great grades, if you didn't do this or do this, that never got to be called cute! That was bad. That was an embarrassment. You were broken. You were "less than."

And we're going to change the whole game tonight. The whole game is: You see your behavior: "Isn't that cute?"

[Imitating someone talking to him]: "Richard, I'm just going to sit around and eat bons bons." Right? "If that's now how I live my life, then I'm just going to just go off the deep end and I'm going to make bad choices. I'm going cut people off; I'm going to drive. Because if I get a free pass, I'm going to use it! Okay? Right?" Isn't that cute?! Right? Because the more you can see your behavior with an open heart, the more you can evolve. The more you can see what's not working in your life, and not judge it, at that moment you can transform it.

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