

LOVE

Week #3 of a 4-Week Series, "The Four Gifts of Christmas"

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Rev. Richard Rogers

Rev. Richard Rogers: Okay; so ... What do you think is the real purpose of your life? If you had to define your purpose, what do you think is the real purpose of your life? Because sometimes I get confused.

[Congregation laughs] Right? **[Laughs]**

I don't know if you're anything like me, but sometimes I get confused! And sometimes I think my purpose is this direction, and I realize -- as I'm going down that road - "*Oh, my gosh, I'm going the wrong way!*" Like, sometimes I think my purpose is this or last, or is to make money or to help people, or to make sure that everything is okay with my family, or whatever. And that ...

I don't know about you, but when I'm in that mindset, I'm locked in ... Do you ever get locked into a mindset? Like, your mindset is just, "*Get it done.*" Is there anybody else that ever gets into that mindset, where you just get in the mindset of "*Get it done.*" And even if you're trying to help people, it's like, "*Will you just get out of my way so I can help you and get this done?*" **[Congregation laughs]** Right? **[Laughs]** And if you've ever been a caregiver, it's like, "*Will you just get out of my way so I can help you, so we can get this thing done?*" Right?

And sometimes I get really good results doing the wrong thing. **[Congregation laughs]** Right? Have you ever done that? Like, you think you're going down the right road, you're doing the right thing, and you're getting really good results. And then something happens, and you realized, "*Oh; this wasn't it at all.*" Yet it was a great result. But you're playing the wrong game! Right? And your ego doesn't want to really all the time stop what you're doing to really change course.

So what I'm talking about tonight is LOVE. And sometimes we think our purpose is many other things. Right? We think our purpose is to take care of our family or to go to work and pay bills, and do all the things that we think is our job to do. And sometimes, when we're busy doing all the things that we think we're supposed to be doing, we forget that our real job is to love and to be loved. Right?

And when your real job is to love and to be loved, the way that you do everything else changes. Right? Because when love is the most important thing -- Jesus said, "*Seek ye first His kingdom and His righteousness, and then all things will be added unto you,*" right? And I believe that the kingdom is love: that love is the kingdom. Right? And that we're here today -- and every day -- to practice loving ourselves and each other at the level that God loves us.

And sometimes we get so committed -- so driven -- to the thing that is front of us that we just forget to be loving. And yet, we live in a world right now that is struggling because so many people don't feel profoundly loved. And we can't ... We can't change our world by just being busier.

How many of you ever get overly during the holiday season? Right? And have you ever noticed that, in a parking lot or on the highway or in line at the grocery store, that you may not be your most loving self? **[Congregation laughs]** Right? **[Laughs]** Like, those people are keeping you from getting things done! Right? And we believe that we are safest, happiest, most successful when we are being good "do-bees": when we are getting things done. When we are checking off the list: tink, tink, tink. "*Look what I've done; aren't I successful?*" Right?

And then we come to the end of our day and we're tired and cranky. And we don't always understand that there's a correlation here. That our job is to feel profoundly loved.

Will you say with me: God loves me. Together: **[with congregation]** "*God loves me.*" God loves me! And God loves all the other son-of-a-guns. **[Congregation laughs]** Right? God loves the people in the parking

lot and in the grocery store. God loves the people on customer service for Amazon, if they had customer service. **[Congregation laughs]** Right? **[Laughs]** Right? Right? And God loves them all! Right? And our job is to practice loving.

So when you think about the most profound experiences of your life, what define them as being profound? Like, it was when you made a lot of money? When you get an award? You know, when you got acknowledged? For me, anyway, the experiences that I rank as my most profound are the times when I felt the most love. When I truly felt profoundly loved.

One of the experiences that I will always remember: I was 19 years old. And they hired me to run a camp for kids at 19. I don't know what possessed someone to hire me at any age to run a camp for kids **[congregation laughs]** but, at 19, it was like ... Even I thought it was weird, right? And then they kind of sent a couple of "real" adults to kind of watch over me. But they actually hired me to run a camp for kids. And I had all these teen-agers that were camp counselors, and I had all these kids, and I was responsible for all of them!

And, like, I've always been fairly responsible ... maybe seemingly responsible. I mean, I did it, right? And I did it well. And one night ... There were crazy long hours, because I had to make sure that everybody was where they were supposed to be, and everybody was in bed, and the camp counselors were where they were supposed to be, not where they wanted to be ... And, like, it was a lot of work, right?

And one night one of these camp counselors was singing to this little girl. This teenage camp counselor was singing to this little girl, because she wasn't feeling good, and she was trying to help her get to sleep. And it was such a loving act that something on the inside of me popped completely open.

They talk about mystical experiences. Well, at about 10 o'clock, 11 o'clock at night, my soul popped completely open. And I felt the infinite love of God, the infinite love of the Universe. I felt infinite love. I was exhausted, but I was ... I was popped open! And I spent that night -- literally all that night -- after everybody was tucked in. I spent that night just wandering in the woods in the dark, feeling the love of everything. Feeling the love of every tree. Feeling just profound love.

Now, you could say it was a **[laughs]** psychological break; a snap. Like, he needed to be institutionalized. But it was ... It was the deepest, most profound mystical experience I've ever had. Right?

And as daybreak started -- as I could see daybreak happening, and I could see the sun starting to come up -- it began to wane. It began to lessen. And my prayer was, *"Please God! Like, no! Like, I don't want this ever to end. I want this for the rest of my life."* And the voice within me said, *"Richard, this was a **[laugh]** free introductory offer."* **[Congregation laughs]** And Spirit said to me, *"This is the way your life can be if you do your inner work. That you can know this level of profound love day in and day out."* I mean, it was just ... It was so real for me.

And I think about that ... that promise. Right? And I shared with you, as we moved into this Advent season, that I really took into prayer these four spiritual qualities: that every year most Christian churches who celebrate Advent come back to these four spiritual qualities. And I was really curious as to why, not just from a church hierarchy place, but from a spiritual point of view: why have we focused on these four spiritual ideas year after year, over and over again, for literally thousands of years? Over 2,000 years? Right?

And it's these four spiritual ideas. And the first one we start with is HOPE. And last week we talked about PEACE. And this week is LOVE. And next week we'll talk about JOY. And the way that it was revealed to me was that these four qualities -- as we do our spiritual work; as we really desire to live a spiritual life -- the promise is that these four spiritual qualities will be fully integrated to who are. That we'll live in peace. That we'll live in hope. That we'll live in love. And that we will live in profound joy.

And I truly believe that that's true: that, for each and every one of us, to live in a constant of hope, or a constant state of peace, or a constant state of love or joy, is radically transformative. It shifts us, and it gets us out of our crazy mind, and puts us into a place of just profound peace, love and joy. It shifts us!

And, for me, this week -- where we talk about profound love -- it is a necessity that we understand what we're looking for ... What we're shooting for ... What the direction is ... Why we celebrate Christmas. Because if you're not experiencing profound love ...

Now, usually when we say profound love, we instantly look at our relationship and say, "*This old gal or this old guy isn't doing a really good job at loving me at a profound level. We're going to have to start over. We're going to have to make a change.*" Whatever. And that's not what this teaching is!

This teaching is that every soul has a right -- was designed, is entitled -- to live in a state of profound love. And yet, most of us aren't even praying for that! Most of us aren't even setting up as a desire in our life: to know profound love. We want to know profound safety or security or financial success. Or we want to, you know, get the right date, or whatever it is. We want to have the right size hips, or whatever it is. Right? We're praying for all these things. And yet, we're kind of missing the mark. That our whole world, our lives, aren't going to change -- not radically, not significantly -- until we know profound love.

And to the degree that we know profound love, it is the kingdom. It is the righteousness that Jesus was talking about. And I want us to really look at our own intent and our own desire and our own longing to know profound love. Because when we feel the infinite love of God coming in us and through us, and we feel filled with it, everything in our life changes!

And even our Christmas stories -- our mythical Christmas stories of Ebenezer Scrooge and The Grinch, right? Those are mythical stories about an individual who is transformed by profound love. And it's interesting for me that both of the main characters are male. Right? **[Congregation laughs]** Like, the wounded male, right? Because, in our culture, historically it has not been the role of the man to really seek profound love. Right? The role of the man is to be the warrior or the provider, the protector. And historically, that's been the male role model: is to go in another direction.

But in these two cases -- The Grinch and Ebenezer Scrooge -- we see two mythical visions of the masculine who are profoundly transformed by love. And we see the radical shift, in these stories, it creates in their lives. The generosity, the spirit, the goodness, the light just comes out of them. They are living examples of the transformational power of profound love. Right?

And that's what I want us to play with tonight. I don't want us to miss the significance that, every Christmas, we're invited into an experience of profound love. Wherever we are -- whatever our relationships are like, whatever our family life is like, whatever we're going through -- we're invited into this experience of profound love. But we have to actually ask for it. We actually have to align with it. We actually have to set an intention. We actually have to make it the most important thing. Because, for many of us, it's not even the top three! Right? And yet, when profound love the experience, it becomes the thing that creates everything else. It becomes the kingdom, and all else is given.

So there's a video where Oprah Winfrey is interview Maya Angelou. We have it on our ... Do we still have it on our website? It's on our website. And you can look at it. And Oprah is asking Maya Angelou how she became Maya Angelou, pretty much. And she talks about her background in Unity. And her first real spiritual teacher said to her, "*God loves you.*" Right? And that she was supposed to hold on to that idea over and over again: "*God loves me.*" And she said, you know, it took her awhile. It wasn't an instant process before she could really internalize that, and really allow that to really break her open. But she held on to that affirmation: "*God loves me. God loves me. God loves me!*" And it impacted her soul. And I believe that was the thing that opened the door that allowed Maya Angelou to literally reach millions of people ... Because once she hit that, at some deep profound level, people wanted to know

what that was. What was it that she had within her that would write these poems and do this work and share this much light? And it was this experience of profound love.

And I feel like, tonight, we have to kind of open a window again and remind ourselves why we're here. Because we can have the perfect tree and the perfect presents and the perfect meal, and everything can be perfect. And our clothes can be perfect, and we can be the exact right size we want to be for this, and have everything exactly the "right" way ... and still not feel profoundly loved. Because our dress size or our income or our job: for most of those, don't make us feel profoundly loved. What makes us feel profoundly loved is LOVE. It's the best thing. It's the most important thing. It's the thing that we're all hungry for and that we all need. And the thing we're all, at some level, going without, whether it's a little bit or a lot.

And tonight, what if you actually put the focus of your attention on feeling profoundly loved. What if that was your prayer? What if that was your desire? What if that's the reason you lit the candle on Christmas Eve? Or did everything that you do: *"Help me, today, to feel profoundly loved. Help me to know profound love in every cell of my body. Help me live that, know that, express that. Let me know profound love in every level of my life."*

Because the moment we set our intention toward anything: toward any desire, toward any expectation ... The moment we shift our longing for that, then that way, that process. Because it's all here; it's all available to us! That the moment we set our intention to that, then everything begins to open up, and we begin to feel profound love.

And we can change! We can change our world! We can change our families! We can change everything! But not until people feel loved.

Until people feel profoundly loved, I'm afraid we're just going to get more and more of the same. Because love is the answer! Love is the thing that we're missing. Because our intellect, our ego, could not get us there without love. Wherever "there" is for you, it won't get you there without love. But if you trust love, if you go into love, if you fully dive into love, then -- as Jesus says -- everything else will be provided. Literally, everything else will be provided! But if you settle for less than love, then nothing will feel right. It will only feel tinny. It will only feel inadequate.

So, tonight, what if you decide that profound love is the purpose of your life? That you want to live it; you want to feel it; you want to know it; you want to share it with others. What if profound love becomes your most important thing? And what if that's the promise that God has made to you from the beginning of time?

Reading from Scripture, 1 John 4:16: *"You will know and believe the love God has for you."* Right? So that's where most of us are. We're kind of in that intellectual place where ... *"So you will know and believe the love that God has for you."* But believing it is an intellectual activity. Do you see that? That I don't want you just to believe that God loves you; I want you to literally open the door and experience it firsthand.

The Scripture goes on: *"For God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him."* So we can know that God is love from an intellectual place, right? From a mental place, from even an ego place, we can understand this concept that maybe God is love. But until it moves down into our heart and becomes the experience -- until love abides in us; until we abide in love -- that we don't really live it. We don't really feel it. And love ...

Love is like kissing. Right? You can talk about it. And that's nice. Or you can have a really good kiss. And, frankly, kissing is better than talking about kissing. **[Congregation laughs]** And if you don't believe that, you've been kissing the wrong people! **[Congregation laughs]** Right? It's just true! **[Laughs]** Right? Thinking about it is not as good as doing it! Right?

So what I want us to see tonight is that we talk a lot about love. And yet, it doesn't always shape and become the real juice of our life. And tonight -- as we move into this Christmas season -- I want you to know profound love. I want you to know it. I want it to tingle within your body. I want it to activate every cell of your DNA. I want it to awaken every part of you. And that it is not a distant thing: you're not waiting for Prince Charming or Little Princess. This is a God thing. Profound love is a God thing that reactivates you at the deepest level.

So how do we get there? First thing I want you to see is that asking, praying, declaring, giving thanks for profound love opens the door. Because the moment Spirit knows that your soul is ready for profound love, profound love is available to you. But if everything is more important than love, the Universe kind of waits for you to get hungry enough, get ready for it. But the moment that you ask for it, the door is open.

So the first thing I want you to really look at is: I want profound love to be an expectation. A prayer request. An affirmation. A declaration. That you're ready to declare profound love within you, within your life.

Two. I want you -- during this holiday season, when we're focusing on love: if you could forgive anything about your past, what would you forgive? Because, in my experience, forgiveness allows us to be more willing to experience love. And in the process of forgiving ourselves, we actually re-open the door to love. So if there's anything in your past that you have not forgiven, I suggest tonight that you forgive it. Because the love of God is worth forgiving everything. Everything, everything, everything!

So first: ask for it. Then: forgive, forgive, forgive. And three: I want to share with you some ways of optimizing the love that you feel during this holiday season. And these are kind of silly, but they're also meaningful. Right? That we have the ways to optimize the love that we feel during the holiday season.

First one is: I want you to write a note -- or, if you have to, an email -- to someone you love or appreciate. I got one of those today. Somebody wrote me a note about something that I've done. And their appreciation -- it was just a little note: two paragraphs, right? But they put a stamp on it; they put it in the mail. And it was, like, "That is so sweet!" Right? At that moment, there was a connection that I had with that individual. She lives in Florida. She just thanked me for something. And it was sweet! It was just ... So write a note! Write appreciation. Write a little love note. Write a little appreciation and mail it. Or email it. Whatever you can do. Right?

Second one. **[Laughs]** Take someone coffee. Now I'm not talking about buying them coffee. I'm actually talking about you getting someone a coffee and actually taking it: taking it to their work, taking it to their home. And just taking them coffee as a gift of service to them. Just, in the buy season, take someone coffee.

Serve in a homeless shelter.

Buy somebody's lunch. Now, you can invite a friend to lunch, or a family member to lunch. You can buy somebody lunch. Or you can just go through a fast food restaurant, buy a lunch -- a bag of lunch -- and give it to a homeless person on the street. And just feel what it feels like to buy somebody lunch. Or buy the person behind you in line at the fast food place ... just buy their lunch, right? And feel what it feels like to be that generous.

Call someone out of your past and wish them a Merry Christmas.

Be a silent Santa. And I love this one! Be a silent Santa! And that is, between now and Christmas, pick a friend, a neighbor, a family member and be a Secret Santa. Be a Secret Santa and do little things every day that they don't know who's doing it. So it's really easy for a neighbor; you can put something in their mailbox. Or you can drop something off at their front door. Or a friend or a family member. And just feel what it feels like to actually just give in greater ways.

And the last one is -- and I love this one, too! -- is to drop off a poinsettia at a neighbor or a co-worker and just let them know that you love and appreciate them.

So here's where we're going: there is a promise that God has made to your soul that you could know infinite, unconditional love. And you could know it in this life. And that -- as it becomes a priority for you; as it becomes the most important thing for you -- the doors will open and you will know profound love.

And I guarantee -- guarantee! -- that, as you experience profound love, everything in your life will take a huge step forward. That the thing -- whether we're conscious of it or not -- is that every soul wants to know that they are deeply, profoundly loved. And when we have that -- when we are that full -- like Scrooge and Ebenezer, we begin to be our best selves. And we give our best selves to the world. That we cannot be our best selves and only be half full. To truly do the work that I believe that we've come to do -- to heal this planet -- we have to start from a place of fullness. We have to get that one first. And then everything else will be right.

Will you join with me in prayer?

And I want you just to take a deep breath. And I want you to open the inner space to God. And all the places where you've never, ever felt fully loved. Holy Spirit, I am ready to be loved. I want to know pure love in every area of my life. I want to know that you truly, deeply, profoundly love me, God. That I truly was created in your image and your likeness. That I am your beloved. I want to know a love so deep, so true, that it changes me at depth.

Holy Spirit, I am ready for infinite love. And, as I am loved, that I love others. That I can't help but share that love with the world. So, Holy Spirit, even when I'm not asking, I want to know profound love. Even when I lose myself and go the wrong direction, I want to know profound love. Even when I get busy in all the things that are in front of me to do this day, I want to know profound love. I want to know it -- from the very tip of my toes to the very top of my head -- that you love me just the way I am. And so it is. Amen.

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