

# GRATEFUL FOR MY ENEMIES

Final Week of the 5-Week Series, "40 Days of Gratitude"

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Rev. Richard Rogers

**Rev. Richard Rogers:** Shout out to everybody's who's watching us online; thanks for being here! And especially to all my new friends in Ohio that I met today when I helped you with your Wednesday night service; I hope you're watching! *[Congregation laughs]*

It's so fun *[laughs]* to be able to do a Wednesday night service live and a Zoom one in Ohio! And I didn't even have to get in a plane! Isn't that fabulous? *[Congregation laughs]* That's so much fun!

Alright; let's go. You ready?

So what do you see as the benefit of living the spiritual life? You know, 'cause most of us kind of living the spiritual life the way we do it. And I really want you to see what the benefit is. Because sometimes we're going through the motions, and we kind of need to take a step back and say, "What do we get out of this? Like, what's in this for me?" *[Laughs]* "Like, why am I doing all this stuff? Why am I practicing forgiveness? Why am I practicing love? Why am I doing all this stuff? What's the benefit of living the spiritual life?"

And I've come up quickly ... I came up with eight. Now this isn't an exhaustive list; this is kind of the top eight things that ran through my little noggin. Right?

So the first one is that: **As you live the spiritual life, I believe that you feel more connected to God.** That God goes from concept -- or an idea -- into an experience. That you actually feel the presence of God within you and all around you. There's a change; there's a transformation that happens when we move from talking about God to having a first-hand experience of God.

Two: **I think when you live the spiritual life that one of the benefits -- one of the byproducts -- is that you tend to be more peaceful.** That there's a higher level of peace. There's a level of just knowing that it's all going to work out, and you're peaceful.

Three: **I think there's a level of faith and confidence in your daily life.** I think people that live the spiritual life are willing to live life with more gusto, more enthusiasm, more passion, more faith, more confidence ... because they believe. They believe that it's possible. They believe that their hopes and dreams can be realized. It helps, right?

You know, being depressed is sometimes the most logical reaction to your own thoughts. If your thoughts are so limited that you don't believe in the possibility for your life, depression makes sense. But as you begin to live the spiritual life -- and you begin to think that greater things are possible -- what happens is: there's this greater joy, right?

Four: **I believe that, as you live a spiritual life, you live a bigger life,** because you do see those possibilities. That your life actually reflects your faith. That the inner actually creates a bigger expression.

Five: **I think that, as you live the spiritual life, you get happier; you get kinder.** It's just easier to be around you. *[Laughs]* Most of the time. *[Congregation laughs]* Right?

Six: **Life gets just easier.** Right? It's just easier.

Seven: **You improve your relationships with family and friends.** As you live the spiritual life, it's amazing how those relationships get better.

And eight: **I believe that, as you live the spiritual life, you become healthier and more alive.** No matter what age you're at -- no matter what's going on in your life -- as you live the spiritual life, on the inside you get healthier, and you become more alive.

Now, let's look at the cost. Right? Because there is a ... there is an opportunity, right? That living the spiritual life, there are things that are asked of us. That we're being asked -- if we're going to live a spiritual life -- to transcend out ego. Right? To really move beyond our own limitations. To really let go of a sense of separation between us and God. Right?

And one of the things that I want you to really look at tonight -- that is really the focus of tonight -- is that: I believe that living a spiritual life asks us to love in a bigger way. To move beyond our own preconceived ego limitations in how we're to do relationship, and to really truly love in a bigger way.

You know, I knew from the time I was in high school that, at some point in my life, I was going to be a minister. I felt called. I mean, I just ... I grew up in the church, and I just knew that some day, when I was very old -- probably the age I am today ... **[Laughs]** When I was very old, I was going to go into ministry. Right? That when I had all the fun I could have, and I made all the money I needed to make, then I was going to kind of retire into it. Because working every Sunday and like, blah, blah, blah. It looked awful! Right? **[Congregation laughs]**

So I was going to kind of retire into it. And what happened for me is: the more I kept living my spiritual life, I realized that all things were possible. And then I began to really look at what were the expectations. You know, my college buddies said, "*Richard, don't do it!*" Like they were pretty clear about it. "*Don't do it!!!! Go this way; don't go that way.*" **[Laughs]** Right?

And the idea is: there's an expectation. And I really believe that Jesus gave us some challenges about how we were supposed to live. Like, that most of us know that it's a good idea to love the people around us. Right? Jesus said the most important thing was to love God with all your mind, your heart, your soul, and to love your neighbor as yourself.

Now, how many of you have a neighbor that's sometimes difficult for you to love? **[Congregation laughs]** So maybe all of you have great neighbors. But occasionally, we ... **[laughs]** We have this magnificent soul who can be a challenge, right? I don't know about you, but it's just been a challenge. And, as you look at what Jesus is asking of us, it's like: how do I love that person in the greatest possible way?

In Matthew 5:30 and 40-48 he said, "*You've heard it said you should love your neighbors and hate your enemies. But I tell you that you should love your enemies and pray for those who would persecute you. That you may be children of your Father in heaven, who causes the sun to rise on the evil and the good and send rains to the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward have you? Don't even the tax collectors do that? And if you greet only your own people, what more are you doing? Even the pagans do that. So be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*"

So tonight I want us to look at our enemies. Now, that might not be a word you use to describe people that you're in conflict with. But I want you to look at those people that you're in conflict in. Those people that you're not digging their act. Those people that you don't have **[laughs]** on your Christmas list. Uh ... Those people that, if you never saw them again, it would be just fine with you. **[Laughs]** I want you to look at those people. Right?

Because I really believe that those people are the people that we're being asked to love in a bigger way. Because people that are easy to love are just easy to love. Like, it's like a puppy, you know. The puppy comes up and your heart explodes open, right? Until the puppy pees on your carpet, and then it's like: that's not so cute any more, right?

And there are people in your life who I believe are messengers from God, right? Who've been sent into your life and are really asking your soul at a deep level: "*Can you love me here?*" Right? "*Can you love me here?*"

And I want you to really see your own relationship with love. Because for most of us, we trust love when it's easy to do. Right? But we're not so sure that we can trust love when the person that we're being asked to love is not easy to love.

There's a belief in our culture that love makes us stupid. That love allows us to do stupid things that aren't for our highest and our best. And we're not really sure if we really trust love. If we go all the way into love -- if we love bigger than we've ever loved before -- if we're not just going to have a road map that says "sucker" printed all over us. And yet, the teaching that Jesus gave to us is pretty clear: that we're supposed to turn the other cheek, go the extra mile. We're going being called, over and over again, to do that which is greater. To really find out if love works, if it makes sense, if we can rely on it, if we can build our life on it, if it is real.

And what I want you to see is that the people that you're at odds at -- the enemies, the conflict -- those people are the people that are helping you and me learn to trust love.

So tonight I'm going to give you some ideas. And I want you just to play with them, and to see if there's any of these that really relate to you. If you can see how you can use them in a greater way.

First one is: **to be willing to greet the people that are different than you.** You know, this is one of the strongest lines in this verse that read: is that, when Jesus said, "*If you only greet your own people, what are you doing more than others?*"

And I really want you to look at how you're greeting the people around you. Like, we all know the idea that birds of a feather tend to ... remember what the line is? "*Flock together*"? Right? We all know that people of like minds tend to move toward people of like minds. That we all tend to move in circles of people like ourselves.

But what I want you to see is that that's also a trap. It's natural to move into circles of people that are like you, but how do you greet and acknowledge and celebrate the people that aren't like you? That don't think like you? That don't look like you? That don't believe the way you do? That there's this idea that we're being called to see that, in all of us, we're always more alike than we are different.

And right now in our culture and our world and our nation, we're becoming more and more divided. That we're seeing the world through more and more eyes of "us" and "them." People that think like I do or believe like I do, and those that don't. And, as a nation, that's a dangerous thing. As a spiritual process, that's a dangerous thing. To really begin to see others as an "other" instead of an expression of you, an expression of God.

You know, I have a friend, and ... when she's driving around town, um ... She noticed that she didn't like to greet homeless people: when they were on the corner or ... when they were on the corner. And what she noticed was that she kept looking away. She didn't want to see them; she didn't want to acknowledge them; she didn't want to be asked for money. She just didn't want to do that. And so what she began to do was: she created these gift bags. And in the gift bag there was a pouch of tuna and socks and suntan lotion and Blistex and Band-Aids. There were all kinds of these ideas ... all these things in this little bag.

And so when she would pull up to an intersection, and there would be a homeless person or a person begging, she would actually look them in the eye and wave her little gift bag. Like, and some of them didn't want her gift bag! Some people don't want her gift bag! Right? But there was a lot of people who were like really grateful for her gift bag: that she could actually look them in the eye, have a connection with that other soul, and give them a gift bag. And she felt really good about it! She felt like, at that

moment, she was doing her spiritual work of connecting with people, instead of looking away and pretending like they weren't there.

So the first thing I want you to see is: I want you to really look at how you greet people. Now, for all you extroverts, this is like, "Woooooooooo!" Right? This is like being unleashed to do more, right? All the introverts are going, "Noooooooooooo! Ask me to do anything but greet people!"

Now, let me tell you a little story. So my younger ... sister. My younger sister, Christine lives in the UK; she lives just outside of London. And one of the ... Now, if you're English, if I blow this, just email Richard Maraj [**congregation laughs**] at rmaraj@unityphx.org. Right?

And so the several times that I've been to England to visit her, what I know to be true is: when they walk their dog, they know the name of every dog they encounter in their walk. And they do not know any of the names of the people they encounter. [**Congregation laughs**] Like, it is totally acceptable to have a full-on relationship with their dog, and not even acknowledge the human that is standing there right there next to their dog. And so she'll go, "Well, that's Skipper" or "That's Troy," or whatever the name of the dog is. And she knows all their names; it's like a ...

And she lives in ... This is the cutest thing. She lives in a little community called Who. [**Congregation laughs**] So, of course, I have to call it Whoville. [**Congregation laughs**] And she doesn't find that as funny as I do. I think it's hysterical! [**Congregation laughs**]

My sister lives in Whoville. And that's real! She does! Right? And so every time I go to visit her, like, one of the things I enjoy is when we go to a store or out, I walk the thing, and I say, "Hello" to people. I wave; I talk to people. And she gets really upset. [**Congregation laughs**] She says, "Richard, if you do that again, you're not going out with me again." [**Congregation laughs**] It's like, "We don't do that here. You're making people uncomfortable. That they know you're an American, and it's just ... No! Stop!" Right? And I think it's hysterical! Right? Right?

So what I want you to look at right now [**laughs**] ... Don't ... Just please; just forgive me. Just let it go. Right? [**Congregation laughs**]

What I want you to look at is: I want you to be willing to greet the people around you from the highest sacred point. You know, the word "namaste" means: the divine in me recognizes the divine in you. And I want you to look at how we relate to each other. That we're ...

Do you remember Martin Buber in the 50s wrote a book, *I and Thou*. And the whole thing was that, if we treat people as an "it" instead of a "thou," we miss the whole meaning. That the way that we relate to one another, Jesus said, was of the highest importance. And it all begins with how we greet each other, how we see each other. Do we look beyond the boundaries, and really see one another for who they really are. So the first one is: how do you greet people, especially those that are different from you. Right?

And the next one is: **Can you accept people who are different than you?** Right? Not who you thought they were, not who you wanted them to be, not even who they told you they would be. Can we practice accepting people for who they are, even if you don't agree with them? Even if you don't understand them completely? Can we just make room?

Because if we can't get to acceptance, we can never get to love. Does that make sense? That acceptance is a precursor to love. If I don't accept you, my heart never opens. Like, when I don't accept you, in some ways I've judged you ... and the moment I judge you, my heart stays closed. That you can't be ... You can't have an open heart and in judgement in the same moment. You just can't do it.

You have to decide! If you're going to open your heart, you have to accept that person just as they are. Like, nobody's perfect; you just have to accept them exactly the way they are. And in that moment, your

heart opens. And then the most amazing things happens: is that, then, you can make a good choice. Right? If you're not in acceptance -- if you keep going in that mindset that, "*They shouldn't be like this*" or, "*They told me they weren't going to do this to me*" -- the moment we move into resistance to them, there's no movement. There's no growth. There's no opportunity for love.

So the first thing I want you to do is: I just want you to greet people.

You know, Jill, my wife, tells the story that when she was at Michigan State, she had a psychology professor that gave the class an experiment: that, for 10 days, they had to greet -- they had to say, "*Hello*" -- to everyone they saw on campus. Right? So they had to go and just say -- wave -- or say, "*Hello*" to everybody on campus. The guy Jill was dating at the time thought she was the most popular girl on campus! **[Congregation laughs]** That she literally knew 60,000 people! 'Cause she said, "*Hello*" to everybody!

So the first thing we're going to do is: We're just going to greet people. The next thing we're going to do is: We're going to accept them.

The third thing we're going to do is: Creating greater relationships requires deeper conversations.

**[Laughs]** I have a friend, that when she gets mad at me, she gets quiet. Right? She punishes me with silence. That doesn't really bother me so much! **[Congregation laughs]** Right? It's not really a problem! And I remember thinking, you know, "*I really need to fix this!*" Right? But it was like I was enjoying the silence so much that it was, like, it wasn't a problem. Right?

But what I realize is: is that, sometimes, we don't really heal relationships, because we're not willing to be in a deeper conversation. We have to be willing in a deeper conversation to move anything forward. Like, if somebody runs over your rose bushes, right? And you just get mad. Does anything heal from that? No! Right?

So the idea of just not having a conversation is what keeps the world stuck. So there's a way that I want you to communicate. And it's three simple lines: "*I see. I feel. I want.*"

And all of this communication based on, "*I see.*" And the "I see" is just describing the situation. "*I see that you ran over my rose bush.*" Right?

Now, the next line is: now you've got to tell them how it feels. Right? How many of you ever feel vulnerable when sharing your feelings with somebody? Especially when you're mad at them? Right? We don't like to do this! We don't want to be vulnerable! We don't want to be that honest. We don't want to be scared that we're sharing our feelings.

But, "*I see that you ran over my rose bush. And I feel upset. I feel disappointed. I feel frustrated. I feel, you know, angry. I'm having a feeling about you running over my rose bush.*" Right?

And then the third line is: What do you want? "*Well, I want to know that I'm important to you. I want to know that my rose bushes are safe [laughs] while you're in the car. I want to know ...*" Sometimes what you need to say is, "*I want to know that I'm loved. I want to know that you care about me.*" Right?

And the deeper you get into the "*I want,*" the more it increases the probability that they will respond to you in a deeper way. If you give them a throw-away -- if you give them a *superficial* "*I want*" -- the chances are good that you're going to get a superficial "*I want*" back. And we don't want to be vulnerable. But if we're going to create deeper and greater relationships, we have to be vulnerable! You have to give them your deepest feeling.

*"I feel, like, so uncomfortable sharing my feelings with this person. But I'm going to do it anyway. And what I want is to know that I'm important to you. What I want is to be loved. What I want is to be respected. What I want is to know that I'm safe."*

There's some universal human wants, needs and desires that people can respond to when you share what they are: when you share.

And the fourth one. The fourth thing -- I know I'm going to get emails, but I'm going to say it anyway. The fourth thing when you look at relationships with others is: **Life isn't fair, but it's infinite.** Life isn't fair, but it's infinite. Why kids get sick. Why people who act badly still prosper. Why ... Why people who should never be promoted are promoted. Why things happen to people.

What I want you to see -- and this is going to be troubling -- is that life isn't fair, but it's infinite. Now, why is that important? It's important because sometimes we spend so much time and energy trying to make everything right and fair that it really keeps us from accessing all the blessings that we want from God.

Now, when it comes to social policy, do I think we need to create a world that's fair? Yes! From a spiritual point of view, do I want you to know that, even when people are unfair with you, do you still have access to all the good that God is? Yes!

And so, over and over again, what I want you to see: if somebody takes advantage of you, and you spend weeks and months and years trying to make it fair, it's not going to be fair! But you still have access to all the good that God is! And when we get into these issues with one another, and we expect everything to be fair, sometimes the piece of cake that you get in life is smaller than everybody else's. Okay! Does that mean that you can go and buy five more chocolate cakes if you want to? Yes! Because life is infinite!

So it's not always fair, but it's always infinite. And that's what Jesus tried to teach when he was teaching that ... There's this line where he said, *"Those that have not, even that which they have will be taken away. And those that have, even more will be given to them."* Because life isn't fair, but it's always infinite! And that's why, sometimes, people really like this idea of karma. Because the idea of karma is -- at a very superficial level -- is that everybody's gonna get theirs at the end. So if somebody takes advantage of you, they're going to get theirs at the end. And so we like this!

But that's not what Jesus taught! Jesus taught radical forgiveness! And he also taught that God was infinite. And when we forget in our relationship with others that no one can keep you from your good -- no one can keep you from the infinite goodness of God. And if you spend too much time trying to get your share out of them, it really moves you out of the flow of the Infinite. Because God is infinite!

So it's not fair when people get sick. It's not fair that some people are born one way, and some people are born another way. It's not fair! But the reality is: in the midst of all of that, that God is infinite. So when our human mind -- our ego -- gets involved, trying to make everything fair, it really keeps us from the idea that God is infinite.

And I believe that we need to work for a world that's fair for everyone. But I still think we need to remember that, in all of our human relationships, God is infinite. That no one can keep you from your good. No one can keep you from all the good that God is.

And because no one can keep you from all the good that God is, it becomes easier and easier for us to forgive, and let go of the past, because your relationship with God is your ticket to everything that you could ever want or need. [Laughs]

Now, you don't have to say this, but I'm going to invite you to say it. *"Life's not fair, and I'm okay."* Together: **[with congregation]** *"Life's not fair, and I'm okay."* One more time: **[with congregation]** *"Life's not fair, and I'm okay."*

*"Life's not fair, but God is still infinite."* Together: **[with congregation]** *"Life's not fair, but God is still infinite."*

And that's what I want for you! I want you so connected to God! I want you accessing the divine love and joy and power of God in such a full and abundant way that, if somebody bumps you, oh well! If somebody borrow \$2 and never brings it back, oh well! That your relationship with God is your source of everything that you could ever want or need.

Alright; you ready for your homework? I want you to look at your relationships. And I want you to look at those people that you put in the "rascal" category. Right? In the "no-good-son-of-a-gun" category.

***[Congregation laughs]***

And I want you to see: Is there a willingness at all, on your part, to love them anyway? Right? Because it is possible to turn enemies into friends. But that requires us. It rarely happens without us. And every time we turn an enemy into a friend, we win! We win! Because we see that the power of love is great. Are you willing to try?

Okay. Let's pray.

I want you to open your mind, your heart, your soul to the activity of love. That love is greater. That love is always greater. And that you can trust the power of love to heal every situation in your life. That the power of love in you is healing every relationship. Love the Lord, your God, with all your mind, your heart, your soul. And to love everyone else exactly the same way. And so it is. Amen.

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