

## YOUR MOST PRECIOUS RESOURCE

Week #1 of a 4-Week Series, "The Power of Full Engagement"

Jan. 9, 2022

Rev. Richard Maraj

**Rev. Richard Maraj:** So before I begin, full disclosure: the jokes I'm about to tell you stink! They're horrible! [Congregation laughs] This morning nobody laughed; nobody clapped. Several people groaned. And yet, I am still going to tell you the jokes. [Congregation laughs] 'Cause I kind of like 'em! Here we go!

So a friend of mine bought himself a new wig for only \$1. It was a small price "toupee." **[Drummer does "rimshot" drum roll] [Congregation laughs and moans]** Okay ... Just like this morning! **[Congregation laughs]**

So I've been getting a little concerned about myself, because I keep thinking that I'm Tom Jones. But my therapist says "it's not unusual." **["Rimshot" drum roll] [Congregation titters]**

I told a chemistry joke to a friend, but I got no reaction. **[Rimshot drum roll] [Congregation groans]**

What do you call a dinosaur fart? And, yes; I said a dinosaur fart? "A blast from the past." **[Rimshot drum roll] [Congregation titters]**

Okay; you know you're getting desperate for jokes when you're using a flatulence joke in church. You're really, really kind of desperate. **[Congregation laughs]**

Anyway, it's a New Year! And, with it, comes a desire for a better year than last year. A better life. Better relationship. Better jokes. Better everything! Spiritually, financially ... I mean, workwise. We look for something greater and better with each New Year. And that can come in the form, as we begin, by holding a vision and setting goals; having a plan; working with determination and persistence; and being better at time management.

Well, I'm reading a book right now on high performance and effectiveness called *The Power of Full Engagement*. And it says the absolute key -- and the greatest impact on our level of happiness and success, greater health and prosperity in all areas of our lives -- is being more fully engaged in our lives. Being fully engaged in whatever it is that we are doing. Being more fully engaged is the key.

But the problem is: we're not always fully engaged. Sometimes we're just kind of mostly engaged, or hardly engaged, or actually completely disengaged. You know, the Gallup people did a survey, and it said that -- and this was in 2001 -- that less than 30% of people are fully engaged at work. Less than 30%! Fifty-five percent of the people were not engaged, and 19% were actively disengaged! Actively telling people how they were not happy at work and were not doing their best. And what they have calculated and discovered: that we use trillions of dollars a year in productivity because the people are not engaged in the workforce.

But here's what's even worse. Here's what's even more costly: is when we're not fully engaged in our relationships or in our families or in our own self-care. Our health, our exercise. In our communities; the things we do we do in our neighborhood. In our own spiritual life. When we are not engaged in our lives, it absolutely costs us in love and intimacy and friendship. In connection. In creativity and passion. In a sense of purpose and meaning.

So I ask you: in what area of your life are you most fully engaged? What areas are you fully engaged in? And in what areas do you know you're not as engaged as you could be? In what areas do you feel maybe disconnected, and almost disinterested? Or even "numbed out" to?

Jim Loehr and Tony Schwartz, who wrote this book, *The Power of Full Engagement*, say that high performance comes from being fully engaged. And the way we get fully engaged is by managing and utilizing our most precious resource. And sometimes we think our most precious resource we need to manage is time. But the truth is: the most precious resource we have -- that we need to manage -- is our

energy. Life is energy! Every one of us are energetic beings. Our words are energy. Our thoughts are energy. Our intentions, our attitudes, our actions are energy. Everything in life takes energy! And success and high performance is about how skillfully and effectively we utilize and channel our energies.

You know, without the right quantity of energy, or the quality of energy, or the focus and force of our energy, we literally limit and compromise our effectiveness and our happiness.

And there's no question: we have more control over our energy than we think. I mean, life isn't easy. There are trials and struggles; there are difficult relationships; there are all kinds of circumstances that are difficult. But we really can control our own energy. We often misuse it and deplete it and drain it by focusing on the negative. You know, we waste a lot of our energy on unproductive things. But the fact is: we're the ones who have control. When we use it wisely, it actually renews us. You know, it restores, and it actually increases and builds and helps our effectiveness and our level of fulfillment in life.

One of the things you realize is that time is fixed. Twenty-four hours in a day; 60 seconds in a minute. That's fixed; it's always going to be that. But the quantity of energy that we have -- the quantity and quality -- is up to us! It is how well we use or don't use. And the more we are willing to take full responsibility for our energy, the more empowered we are, and the more productive, and the more happy and fulfilled we feel.

Today we're beginning a four-week series, and it is looking at ways to better manage and more effectively manage our energy -- our most precious resource -- so we can live a life that is more fully engaged. There are four principles of engagement. Today we'll look at two of them.

The first one says **full engagement requires us drawing on four separate, but related, sources of energy: physical; emotional; mental; and spiritual.** See, energy is more than just physical. Because we are not one-dimensional beings. To live a fully engaged life requires that we are physically energized; that we are emotionally connected; that we are mentally focused; and that we are spiritually aligned.

Full engagement begins when we can be excited about something greater than ourselves. That when we can go to work, eagerly get to work and engage in it ... and just as eager and happy to come home and enjoy. And learn how to set boundaries and separate those two.

To be fully engaged is to fully immerse ourselves in whatever we are doing in the moment, whether it's a creative challenge at work or managing people or spending time with our family or just having fun. The question is: how engaged are we? And how are we using our energy?

Anybody ever felt like you didn't have enough energy to do something good and important you wanted to do? But you didn't have the energy? And sometimes we think it's just an issue of: we didn't have enough time. But the fact is: sometimes it's really a matter of not using ... We feel depleted and drained because we didn't use and aren't using our energy in the most effective way possible.

Again, we are multi-dimensional beings. And if we want to be more fully engaged, we have to be aware of the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual energies, and how we're using them.

The second principle says ... **because energy's capacity diminishes with overuse or underuse, we need to be more balanced in how we expend energy and how we renew energy.** You ever felt out of balance with your life? You know, every found yourself saying, *"God, I could use some more balance! I wish I had more balance in my life!"*

You know, not being balanced comes from doing too much of one thing to the detriment and ignoring something else. But the fact is: our energies need to be balanced.

So I ask you: where in your life right now are you out of balance? Where in your life are you overworking or overdoing it? And spending an unhealthy amount of time on one thing, and being distracted from another? Or what is something that you're underdoing? Something that's important and valuable that you're not putting as much energy and attention towards?

Typically, for most of us, we overdo work and kind of underdo it with self-care or our relationships. And our energy is really that capacity that we have -- physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually -- to be able to get things done. And to utilize, to expend, to create, to attract, to enjoy, to be present towards.

And one thing I've discovered in this book that I really like is that there's a natural rhythm of energy that is actually built into each and every one of us. And it is a thing we need to maintain and to connect with to keep that life force. To keep that impulse of energy moving in and through us. And some of the flows of energy go like this: ***[moves his hand up and down in a serpentine movement]***. We expend energy, and then we recover energy. We use energy; then we replenish energy. It's like the ebb and the flow. It is like work and rest. It is activity and inactivity. It is stress and it is relaxing. It is engaging and then disengaging.

If you look at how Jesus lived his life, he did this flow. He was in the flow of this impulse and this force of life and flow of energy. He would work, and then he would withdraw. He would go preach and teach, and then he would meditate and be quiet. Jesus often used the line, and said to his disciples, "*Come apart awhile and rest.*" He was trying to get them connected to that flow.

In 170 AD, Flavius Philostratus -- who was from Greece -- was an athletic coach. And he developed a practice and a philosophy for maximizing athletic performance. And he actually wrote a lot of training manuals for athletes. And he said this: "*To maximize your performance, you must engage in periods of activity and rest.*" Intentional periods of stress and exertion, and intentional periods of relaxation and quiet.

And, strangely, it wasn't picked up again until the 1960s by some Olympic coaches. They started utilizing that. And, still to this day, world-class athletes are engaging in these cycles of activity and rest, activity and rest. And it's not just on the physical level! There has to be mental activity and mental rest; emotional activity and emotional rest; spiritual activity and spiritual rest.

There is a cycle and an impulse of energy flowing that is there to help us and support us. Everybody's heard of the circadian rhythms? I mean, it basically is saying that sleep isn't just like an eight-hour gig; it is like a cycle: 90 to 120 minutes are the cycles of our sleep. They say they discovered that a cycle -- not just for sleep -- but an activity and rest cycle for the body and mind, and it is also about 90 to 120 minutes. And it's always going. There needs to be that cycle of activity and rest every 90 to 120 minutes.

And your body gives you clues and signals like yawning or feeling like you need to stretch. Or getting hunger pangs. Or feeling tension and stress. Or being distracted or procrastinating or not being as effective. Making mistakes.

And doesn't it sound ridiculously simple? Haven't we all heard this? And yet, we do everything in our power to not live within that. In fact, we fight that! You know why? Because we are absolutely obsessed with power and success and money and proving ourselves to the point we keep pushing and working, and pushing and working, and keep going, going, going. It's almost a badge of honor to say, "*I work 60 hours a week. I'm the last one; work my fingers to the bone. Sleep? I don't need sleep! I'll sleep when I'm dead!*" ***[Congregation laughs]***

I mean, we say all these kind of insane things! You know, "*I take my computer on vacation with me! I check my emails an hour so I don't come back to a whole bunch.*" We work and work and work! And we fight the cycle! We fight the cycle by creating a level of inner stress, triggering the "fight or flight" response; flooding hormones -- flooding hormones into ourselves! -- to keep going. To fight the regular cycle. To create a linear, constant flow of energy. "*Caffeine; caffeine! Give me another cup of coffee! How about a couple of Red Bulls? Let's go; let's go; let's go!*" We don't want to stop!

And it sounds like a simple thing. "*Oh, I just do it once in a while.*" But do you know, long-term, all those releasing of those hormones creates toxicity in ourselves? It triggers aggression and anger and frustration. And here's the kicker: we are actually culturally trained for overwork and imbalance, which

fighters the very nature of the flow of energy that is already built into us that we are ignoring and fighting against.

We say, *"Oh, I want to have a better year. I want to have a better life."* The only thing holding us back is we are doing things counter to it, and not helping ourselves at all. We are actually hurting ourselves.

You know, on an EKG, the lines always go up and down. And then, when you're dead, it's a flat line. And the fact is: Life is more like a flow of up and down. We have to move with the flow of the energy, not try to create a flat line of consistently high energy all the time. That's not how life works! It's not healthy, and it absolutely hurts us and prevents us from living as full a life as we want.

So one of the things they say we've got to do is: we've got to start building to this activity/rest cycle. We need to not just pay attention, but build little rituals of renewal and replenishment in it. And even small ones make a huge difference in terms of performance and effectiveness and happiness and peace of mind.

Here's an interesting one from an Army study. This is 1998. In the Army, they did a thing of how many shots will get hits. And they had two groups. One group was: *"Shoot as much as you want over a three-day period."* And the other group was: *"We're going to shoot, but we're going to take naps every so often."*

So in the first group -- the one that shot the most -- on the first day hit the most. But on the second day, it was the group that had the naps. They were more accurate on the second day. And on the third day, they extended their lead of accuracy by having the naps. Even though the first group took more shots, in the long run -- because of a ritual of renewal and replenishment -- they were actually more effective.

These guys have worked with corporate executives who eat their lunch at their desk; work, work, work until late hours. And they would say, *"We need a little ritual for you to just have a little break."* So one CEO would get up and walk around and meet some of the staff, and just say, *"Hey; what are you working on today?"* Other ones would just stop and have a break and read a magazine on whatever. Or listen to music. Another one would walk a flight of 12 stairs. Another one learned how to juggle. Another one would just put their cell phone away for X number of hours, and only check emails once a day. Little, simple ways to get more connected to that activity and rest cycle is what makes a huge, huge difference!

There was one with tennis. They were studying the top tennis players, and what makes a difference in them. And here's what the interesting thing was! It wasn't how they played or practiced or anything. It was what they did in the 20 seconds between points. That the ones who were the top-ranked ones, they breathed slower. They said nicer, kinder things to themselves. They were able to relax their neck and shoulders a bunch. They kept their eyes a little less busy and a little more focused.

And what they found was: the lower-ranked ones didn't have any rituals at all, what they did in between. They were kind of sporadic. Interestingly, it's after two hours or three hours, the ones who didn't have rituals were more frustrated; they made more mistakes; they got more upset. And the ones who had the rituals were calmer. And here's the thing: their heart rates actually slowed down within those 20 seconds to the point of approximately 20 beats per minute. Isn't that amazing? In the stress, they were able to create an activity and rest cycle in 20 seconds of intensely trying to relax themselves.

So what replenishing and relaxing ritual can you add to your life? Because if we really want to have a better year and a better life, we need to learn how to move with this activity and rest cycle.

I mean, you could do a simple thing of just stopping and taking a deep breath and counting to six: *"One - two -- three -- four -- five -- six."* And exhaling: *"One -- two -- three -- four -- five -- six."* I mean, you can just close your eyes and put a big smile on your face and say, *"Thank you, God; thank you, God; thank you, God!"* You can do jumping jacks and say, *"I am so healthy and alive!"* You know, you could do a one-minute dance party like Ellen DeGeneres. You can do anything you want! You can take a break and go for a walk around the parking lot. You know, you could eat something healthy, like an apple. You can

come up with any ritual you want that breaks that activity level and gets more in sync with that natural rhythm and flow of energy in your life ... and work with it, rather than against it.

Listen to these words in Scripture. We've heard the 23rd Psalm lots of times. Listen to the deeper wisdom of what it's saying, in my opinion, about this, and the need to relax and renew. It says, "*The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul.*"

When it says, "*The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want,*" part of the "*shall not want*" part is how well you're lying in the green pastures; how well you are being near the still water; and how well you're allowing your soul to be restored.

We always want the active part! But we aren't always willing to do the slower part. I think we sometimes "poo poo" and think it's weak to rest, to relax. And yet it is vital in replenishing and refilling -- and actually increasing -- our energy. Because one of the things: if we keep on this cycle, we might be wishing for the very best year every single year. But we'll be working against ourselves, because we're disconnected with the own inner system and energy flow that is within us. It is the impulse of life -- that force of energy and Spirit that's in us -- that we're fighting against, that we need to get in alignment with. Instead of working against and depleting energy, we can work with it and increase our energy.

So if you woke up tomorrow with twice as much energy as you had today, how much of a difference do you think it would make in how you live tomorrow? How do you think having more energy would actually help and serve your life? If it made a difference for tennis players within 20 seconds, how much more difference can it make in our lives if we were more consistent and intentional managing your energy. I guarantee you, it's one of the most powerful tools for transformation if we're willing to use it.

So this week, here's your homework, because we're going to do a lot more over the next three weeks. It's simple! First thing is: notice the areas in your life where you are not fully engaged, and notice the areas in your life where you are most out of balance. Number two is: pay attention to the cycle of energy in your body -- that activity and rest cycle and flow. Listen to your body and notice those so we can get back in alignment with it. And the third one is: choose and practice some renewal and replenishing rituals. Just make up any simple thing that you will do, and it will make a difference.

One of the best ways -- if you want a better year and a better life -- is to learn how to use your energy, which truly is your most precious resource.

God bless you all! ***[Congregation applauds]***

**Copyright 2022 Unity of Phoenix Spiritual Center/Rev. Richard Maraj**