

## WILLING TO BE WILLING

Week #1 of a 4-Week Series, "Know the Truth"

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Rev. Richard Maraj

**Rev. Richard Maraj:** On a very foggy night at sea, the captain of a ship that was cruising off the coast of Newfoundland got a message from a light on a vessel that was moving towards them. And it said, "Change your course 10 degrees north to avoid collision."

The captain didn't like being told what to do, and he testily responded, "I am a U.S. captain. YOU change your course 10 degrees to avoid a collision."

"I am a Canadian seaman first-class. I strongly recommend you divert your course 10 degrees north now, sir."

The captain was absolutely ticked off that this seaman would give him orders, so he responded angrily, "This is the Battleship U.S.S. Lincoln. If you don't change YOUR course, countermeasures will be undertaken to ensure the the safety of the ship. Consider yourself warned."

The seaman responded, "This is a lighthouse. Your call." **[Congregation laughs]**

A single applaud is good enough for me. So anyway ... **[Strong applause and laughter]**

So how many people ... Yes, I'll even take mercy applause! Anyway ...

How many people here have ever been stubborn, hard-headed or narrow-minded? Anybody?

**[Congregation laughs]** And how many people would say you do not like change, and sometimes are not open to doing things in a different way? And how many people would say that you can be, sometimes, a bit rigid in your thinking; you always want to be right? Hardly anyone. Let me ask it in a better way. How many people know someone else who is rigid and always wants to ... **[Laughs along with congregation]** There we go!

You know, every one of us wants to be happy. We want to live successful lives. We want to have fulfilling careers, wonderful families; we want to fulfill all of our dreams. I mean, we want the full-meal deal! And when we don't get it, we start wondering, "What is it that is stopping me -- what is preventing me and what is blocking me?" And we think, "Oh, it's the economy. It's the government. It's my boss. It's my family. It's a lack of money or education." We can come up with a whole bunch ...

So let me ask you? What do you think is holding you back the most from living the kind of life you want to live? And I would suggest there might be truth in what you're saying ... But I think the higher truth for all of us is us. We're the ones that hold us back! And the aspect of ourselves that hold us back the most is actually our attitude and our mindset and perspective.

And you know the attitude and mindset that hinders us the most? And prevents us the most from living as happy a life as we want? It's a mindset that's closed. A mindset that is stubborn. A mindset that is rigid and resistant.

I was reading an article this week, and it was actually called, "Project Happiness." And it says one of the absolute keys to happiness, success and a fulfilling life is to have a mindset that is willing. A willing mindset may not sound like a lot, but it absolutely is the key to a happy, successful and fulfilling life. And, conversely, an unwilling mind -- a rigid, reluctant mind -- absolutely reduces our level of happiness, success and fulfillment in our lives.

Every one of us has been unwilling at times. Like, have you ever been unwilling to listen? Ever been unwilling to change? Ever been unwilling to admit that you have a problem or to face the truth? Ever been unwilling to accept full responsibility? Have you ever been unwilling to take a chance? Ever been unwilling to ask for help? Ever been unwilling to fully surrender your life to God?

So what area in your life are you not willing right now? In what area of your life would it really help you a bit if you were a little bit more willing?

The truth is: a willing mindset really affects our lives positively a lot more than we realize. Like, without a mind that is willing, we wouldn't learn. We wouldn't grow. We wouldn't change. We wouldn't transform. Without a willing mindset, we would not dream big dreams. We would not take bold steps. Without a mind that is willing, we wouldn't love or forgive or fully surrender our lives to God. Willingness is actually an invaluable asset when it comes to living a life of happiness and success.

You know, in the Bible it tells in several places how important this idea of having a willing mind is. In 2 Corinthians it says, *"For if there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what a man has, not what a man has not."* In Isaiah 1:19 it says, *"If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat of the good of the land."*

You know, Dr. Don Aubrecht, who is the only M.D. addiction medicine specialist, says honesty, open-mindedness and willingness are some of the ingredients necessary to move along this path to overcoming addiction and having a better life.

If you think about it, willingness is an idea about openness. It is about letting go of the walls of resistance, and openly accepting, facing and living your life. It is about a level of excitement; a level of readiness; a level of optimism; and a level of trust that there's good in life for you if you open up to it. Willingness is saying that, *"I'm willing to step forth and fully live this gift of life that I have been given."*

Life will open up to all of us, but we have to open up to life first. You know, the truth is: we live in a responsive universe. Jesus said, *"As you give, so too shall you receive."* That whatever you put out there will come back to you. And he also said, *"It is the Father's good pleasure to give us the kingdom."* And that means that the two laws are The Law of Attraction -- that the universe is governed by -- and The Law of Grace. Things are always flowing and moving in our favor: in the direction of our highest and best. But to activate both of those, we must be willing.

So my question for you is: on a scale of 1 to 10, how willing are you? And if it's not an eight, nine or 10, would you be willing to be a little more willing?

And so the thing is, when it comes to willingness, most of us want to know what we have to do first, then decide if we're going to be willing. **[Congregation laughs]** But life is saying, *"You need to be willing first, and I will show you great things. I will lead you; I will guide you. I will open things up to you."*

Remember in *Indiana Jones* when there was this huge chasm, and he wanted to cross it? And the thing is, he had to put out his foot first, and then a path showed. That we have to be willing first and amazing things will come into our lives. We will be shown amazing and wonderful things.

You know, the fact is: the more the willing, the better the living for us. So, again, are you willing to be more willing?

*"I am willing."* Together: **[with congregation]** *"I am willing."*

Take a deep breath and feel yourself openly and willingly giving yourself to life.

Now in a half voice: *"I am willing."* Together: **[with congregation]** *"I am willing."*

Take a deep breath. And one more time: **[with congregation]** *"I am willing."*

Today we start a four-week series called, "Know the Truth." Remember when Jesus said, *"You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."* So we're going to look at four powerful, liberating spiritual practices -- four spiritual truths -- for better living. And today we're going to look at the truth of being willing.

And so the first thing we need to be willing to do is: **WE'VE GOT TO BE WILLING TO ACCEPT AND LEARN FROM WHAT LIFE IS TRYING TO SHOW US.** I find it always interesting that, when something goes wrong

-- like we lose a job or a relationship breaks up, or break a leg, you make a mistake, you get a poor investment -- we spend more time wishing that thing didn't happen, hating that it happened, judging and complaining that it happened, than actually dealing with what happened. And we drain so much of our own lives by resisting and not accepting the things that just happen in our everyday lives. We invest so much time in complaining and disliking and resisting the things that have happened instead of just facing it and dealing with it.

You know, the Greek philosopher Epictetus said, *"We are not disturbed by what happens to us, but by the thoughts about what happened to us."* That the willingness to just accept when things happen actually just saves us a lot of wasted time and energy that we could be investing in actually dealing with it.

You know, willingness is about knowing that, whatever happens in our life is meant to be there. That it is meant to happen for us. You know, we always say things like, *"Everything happens for a reason."* Well then, if everything happens for a reason, everything in our life is there for a reason! And the truth is: it is all ours. And we can run, and we can resist, but the fact is: life is always trying to teach us! Life is always trying to show us and guide us and lead us and help us to be more of the fullness of the person we came to be, and to fulfill the work that we came to fulfill. Whatever is in our lives: it is there for us. And the question is: are we willing to learn from it?

I heard somebody say that fighting against life, and fighting against things happening, is like trying to teach a pig how to sing. **[Congregation laughs]** It ain't ever going to happen! You can fight all you want; it's not going to happen! You know ... And the other thing is that: it's not only not going to happen; it also annoys the pig! **[Congregation laughs]**

The resistance to anything that happens creates frustration in ourselves. But you know what's the biggest part of the sad part? Is that it robs us of the lesson that those things came to teach us.

Sometimes it's the difficult times we go through that give us the strength and the focus and the drive and the appreciation to live our lives at a better level. That every time we try to avoid anything difficult or challenging, or not face it, it's our path that we are cheating ourselves out of. It's our own growth and fulfillment, and the gifts we came to share with the world.

The fact is: every one of us is here to learn. Every one of us has something here to heal. Every one of us has something to discover. Everyone has something to let go. Some gift to share or difference to make. And willingness is the thing that helps us to accept those things that appear in our lives, and to face them and learn from them. And to grow from them.

And they're usually not present things. So whether it's a job loss or a divorce or financial difficulty or family conflict -- or a disability or lack of education-- the vital question always is: are you willing to learn from it? Gain from it and be transformed and made better by it?

I always over-give this example, and I'll keep doing it, because it's the best example I have ... is Nelson Mandela. He was thrown into prison for 27 years. Twenty-seven years! Then he came out when he was 70 years old. Worked hard on ending apartheid with the ANC. At 74, he became president of his country for five years. Considered one of the greatest statesmen in the world.

And do you know why that happened? Because he was willing to accept the 27 years, and to learn from it. And was able to do great things. He could have stayed bitter, but he got better! Because he was willing to accept and learn from what life was showing him.

So I ask you: in whatever area you're going through, that you're facing and dealing that isn't feeling good right now ... The question is: are you willing to accept that it is a part of your journey? It is in your life for a reason and a purpose? And are you willing to have a mindset to learn from it? To gain from it, and better yourself from it?

*"I am willing to accept what is mine, and learn from life." [With congregation]: "I am willing to accept what is mine, and learn from life."*

One more time: **[with congregation]** *"I am willing to accept what's mine, and learn from life."*

The second thing about willingness is: **WE'VE GOT TO BE WILLING TO LET GO.** You know the hardest of all human practices is any form of letting go! Human beings have a difficult time letting go. And when you think about it, willingness -- at the core of it -- its nature is about letting go. It is about opening yourself.

But as human beings, we have this tendency to think that holding on makes us safe. So we get attached to the way things are; we hold on to the outcomes that we want to happen in our lives. You know, we hold on to how we think life should be. We hold on to the past. We hold on to hurts. We hold on to regrets. We hold on to fear. We hold on to all kinds of stuff, thinking it's going to make our lives better. And it just doesn't.

And so the most important thing for us to do is to be willing to let go. Because when we let go, we open ourselves for more of the flow: for more peace, for more possibilities, more wisdom and goodness.

So my question for you is: what do you need to let go to be more willing? What are you holding on to that is blocking your way and your path to more peace? To more goodness? To more blessings and opportunity? What grudge are you holding? Who do you need to forgive? What is it that you need to release?

Because the truth is: the more that we're willing to let go, the more peace we feel. The more we're willing to let go, the more we open ourselves for inspiration and creativity and joy and goodness. The more we become a greater instrument: a channel for the Divine light in us.

*"I am willing to let go." Together: [with congregation] "I am willing to let go."*

Just take a deep breath. Just feel yourself letting go of whatever it is. You know the best thing you can do to help yourself is to be willing to let go.

And so the last one is: **WE'VE GOT TO BE WILLING TO OPEN UP TO NEW POSSIBILITIES.**

Here's one of my favorite stories. So this guy named Jim: he had never learned to read. And when he got old enough to get a job, he still was not able to read or write. And so he had a really difficult time getting a job, and he thought, *"No one's going to hire me if I'm illiterate."*

And, in his frustration, he thought he'd turn to the church to see if there was a job there he could get at the church. So he applied for a position of janitor at the First Baptist Church. So he went in for the interview, had a great conversation. The pastor was so nice; everything was going great. And then the pastor said, *"Jim, I think you're a really, really great guy. I like you a lot. However, since you're not able to read or write, it'll be really difficult for us to hire you for this position. And so, unfortunately, we're not going to be able to do so. But we wish you the best."*

Jim said, *"I understand."* And inside, he was really quite devastated. He figured if the church can't help him, you know, what's he going to do?

And he was always the kind of guy to land on his feet. And not a guy to really give in. So he had this idea to start this fruit stand in town. And he only had the finest fruits and vegetables. And it started going pretty well! And after a number of months, he opened a second fruit stand. And then after several months, he opened a number of fruit stands to the point that he had more fruit stands in the entire state than anyone else. He started making a lot of money. He had a lot of wealth.

And somebody wanted to buy his business from him. And he handed him a contract. And he said, *"I want you to just read this over, and then we can kind of negotiate and finalize things."* And Jim said to the man, *"Sir, you're going to have to summarize that for me, because I've never learned to read or*

write." And the man said, "Are you kidding me? You are an amazingly successful guy; you've created this incredible empire with fruit stands. How is it possible that you can't write and you've actually done this?" He said, "Do you have any idea where you'd be today if you'd learned how to read?"

He said, "Yeah. I'd be the janitor at the First Baptist Church." **[Congregation laughs]**

And so ... And so there's the situation: I mean, he can't read or write. And even though he got turned down, he was still willing to see that there were possibilities for his life.

The wonderful thing about a willing mind: it is open. It is more aware. It is more optimistic. It is more possible. And it is what's more conducive to see possibilities in life, instead of just dead ends. Possibilities are everywhere, and it is a willing mind that tends to pick up and see and be more open to them.

You know, if you look at different characters in the Bible -- from Abraham, Noah, Mary, Jesus, David and Daniel -- every one of them were called to do something they thought was impossible. They didn't know how it was going to be done, but they were willing. And because they were willing to believe it was possible, and willing to believe and trust they could be a vehicle that could be used, they all did amazing and wonderful things.

"All things are possible to those who believe." And my question is: what are you willing to believe is possible for you? What is possible, you know, for your career? What is possible for your relationship? What is possible for your lifestyle, your joy, your energy level? What are those possibilities for you? And are you willing to be open to them?

You know, sometimes we think being stubborn and bull-headed and hard-driven is the way to happiness. And I would suggest there's a way that is far more powerful and amazing. And that is to have a willing mind and a willing spirit. It sounds soft, doesn't it? Willingness? Is the key to advance and to have your life progress?

In the Book of Zachariah it says, "Not by might, not by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord." By having a willing spirit -- being willing to change, being willing to listen, being willing to open your heart -- that is the way to move our lives forward.

Are you willing to accept what is yours? And to learn from life? Are you willing to let go? Are you willing to open yourself to new possibilities? Jesus said, "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." And that truth is: the more the willing, the better the living.

The question is: are YOU willing to be more willing?

God bless you all!

**[Congregation applauds]**

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