

BELIEVE IN YOUR SELF

Week #2 of a 4-Week Series, "Know the Truth"

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Rev. Richard Maraj

Rev. Richard Maraj: So this young teacher that was strongly anti-religious decided to explain to her class of children that she was an atheist. She was so into it, she decided to ask them, "How many of you would like to be atheists, too?"

And the kids, having no idea what atheism actually was -- but wanting to please their teacher and be like their teacher -- all raised their hands quickly in the air. Everyone raised their hand except one little girl named Lucy.

And the teacher said, "*Why didn't you raise your hand? Why did you want to be different?*"

She said, "*Well, because I'm not atheist.*"

The teacher said, "*Well, what are you?*"

She said, "*Well, I'm a Christian.*"

The teacher said, "*So, why are you a Christian?*"

She said, "*Well, because my mom's a Christian, and my dad's a Christian ... so I'm a Christian.*"

The teacher gets a little angry and says, "*Well, that's no reason! Just because they are! Suppose your mother is a moron, and your father's a moron; what would that make you?*"

She said, "*Well ...*" She smiled and paused, and said, "*Well, that would make me an atheist.*" **[Drum does rim shot drum roll] [Congregation and Rev. Maraj laugh]**

Alright. **[Laughs]** Not a great joke, but the best one that I had this week! **[Congregation laughs]**

Napoleon Hill, in his legendary book, *Think and Grow Rich*, said, "What the mind can conceive and believe it will achieve."

Theodore Roosevelt said, "*Believe you can and you're halfway there.*"

Jesus said, "*Whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.*" He also said, "*All things are possible to those who believe.*"

Final quote I came upon this week said, "*Believe! As long as you have life and breath, believe! Even if you stop believing, believe!*"

All these quotes really emphasize the power of believing. That our beliefs absolutely shape, create and influence the quality of our lives. Our beliefs affect how we see the world; how we see ourselves; how we believe the world works; and what we attract and experience every day in our lives.

And, whether that belief is that life is abundant or that belief is that life is unfair ... Whether that belief is that this is a wonderful world or this is a cold and dangerous place that we live ... that all of our beliefs have a huge impact on what we attract and experience in our lives.

You know, our beliefs are a mindset of things that we hold to be true. And that mindset sends out an energy and a vibration to the Universe that will tend to attract more things like itself.

There is something called the Law of Belief, and here's what it says. It says that, "*We will always act in a manner consistent with our innermost beliefs and convictions.*" And if you want to know what your beliefs are, look at your life. Look at what you're attracting, what you're experiencing, what you're creating. Because our lives are a reflection of our beliefs.

So my question is: what do you believe? What are your beliefs about life? What are your beliefs about your life? About your future? About your relationships? About your finances? About your level of success? Or about your spiritual connection?

You know, based on how your life is right now -- and life being a reflection of your beliefs -- how many people would agree that you could believe bigger and believe better than you're currently believing? Anybody?

You know, sometimes we just don't know how to believe better! Because we have been so conditioned to think small, to act small, to be small, to live small. Nelson Mandela said, *"There is no passion found in playing small: in settling for a life that is less than the one that we are capable of living."* If you want to live a better life -- a life that we know that we are capable of living, that we are meant to be living -- we've got to believe better! Because life is a reflection of our deeply held beliefs.

Today we're in Week #2 of our four-week series entitled, "Know the Truth." Jesus said, *"You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."* So we're going to look at four -- we are looking at four -- powerful spiritual truths for better living.

Last week was to have a willing mind. It doesn't sound like a big deal -- having a willing mind as a prerequisite for living a great life -- but let me take you to the other direction. Living with an unwilling mind -- which means living with a rigid, narrow, inflexible, resistant mind -- actually prevents us from growing, from learning, expanding and feeling greater levels of joy.

When we have a willing mind, it means that we're open: open to possibilities. We're willing to learn. Willing to change. Willing to grow. Willing to see more. Willing to be more! That, when we are willing, we not only open up to life, but life open up to us! So willingness -- having a willing mind -- is a powerful thing.

Today we're going to look at the second powerful spiritual truth: and that is to believe. And the most important aspect of believing, I think, is about believing in yourself.

Anybody ever doubt yourself? Second guess yourself? Or not feel confidence or believe in yourself? Anytime? Anybody ever have that? I mean, it sounds like a silly thing, but what you believe influences your life so much that, if we don't believe in ourselves, we tend to settle. We tend to give up. We tend to not try as hard; get a little lazy. You know, we tend to come up with all kinds of excuses.

Believing in ourselves gives us a level of confidence. It makes us feel worthy. It helps us be more persistent and resilient, because we believe we have what it takes to achieve, to succeed, to grow, to develop, to change and transform.

A little child was sitting on Santa's knee, and looked at him and said, *"Santa, do you believe in yourself?"* **[Congregation laughs]** And my question for you is: do you believe in yourself? And in what areas in your life would you like to believe in yourself more?

Since believing in yourself is such a powerful thing -- it makes such a difference in the quality of our lives -- the question is: how do we believe better? And what are the ways that we can improve believing in ourselves?

And the first one is: if you want to believe in yourself, you've got to **BELIEVE IN AND TRUST YOUR HIGHER SELF.** Do you believe that you -- and I mean **YOU** -- have been created in the image and likeness of God? Do you believe that you are God's beloved child? Do you believe that the light of God -- that divine spark, that spiritual intelligence -- is in you? That it made you? Is in you?

I mean, did you know that you are made by the same Intelligence and Creative Power and Energy that made the sun? And moon? That you have been created by the same Intelligence that made the stars? And the oceans and the beaches? Do you know you were made by the same Intelligence ... the same Intelligence that made you made the mountains and the trees? And the whales and the monkeys? And

roses and orchids? And cashews and macadamia nuts? **[Congregation laughs]** And hot springs? And naturally carbonated mineral water? And pineapples and mangos? And eagles and hummingbirds? There's a longer list, but I think you get my point! **[Congregation laughs]**

The magnificence of everything you see in this world is created by an Intelligence, and it created us. That is an amazing thing! Are you willing to believe in that? Because, if you want to believe in yourself, first we have to start believing in the higher self that created and brought us here.

You know, Jesus said a beautiful line. It's one of my favorites. It's, *"He who believes in me shall do the works that I have done, and even greater things than these."* That's a pretty powerful, bold statement! Here's what I think he means. He's saying, *"If you believe in the Spirit of God in you the way I've believed in the Spirit of God in me, through that Spirit you shall do the things I've done, and even greater things."*

And the question is: are you willing to believe that? Are you willing to trust that for you? When Jesus said, *"Seek ye first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you,"* are you willing to believe that? And trust that?

When Paul said, *"I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me,"* are you willing to believe that? And trust that?

In the 23rd Psalm, when it says, *"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want."* Are you willing to believe that? Are you willing to trust that?

When Jesus said, *"It is the Father's good pleasure to give us the kingdom,"* are you willing to believe that? And are you willing to trust that?

Because if you want to believe in yourself more, you have to believe and trust in your higher self, and the promises of God. Trust is an important aspect: believing and trusting. But I also think it's important to connect with that power: that Higher Power and Intelligence that made us.

There's a story about these little excited souls who wanted to become human beings and go down to earth. And they kept saying, *"God, can we go? God, can we go?"*

"Yeah, yeah; you'll get to go sometime."

"God, can we go now? We want to see all the beauty! And we want to see what it's like to be human."

"Yeah, yeah; you'll get to go sometime."

"Yeah, and we want to go and help all the homeless and poverty, and fight racism."

"Yeah, yeah; you'll get to go."

"God, when, when, when? When do we get to go?"

"You're going to go soon!"

"When?!? Can we go now?"

God said, *"Yes, yes; okay. You can go. But just one thing."*

"What, God? What, what, what?"

"You can go, but one thing."

"What?"

And God said, *"Just remember to stay in touch."* **[Congregation laughs]**

And it's a silly little story, but the truth is: if you believe, and you trust that His Spirit is in you, that it's important to stay in touch.

Jesus prayed in the morning, evening, afternoon. He prayed all the time! Jesus believed in God; Jesus trusted in God. But Jesus stayed in touch. He kept connecting, kept connecting ... Because the more you connect, the more you believe. The more you connect and are centered in God, the more you can trust. And the more you believe and trust in that Essence and Intelligence that made us, the more we will believe in ourselves. Does that make sense, everybody? The correct answer is, "Yes!" Okay; good.

[Congregation laughs] I just wanted to make sure.

The second thing about believing in ourselves is that, to believe in yourself, you've got to **KNOW YOURSELF**. And sometimes we do not fully know ourselves. Sometimes we are into pleasing people so much, and just doing things that agree with people, that we aren't quite 100% in touch and connected with who we really are. We aren't always in touch and connected with what we want, and what we feel, and who we came here to be. We aren't always in touch in a lot of ways!

And if you want to believe in yourself, we've got to know ourselves better, and allow ourselves to know the fullness of these human selves.

One of the things I think we need to know is: what are our strengths? Sometimes we don't know what our strengths are! So I ask you right now, based on your understanding, what are your strengths? What are the things that you're good at? What are the things that doing brings you great joy, and helps other people? And whether it's looking at the bigger picture, or you're a good communicator or problem solver ... Or you're really organized or you're good at parallel parking ... **[Congregation laughs]** Whatever your strengths are! It's important!

I mean, it sounds silly, and I'm being a little playful here, but knowing who you are helps you believe in yourself. You know what they say? That the most successful people ... they don't work on their strengths. I mean, they don't work on their weaknesses; they work on their strengths. The more you know what your strengths are, and work on, the better and more efficient and effective you will be, and the greater help you will be to others.

Knowing you are by knowing what your strengths are. The other one is knowing what you're not good at. Good to know that you're good at marketing, and it's also good to know that you're not good with numbers. It's good to know that you're good at creating content, but not very good at working with social media. It's good to know that you are good at having a vision, but not great at the details.

It's not a matter of judging; it's being aware, and honest and truthful with who you are ... To believe in yourself, you have to know yourself, and all aspects of yourself, so you can support yourself in the best way.

Another thing is to know where you want to be in life. What do you want to create? What do you want in the next five years or three years? To know that helps you to believe in you by helping you realize it, and then help you get to it in developing a plan.

I think it's important to know ourselves, also, to know where we're not satisfied or not happy. Or not feel like we're playing up to our best. And by knowing that we aren't doing those things as well, we can also be aware of ourselves, develop a plan, and help be supportive of one another.

Getting to know ourselves -- and honoring and supporting an encouraging who we are -- helps us feel more confident and empowered to know that we can achieve, that we can create, that we can change and improve ourselves.

There's a wonderful, wonderful long passage in 1 Corinthians 12. It's a long, beautiful thing; I'm not going to read it. But I'm going to tell you a little bit about it. And what it says is: there are a variety of abilities, but the same God. There are a variety of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are a variety of services, but it's the same God who created them all, and God chooses the things that are in all of us for the common good.

Everybody isn't meant to have all these gifts; part of your job is to find out the gifts that God has given you. Find out the talents and the beauty and the goodness that you're here to share with the world. And to believe in those things and cultivate them and express them in a great way.

He does another thing in this 12th chapter. He says, you know: there is one body, but there are many different parts. And all the parts are important and valuable, even though they play different roles. The ear's meant to be the ear; you know, the nose is meant to be the nose. You know, the leg, the knee. You get the point. But it says: what if...? You couldn't make a body with just ears! What kind of body would be there if it only was made up of noses? You know ... Or knees? Or calves? Or whatever it is?

And the point it's trying to make is: in life, we all play different roles. We have come here and been gifted and endowed with certain abilities, and it's all for the common good. And a part of your spiritual work is to get to know who you are. To get to know your abilities and talents, and to begin to support yourself in expressing them.

If you want to believe in yourself, you've got to get to know yourself. Does that make sense? The correct answer would be, "Yes!" **[Congregation laughs]** Okay; good. Just messing with you a little bit. Okay.

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If you want to believe in yourself, you've got to get to know yourself. Does that make sense? The correct answer would be, "Yes!" **[Congregation laughs]** Okay; good. Just messing with you a little bit. Okay.

The final one about believing in ourselves is: to believe in ourselves, we have to **CELEBRATE OUR PROGRESS**. Celebrate how far we've come! These amazing selves do amazing work, and sometimes we're so focused on where we're not, that we don't realize how far we've come to get where we are today.

Og Mandino, in the book, *The Greatest Miracle in the World*, says this: "This is God speaking to you. You are my greatest miracle. I gave you powers unknown to any other creature in the Universe. I gave you

the power to think. The power to love. The power to laugh, the power to imagine. I gave you the power to choose. Use wisely your power to choose: choose to love; choose to laugh; choose to praise; choose to give; choose to grow; choose to pray; choose to live. Never demean yourself again. Never settle for the crumbs of life. Never hide your talent from this forth. You are more than a human being; you are a human becoming."

And sometimes we don't always take the time to pause and realize how we are "becoming." We just focus on what we're not yet. But how often do we pause to say, "Look how far I've come! Look at the differences I've made. Look at the breakthroughs that I've had."

So my question for you is: what have been your best breakthroughs this year? What have been your greatest insights? What, from your past, have you let go and have been able to move on from this year? What is it that you've healed? What is your biggest success? What has been your greatest joy? Your greatest milestone? In what way have you opened your heart and loved deeper than you've ever loved before?

See, I think it's important to notice how far we've come. If we want to believe in ourselves, we need to support and celebrate the progress and the growth and the changes that we've made. Every one of us, I'll bet, we've come a lot longer, a lot further away than we realize.

Now, I've come a long, long way in a particular area in my life ... in my love/hate relationship with squirrels, I've had a lot of growth! **[Congregation laughs]** And I've remembered: a couple of years ago, they broke into my house! They were running through the walls of my house! I'd get so angry! I'd hear some noise; I would go bang on the wall, like as if I could scare them away! It took a while to get them out, and to close it up. And then they were digging holes in the back yard, and I was like a grumpy old man looking out there, feeling angry at these little creatures! Wishing them ill will, I might say!

[Congregation laughs]

And then, finally, I was able to catch the ringleader, and then the other guys were there. **[Congregation laughs]** And I felt like I had a breakthrough and a healing with that. I was able to co-exist; I had wanted them off my property, and then I got to a place where it was like, "*Mi casa, su casa.*" **[Congregation laughs]** I had a lot of healing!

So things are going along pretty well. And then, earlier this year, there's a huge hole, and there's six baby squirrels. I mean, always moving in sync; they were absolutely adorable, like a little squirrel boy band. They were so synchronized and choreographed! **[Congregation laughs]** It was gorgeous to watch! And this time, I had a little less anger. Yes, I still had some; I thought I was over it, and it came back.

But what I noticed: I would always meditate in the back yard. And when they made me angry, I couldn't meditate. So I decided to meditate while they were there, in the back yard. So I'd be meditating and meditating. And even though they'd be destroying my cushions and stuff like that **[congregation laughs]**, that's okay! Because I wanted to balance. Because I did love them, and they made me smile. And I got angry at them, as well.

And so, I'm kind of meditating, going along ... And then I realized I wanted to renovate my back yard. I wanted to do some upgrades. So this big-hole stuff; it couldn't go on! I had to get rid of them in some way. I didn't want to hurt them; I just wanted to get rid of them a little bit. **[Congregation laughs]**

And so a friend of mine filled in the hole, and he put something called, "Critter Ridder." And the thing about it is: the hole covered up, critter ridder's there. And I don't see them for four or five days, and I start to worry. **[Congregation laughs]** I'm thinking, "*I hope they're okay.*" And I'm praying for them. And then they came back, and I was so happy! **[Congregation laughs]** And so we meditate together a lot **[congregation laughs]**. And they're quiet; honestly, there's almost a "zen" thing about my squirrels. And this is for real.

So you know Steve Hildebrand, who's going to be our new music director as of December? Well, Steve was at my house; we were having a meeting. And we were having a meeting. And Steve looks out and says, "Is that a real squirrel on your wall?" And I said, "Yeah." And he said, "I have never seen a squirrel be so still for so long." And I said, "I know! I meditate with them regularly!" **[Congregation laughs]**

And so the point I'm trying to make is: from the angry, old, grumpy man like I was two or three years ago; now I'm more calm. I'm more balanced. And I enjoy and appreciate having these squirrels in my life. And I know this is a little silly example, but where in your life have you made progress? Where in your life have you gained greater peace and perspective on a situation? Not letting you get as ruffled as it used to? Not letting it stop you from enjoying your life?

Life always has changes and ups and downs and frustrations. But we've still got to appreciate and enjoy the life as we live it, and let it keep going. And a part of it is to celebrate the progress that we make: the breakthroughs and the growth that we have. You know, maybe you haven't done something great, but if you haven't done it for three or four times, and you've had a little success, maybe that's a good thing. Maybe saying, "No." Maybe more days of sobriety. I don't know what all the things are. But we need to celebrate the progress that we've made, and how we are maturing and "becoming." That becoming, unfolding self is an important thing.

I'll bet you if you look at yourself now as compared to how you were five years ago, you've probably come a long way. From even two years ago. And so an important thing about believing in yourself is to celebrate yourself and the progress you've made and the growth that you've had.

If you want a better life -- if you want a deeper life -- we need to believe better. And here are the ways of particularly believing in yourself. And the way to do it is to trust and to connect to your higher self; get to know your human self and support it; and then, finally, celebrate the progress of your becoming self.

Don't settle! Don't play small! And the second truth for better living is to BELIEVE IN YOUR SELF.

God bless you all!

[Congregation applauds]

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