

EASY ON ME

Week #4 of the 6-Week Series, "The Songs of Life"

May 15, 2022

With Rev. Richard Maraj

Lyrics – "Easy On Me" (Adele)

There ain't no gold in this river
That I've been washin' my hands in forever
I know there is hope in these waters
But I can't bring myself to swim
When I am drowning in this silence
Baby, let me in

Go easy on me, baby
I was still a child
Didn't get the chance to
Feel the world around me
I had no time to choose
What I chose to do
So go easy on me

There ain't no room for things to change
When we are both so deeply stuck in our ways
You can't deny how hard I have tried
I changed who I was to put you both first
But now I give up

Go easy on me, baby
I was still a child
Didn't get the chance to
Feel the world around me
I had no time to choose
What I chose to do
So go easy on me

I had good intentions
And the highest hopes
But I know right now
That probably doesn't even show

Go easy on me, baby
I was still a child
Didn't get the chance to
Feel the world around me
I had no time to choose
What I chose to do
So go easy on me

Message:

So how many people have ever had to make an important decision -- a very difficult decision -- and you didn't want to make the wrong decision, so you avoided making a decision. Anybody ever had that experience? [Congregation laughs] How many people ever made a decision for something you wanted to have or do for yourself, but you had somebody in your life who disapproved or didn't support you?

Anybody ever have that? How many people ever made a major life decision that you later regretted at some point? Anybody have those? [Congregation laughs]

Decisions! Kind of reminds me of this couple celebrating their 50th wedding anniversary. When asked what the secret to the success of their marriage was, the husband responded, saying, "When we got married, we agreed I would make all the big decisions. And she would make all the small decisions. So far there have only been small decisions." [Congregation laughs]

Decisions! You know, decisions play a very big role in the quality of our lives and our level of happiness and success. In fact, you could say that our lives are the sum total of all the choices we make. The decisions that we have made. And I would say that the quality of the decisions that we make today will reflect the quality of the success we have tomorrow.

Today we are on Week #4 of our six-week annual series, "The Songs of Life," where we take some famous songs and see what life lessons and spiritual teachings they have for us so we can live more full lives.

So far we've done "This Is Me" from *The Greatest Showman*; we've done "Lean On Me" by Bill Withers; last week was "Landslide" by Fleetwood Mac/Steve Nicks. And this week is "Easy On Me," the 2021 hit by Adele.

And she wrote this song going through a lot of personal turmoil, ending a marriage of more than 11 years. And she actually wrote the song for her son, Angelo -- I believe he was seven at the time -- trying to explain to him why she made the tough decision to divorce his father and split up the family. Why ... She wanted him to understand why she made a choice for her own happiness, even though it kind of turned his world upside down a little bit, and had some struggle and challenge. She wanted him to understand so he would go easy on her, and not blame her. Not hate her and hold it against her, and affect their relationship for the rest of their lives.

I love this song because it's a very heartfelt, vulnerable song where she does some introspection about her feelings and her concerns about her decision for the divorce and the impact that it would have. I also like that she was a bit tender with herself, and there was some optimism and hope of a future and a better life.

I think this song shows us how to make some really hard and tough decisions, and that the necessary understanding, hope, healing and compassion that is required for us to move through those tough decisions in as healthy and positive way as possible.

So let's look at the life lessons and the spiritual insights that we can gain from this week's song, "Easy On Me."

You know, the thing is about life, is that every single moment of your life you're making choices. Every single moment of our life we're making decisions: small decisions and some big decisions; some inconsequential decisions and some life-altering ones. And what I've come to realize is: no matter what is going in our lives in these situations -- whether things are smooth and successful or they are challenging and bumpy -- that **WE ALWAYS HAVE THE POWER TO CHOOSE**. We always have the power to decide.

And what a gift and power of creative ability we've been given to choose and to decide. In the Old Testament, in the Book of Job, it says, "*Decide upon a thing and it will be established for you.*" That's how powerful it is for us to decide! Have that ability to choose.

In the New Testament it says, "*Choose this day whom you will serve.*" Choose how you are going to show up. Choose how you're going to react. When it says, "*Ask and ye shall receive,*" it's saying choose; you decide what you want to ask for! When it says, "*Have a vision,*" it means you choose and get clear about what you desire. There's another line in Scripture that says, "*Let your 'Yes' be 'Yes!' and your 'No' be 'No!'*" It means choose! Decide!

And as powerful as it is that we have this power, sometimes we forget and think we have no choice. Ever been in that situation where you thought, "*I have no choice! I'm trapped! I'm stuck! I have no choice!*"

Kind of reminds me of the rich guy that got held at gunpoint. And the robber says, "*Your money or your life!*" Rich guys says nothing. Robber says, "*Hey! I said, 'Your money or your life!'*" And the rich guy says, "*Yeah, yeah; I'm thinking. I'm thinking!*" [Congregation laughs]

Even in the worst situations, guess what? You always have a choice. We always get to choose. We always get to decide. So in the song, it begins:

***There ain't no gold in this river
That I've been washin' my hands in forever
I know there is hope in these waters
But I can't bring myself to swim
When I am drowning in this silence
Baby, let me in***

And what it's saying: there's nothing left; there's no gold in this. She's had her hands in there forever, working and trying at it. And even though there's hope for a better life, it ain't in this river. She can't swim there any more. That she is drowning in the silence.

But here's my favorite thing: she recognizes that, even in a situation that's unhappy, that she can change for the better. She can make a new decision. She can make a new choice. She can attract and create something greater and better than what she has.

So is there some area in your life -- that isn't as happy or isn't as fulfilling -- where it's time for you to make a new choice? Time for you to make a new decision? And it may not necessarily mean changing a job or changing a relationship; maybe it's even changing your attitude and your perspective. But we have the power of choice.

You see, we're creators! And if we don't like what we've created so far, guess what? We can make a new choice and a new decision to create something better.

"I always have the power to choose."

Together: [with congregation] *"I always have the power to choose."*

"I always have the power to decide."

Together: [with congregation] *"I always have the power to decide."*

"I can always choose something greater, better and happier."

[With congregation]: *"I can always choose something greater, better and happier."*

How do we make the best choice? How do we make the right choice? And I think it's making the choice and making the decision to seek God's guidance. To seek God first. To choose God's guidance in all situations. To ask God; to seek God; to listen to God; to trust God.

Here are the Scriptures that back that up. "*If you lack in anything wisdom, ask God, who gives generously. 'Seek ye first his kingdom and righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.'*" "*Listen to the still, small voice of God, and wait on the Lord.*" And finally, "*Trust in the Lord with all your heart.*" The best way to make the best decisions is to choose, and to make the decision to ask God; to seek God; to listen to God; and to trust God. And it doesn't matter what area of life it might be! It could be relationship; it could be career; it could be finances; it could be health; it could be your goals and dreams. You always have the power to choose something greater, something better and something happier.

"I can always choose something greater, better and happier."

Together: [With congregation] *"I can always choose something greater, better and happier."*

And that's what I think this song teaches. You can always -- no matter how sad; no matter how unfulfilling; no matter what it is -- you can choose something greater. Something better and happier.

And the next one is the role that healing, learning and acceptance plays. I'll tell you more about that in a sec'.

How many people would say you make good decisions? Okay; about five people. Great! [Congregation laughs] How many people ever made a bad decision? How many people ever started out thinking, *"Oh, this is the best decision I ever made! That's the best investment; the best opportunity; the best most perfect person for me to date!"* Three months later you're thinking, *"What was I thinking?"*

[Congregation laughs] You know, I always categorize that -- you've heard it many times! We all have the category called, *"It seemed like a good idea at the time."* [Congregation laughs]

We all have those; it's just a part of life! But here's the thing. All decisions -- whether they're good; they're bad; they're indifferent. Guess what? The number one thing about all decisions is they make things move. See, every decision that we make has consequences; has actions; has effects; has reactions. It changes the direction and the dimensions and the dynamics of ourselves and our lives and our relationships.

And so, because decisions move things, and gets energy flowing, three things need to happen. The first one: we need to find **ACCEPTANCE** about the decision that we make. Because when we make a decision, then dominos will fall. Some people will be drawn out of our life; some people will be drawn into our life. We will change. Things will change in our lives. So we have to accept the decisions that we make!

When she made that decision for her happiness, she had to accept the fact that that decision was also going to lead to some frustration and some discomfort of her child. We have to accept all aspects of when we choose to make a decision.

And, you know, one of the things is: when we make decisions, sometimes we will get resistance from people; that they won't like it. Sometimes we get our own resistance. Sometimes resentment and regrets will pop up. So we need to have acceptance and make peace with the decisions that we make.

Regardless of how they turn out, or the different changes, we need to make peace and find acceptance. Because decisions create changes, and changes need adjustment and acceptance and making peace of those changes. All that make sense? Please say, "Yes!" because that's all I've got!

So the second thing is that, because decisions shift things, it brings up our stuff. So with her, it brought up her stuff of feeling guilty that she chose her happiness -- her happiness over what affected her son. It also brought up her grief about the loss of a relationship of 11 years. But it brought up even more for her! It brought up hurt from childhood abandonment issues. Sometimes when there's shifts in life, it brings up the stuff that we might have been hiding or suppressing, and we have to deal with that. And whether it's shame or unworthiness ... whatever it might be. Guilt. It's important to not ignore those things; that we try to move on with the new change. We can't leave those things behind. We have to go up and heal them -- and do therapy or whatever we need to do -- to bring healing in those areas.

The third thing is: I think it's important when we make a decision, we need to learn! 'Cause sometimes we don't always make the best decisions; we make the best decision with the information we have at the time. And that's why, when she's singing this song, and she's saying:

I was just a child

I didn't get the chance to

Feel the world around me

So we make the best decision we can at the time. That's how you learn how to make better decisions: by making bad decisions first. And we have to learn from them.

You know, when we make a decision -- regardless of whether it's good, bad or indifferent -- it helps expand our awareness and our perspective, our consciousness, our mindset. We get to learn more about ourselves; it helps us grow.

Here's what she wrote: *"I learned a lot of blistering whole truths about myself along the way. I've shed many layers, but I've also wrapped myself in new ones; discovered genuinely useful and wholesome mentalities to lead with. I feel like I've finally found my feeling again. And I would go as far as to say, I've never felt more peaceful in my life."*

She made a tough decision. She had to face it, accept it and heal. And it helped her to learn and to discover more peace than she's ever had before.

Sometimes these tough decisions: they're not easy. But they can help us heal and grow and develop. And she probably has a more fulfilling and wonderful life than before. Because she was willing to walk through this, she not only learned and healed, but she got a new hit record! [Congregation laughs] And she's dating LeBron James' agent and attends NBA basketball games. I think her life has gotten better! [Congregation laughs] And so ... um ...

Choices and decisions that we make also make us. Because they shift things and force us to learn to discover new possibilities. So making a decision -- making decisions -- is important. Again: "Decide upon a thing, and it will be established for you." It's important to make decisions and be decisive.

How many people would say you're decisive? How many people would say you're indecisive? How many people are not sure if you're indecisive? [Congregation laughs]

So I want you to think of a major decision that you've made in your life. And what were the things that you had to accept? What were the things that you had to heal? And what were the things that you had to learn? And I would suggest that, whatever important decision you might need to make now in your life -- whatever new choice you have to make -- I guarantee there'll be stuff that you have to acceptance with. There is stuff that you will need to heal. And there are things that you will need to learn. But it's all a good and important thing.

Last thing we're going to talk about is compassion. "Go Easy On Me" is about wanting some compassion, understanding and grace from her son: to not feel upset or unhappy or blaming her.

But when I first heard this song, when I heard, *"Go easy on me,"* my first thought was, *"Go easy on yourself!"* Because we can be brutal and tough on ourselves if we don't measure up or make the right move, or whatever it is. Or do as well as we think. You know? Be kinder to yourself! Be gentler with yourself! Be more loving and supportive and encouraging of yourself!

You know, sometimes we can treat ourselves so harshly. Brutally! Sometimes we can treat ourselves with contempt. And when we don't do well, sometimes we'd rather practice self-loathing and being self-critical than self-love and self-appreciation. And it's a sad thing about the way we treat ourselves sometimes.

You know, we live in a culture that is so driven to be number one -- being the best -- that we absolutely believe that it's weak and soft to have compassion for ourselves.

That what's better is being self-critical and being demanding for having perfection on ourselves, and keep pushing ourselves, even insulting ourselves ... whatever we need to get the best out of ourselves. That might get good results, but that don't create healthy, happy people!

Studies are actually showing now that self-compassion actually creates less anxiety, less depression. It creates greater courage, confidence and resilience. How we treat ourselves while we do what we do absolutely makes a difference. That if we treat ourselves with love and affection rather versus disdain and indifference that it absolutely matters in the quality of our level of peace and happiness.

We may get better results -- or as good of results -- that other way, but I guarantee you will get healthier, happier, more whole, more honest and authentic people if we have more compassion and love for ourselves.

You know, like, self-improvement is great and important. But self-acceptance is also important. And it's not one or the other; we can actually have them both. We can actually have great achievement and levels of excellence and still be loving and encouraging and supporting of ourselves. But it's a matter of what we're telling ourselves! Are you going easy on yourself? Or are you brutal or a little harsh on yourself? Because it does make a difference.

I love that Eagles song, "Take It Easy." My favorite line is, "*Don't let the sound of your own wheels drive you crazy!*" [Congregation laughs] And it's the sound of our own wheels! Going easy on ourselves or going hard on ourselves is our own wheels creating that! So we can take it easy! We can go easy on ourselves!

Anybody heard of Nightingale? Anybody saw that young lady with cancer who wrote the song called "It's Okay"? She was on *America's Got Talent*. She had breast cancer, and she was really struggling with herself. And she was mad that she was sad. She was sad that she was mad that she was sad ... You know what we can pour on.

And she said it's like people always think that everything has to be perfect and fine and positive. We call it "positive toxicity" these days. And there isn't room and acceptance sometimes for feeling sad. Like, you're not failing or doing something wrong, she said, if you're feeling sad. You're just feeling sad! And just because you're feeling sad doesn't mean you don't have hope or you don't want to do well or you can't be grateful. Life has a whole mix of all kinds of feelings and emotions. And pretending that it only has to be positive is not healthy! It's not a real life!

And so her mission became to be reassuring and loving with ourselves. Being supportive and less judgmental and accepting and embracing ourselves and all the things that we experience. And so she wrote a song called "It's Okay." And the lines are:

***It's okay, it's okay, it's okay if you're lost ...
We're all a little lost, and that's alright***

It's a song of reassurance for ourselves. Of encouraging ourselves. Remind you that you're still great, even when you're not at your best. It's just a part of life. And I just really love and appreciate that!

She did a TED Talk ... she did a TED Talk in Bed. And if you haven't heard the song, Google it. It's called "It's Okay." And Google her. Because it's so inspirational! And her message is so powerful.

Unfortunately, she just died in February. [Congregation moans sympathetically] February the 21st. But I was really touched and inspired by what she taught. Because I think we need a little humanity towards ourselves sometimes. We need a little more tenderness from ourselves. We need to be kinder and gentler and remind ourselves, "*It's okay; you're alright! In fact, you're more than alright; you're pretty darn fine! And you're pretty amazing and wonderful.*" And we're the ones that need to deliver that message for ourselves.

So this was her passion: was five little steps of compassion. The first one is just self-awareness. Be aware what you're feeling. Don't feel bad for what you feel; just let yourself feel what you feel.

The second one is to affirm that you're okay. Even if you didn't have a great day, you're okay. Even if you sucked at something. You can say that in church; it's a spiritual word. [Congregation laughs] And I have to remind myself: it's okay that I said "*sucked*"! [Laughs]

And the third one is to think about: How would you counsel and support a friend going through the same thing? Because I think sometimes we would be more supportive of a friend. But we need to treat ourselves that way.

Another one is: give yourself permission to not be perfect all the time. You know, you can still be wonderful, and life can still be good, even if it's not perfect and we're not perfect.

And the final one is: write a note to your inner child and remind yourself how wonderful you are, as if you were talking to yourself when you were four or five.

You know, life isn't easy. We make mistakes and we get ourselves in all kinds of situations. But thank God that God has given us the gift and the power and the ability to choose. To make decisions and make new choices.

And the three things you need to remember ... The first one is you have the power to choose. You have the power to decide; it never leaves you ever! No matter what situation, you can make a new and better choice. The second one is that decisions make things shift and move that will cause you to have to find acceptance, healing and learning. And finally, have some self-compassion. Be kinder and gentler on yourself. And know that it's okay; you're okay. In fact, you're wonderful and amazing!

And these are the three life lessons and spiritual wisdom that we have gained from this week's "Song of Life." And it is called "Easy On Me." And I hope you'll be easy on you!

God bless you all! [Congregation applauds]

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