

FINDING THE SACRED

Week #7 of a 9-week series, "Finding Yourself"

June 14, 2023

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Alright; you ready for tonight?

Do you ever get distracted? Like, do you ever, like, just get involved in something and you realize ...? Like, when I'm having a day off and Jill and I are doing something -- maybe we're working in the yard, or we're doing something -- about 3 o'clock, 4 o'clock I say, *"You know, I need to go in and just check my email just to see how things are going and make sure there's not an issue or a need or a problem."* And so I'll go in and check my email, and then usually three days later she'll come into the office and go, *"Are you ever coming out?"* [Congregation laughs] Right? Because I don't know about you, but sometimes I get distracted!

And I'm concerned that sometimes I get spiritually distracted. Like, have you ever been involved in something and you knew it wasn't for your highest good? You know you really ... it just wasn't for your highest good. And you ever get so distracted, you just forget to move on?

And I think sometimes it happens to all of us. I think sometimes we're here to learn lessons and to grow and to express more and more God. And I think sometimes we get involved in details in our life that just distract us. And then we forget to take our next spiritual step. And we realize, *"Oh; I missed something that was important. I missed something that I should have had."*

You know, Maslow talked about the hierarchy of needs. He talked about the first level of needs were all the biological needs: air; food; drink; shelter; clothing. All the things that we have to have to be in three-dimensional form in a physical body. And those needs are the basic needs; we have to cover those first.

And then he talked about the next level up were safety needs that we need for protection and security ... order and laws and stability. Freedom from fear. And those safety needs.

Then he said the next level up are love and connection needs. That we needed a sense of belonging and community and connection, and we needed to know that we were in relationship with others. And in those relationships with others, that we found meaning and connection.

Then the self-esteem needs. And that worked both ways: that we needed to hold ourselves in a high level of esteem and we needed to do a level of life where we felt like others held us in esteem, as well.

And he said the final level was self-actualization. And self-actualization is: When we find and realize our true self; our true potential. That we have become the person that we are the most capable of being. We've become the best version of us.

Tonight I want to talk about finding the sacred. Because I believe that, in the busy-ness of life, that there are often distractions.

You know, I've been doing this series about "Finding": finding our power; finding peace; finding love; finding beauty. And tonight I want to talk about finding the sacred. Because I believe that a soul has to find the sacred to be at peace. I believe that one of the issues, one of the conditions that is plaguing our world right now is that, when we don't find the sacred ... When we get so involved in all the details of life and we get involved in all of our jobs and all the "to do" lists, and all the things we feel like we have to get done -- that if we miss finding the sacred, I believe that there's a deep uneasiness that happens within us.

There's a hunger that happens within us and it has to be satisfied. We have to connect with the sacred. And I believe that the sacred wants to connect with us. Like, there's a need on both sides: the divine needs us, and we need the divine. God needs us and we need God. And that we have to stay in that relationship and to experience the sacred all around us, whether it's in church; whether it's in nature; whether it's in friendship. We have to be able to see the activity of God with us and through us. And I believe that, for thousands of years, people have been talking about their connection, their relationship, the stories of them actually experiencing the presence of God.

See, I believe there's two paths in our spiritual life. The first path is the path of faith. And the path of faith is a powerful path. And it's a path of believing. And it's the path where you actually believe in a power greater than yourself; where you believe in God; where you believe that you're connected to this presence and power. And it's the path of believing.

And then the other path is the path of experience. And in the path of experience, you actually experience the presence of God. That you actually no longer believe in God, because you know God. And that's the path of knowledge.

They really are two different paths. And I believe that, for some of us, our soul is so hungry to move beyond the path of faith -- that faith in God -- because our soul wants to experience God. We want to know God. And we want to move from the path of believing in a God -- or believing in God -- to actually knowing God. To experiencing God directly, firsthand, and knowing that we're connected. Knowing that we are one. Knowing that we are created in the image and likeness of God.

And I believe that sometimes we get so distracted by life and all the responsibilities of life and all the things that we are called to do, that sometimes we just forget to make sure that we had our "God moment" today.

And that every day we need to make sure we have our "God moment": that moment that reminds us that God is right there. That we are connected. That we are one. That there's a holy and sacred relationship that's unfolding. And that it's not about the path of the mind and understanding; it's a path of the heart and the soul. Of knowing God: knowing God intimately well. Knowing God at the deepest level.

Reading from Exodus 3:

"Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Mid'ian. And he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. And the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush; and he looked, and lo, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. And Moses said, 'I will turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt.'" And when the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, 'Moses, Moses!' And Moses said, 'Here I am.' And then he said, 'Do not come near, but take off your shoes, for where you are standing is holy ground.'"

See I believe that our soul needs that! Our soul needs that moment where we have to take off our shoes, for where we are standing is holy ground! Where it looks like it's a 7-11 or a Circle K, or whatever it is ... And when we realize, in the midst of this, that it's really holy ground -- that God is fully present, even in a Circle K!

[Feigning someone else talking to him] "*Richard, you can't have a spiritual experience in the Slushy machine at Circle K!*" [Congregation laughs] Maybe that's the problem! Like, that little Slurpee is the abundance of God flowing out to us! And that we've become so conditioned, we miss it!

But what if the sacred is all around us and we're simply missing it? That everything is God winking at us? Like, in our meditation this evening, where I said, "*Can you hear the Spirit of God whispering to your soul, 'Do you see me?'*" And many times we don't even hear the question! Because we're so busy doing all the things; and being responsible; and being adults and getting it done; and getting it done at 60 or 70 or 80 miles an hour. That we're so busy being responsible that we don't hear the question, "*Do you see me?*"

And every moment of every day I believe that God is whispering to our soul, "*Do you see me? Do you really see me?*" Or are you so busy being you that you've missed all that is holy and sacred and divine in every moment? Or are you in the rapture, where it is so profound, that you have to take off your shoes, because you realize that God is fully present at the Circle K. And then they ask you to leave, because no shirt, no shoes, no service. [Congregation laughs] Right?

But it is the dichotomy; it is both! It is: How do we live in this busy, productive world and get all the things all the things that we have to get done? And yet, how do we make sure that, in the busy-ness of our lives, that our soul still gets to be fed; and fed often; and fed well? Because we need our God.

See, we can talk about it. We can talk about God, and we can debate God, and we can disagree with God. Or we can say, "*You know, I think God is this; or I think God is that.*" But the moment we have the profound experience of God, we are no longer on the path of faith. We are on the path of knowing. And in that moment, our soul is deeply, deeply changed. Because at that moment, we know God. We don't have to debate, "*Is there a God?*" We know God!

Reading from John 10:

"How long will you keep us in suspense?"

They were asking Jesus.

"If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.' Jesus answered them, 'I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do are of my Father; I do it in my Father's name, and they bear witness to me. But you do not believe, because you do not belong of my sheep. My sheep hear my voice, and they know me, and I know them, and they follow me. And I give the eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one.'"

I mean, that is one of the most powerful things he said! And we sometimes misinterpret that or misunderstand that. But the reality is that Jesus knew his oneness with God. And that is a soul who knows God! Who no longer believes in God; he knew God. He knew God intimately well!

And that's our challenge; that's our opportunity: is to truly know God. Not to debate God any longer; not to even have faith in God, but to know God because we've cleared the space. We've cleared the space in the busy-ness of our lives so that we can actually experience the Divine right where we are. Whether it's through prayer; whether it's through meditation ... We have this deep soul longing to know our God.

Jesus said in Matthew 6:33:

"But seek ye first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours, as well."

You know, what he says before that is: I know you need all this -- you need clothes; and you need this; you need that. And you're going to need it all. But then he says: But the thing that you need most is -- and don't be distracted! The thing that you need most is the kingdom and its righteousness. And then, once you have that; once you taste that; once you live into that, then everything else will be given to you!

But sometimes we get so busy with all the "stuff" and all the details and all the work and all the "to do" lists and all the "have to's" that we miss the most important part: *"Seek ye first ..."*

Like, how hungry is your soul for God? Has that need been satisfied in you? When you wake up in the morning, do you feel like God is right there? And that every day is an experience of the presence of God? Or are you still hoping and believing and wanting a deeper more meaningful relationship?

Because I believe that it's our challenge of our time is to move beyond the busy-ness of our lives to being soul satisfied. And that, once we're soul satisfied, there is a deep level of peace! But we have to find the sacred! But to find the sacred, we have to be looking for the sacred! We have to be desiring the sacred! We have to be: *"So where's God in this moment? Where's God in my life? Where are the miracles and the healings and the blessings that God is doing right here, right now?"*

And as we look for that -- as we look for the sacred -- we will find it. But we have to be looking for it! We have to be seeking it. And then we will find it.

You know, in the Gospel of Thomas -- which is an uncanonized gospel, and it didn't make the original cut. [Congregation laughs] Right? Many Bible scholars believe that much of the Gospel of Thomas is the actual words of Jesus, but it wasn't a canonized gospel. But reading from Verse 1:13:

"His disciples said to him, 'When will the kingdom come?' Jesus said, 'It will not come by waiting for it. It will not be a matter of saying, 'Here it is' or 'There it is.' But rather, the kingdom of the Father is spread out upon the earth, and people see it not.'"

So here it is! Right? What he's saying is: The kingdom of God is all around us. And we miss it. In some versions, it says, *"Men see it not."* And the implication is that women see it and men are just clueless, right? [Congregation laughs] Just sayin', right? Right?

And it's this idea that that which we need the most -- that which we should be seeking the most -- is actually closer to us than our breath and our heartbeat. But when our focus is on everything else, we miss the most important thing. We miss it!

And so tonight, what I want to challenge you in is this idea of finding the sacred; finding God; finding those moments; finding all the ways that God is showing up in your life. And acknowledging them.

You know, I think for most of us, there was a great movement that happened when Oprah started talking about her gratitude journal. It's probably been almost 40 years ago that Oprah started talking about our gratitude journal. And we all began to get gratitude journals. We began to put more time and energy into being grateful. We'd write our gratitudes and we'd acknowledge our gratitudes. And I think it's fabulous! I absolutely believe it's fabulous!

But I believe that there's a next level. And the next level is: I want you to have your "God journal." And I want you to have a journal of all the ways that you notice God showing up in your life; that you've witnessed God being God; that you've noticed the miracles or the moments or the way that God is twinkling his eye -- her eye -- at us. That we actually see those God moments, because -- as we begin to acknowledge them -- we realize that acknowledging the way that God is showing up in your life actually frees us. It actually satisfies us.

Now, in the Gospel of Luke, similar to the Gospel of Thomas, we read in Luke 12:

"Once Jesus was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming, and he answered, 'The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; nor will you say, 'Look here ' or 'Look there.' For the kingdom of God is among us.'"

See, it's here! We're not waiting for the kingdom. The kingdom doesn't happen after you die -- that you get to go into the kingdom. The kingdom was fully present. Right? The only thing that needs to die is our mindset that we're separate from God. The only thing we have to let go of is the busy-ness of our life that doesn't put God as a priority and that we put everything else ahead of God. And the idea, *"I don't have time to pray; I don't have time to meditate. I don't have time to focus on God! I've got to pay rent."* Or, *"I've got to do this" or "I've got to do that."* *"The kids need this or the kids need that; I've got to do all of this stuff."* And then, if there's time, we fall asleep in the chair [congregation laughs] instead of acknowledging the presence of God.

So how hungry is your soul? How much do you want God?

Many people say that there's a veil that hides God from us. And this veil is the way that we don't fully see or fully participate or fully acknowledge the presence of God. And I think the veil is not a divine construct, but a human construct. We put that veil there so that we can be about all the busy-ness in our lives instead of living from a place and sense of awe and awaken to all that God is. *"Like, some day we'll get to that, but not now. Now I need to make sure I pay rent. Or now I have to make sure that I get this done."*

But the moment we're ready for the veil to be lifted, and to see -- fully see and experience -- the presence of God, the presence of God is there!

And I'm not advocating that we just dump our whole life. But the art of life is being both! It is holding both! It is being in the world but not of it! Being able to do what is ours to do, but to do it in the reverence and the experience of God. It's not to have this and that, but it's: *"How do I invite God into my life? How do I invite God into my work? Into my family? Into my drive across town? Into all the things I have to do in a day? How do I invite God into that so that I make every one of those experiences a more holy and sacred moment? And not me just being upset that I have one more project that I have to do today?"*

Anybody else ever get upset that you have something to do that you didn't want to do? Right? In our busy-ness, sometimes we resent our busy-ness. But what if our busy-ness is the way we come to know God?

There's a story that I've told several times. And I want to close with it. One of the first trips that Jill and I took was to see our friend, Daniel Nahmod, up in Yellowstone. And we'd been driving all day to get up to Yellowstone. And it was about dusk, and we were hungry. And we stopped for food. And I'd been driving, and Jill was going to drive. And so we switched seats. And, you know, in our relationship the passenger is the co-pilot; it used to be the person in charge of maps when we had maps. It used to be the person that was in charge of the food and the radio and all that stuff. So the driver drives, and the co-pilot takes care of all the other things.

So I went and got the food. I brought the food back. I set it on top of the car. I got in; buckled in. Set the radio; set the music. Everything was set. And then a man next to us was honking. And I gave him kind of a snotty look. And he said, *"Look up!"* And I looked up and the sunroof was open, and I see all of our food on the roof of the car. [Congregants laugh] As we're about to pull out. And I realized I'm really terrible at the co-pilot job, right?

And our relationship from that moment on: the idea was that, in the most important moment, you'd better be looking up! Or the food's going to go flying! [Congregation laughs] Right?

And I want you to begin to look in your life -- when you're in your busy moments; when you're being your busy self and getting your stuff done and taking care of your "to do" list -- I want you to stop in the moment and **LOOK UP**. And realize that our soul needs to go to higher ground. That when we get too

lost in the details and all the ups and downs of life, we need to stop and LOOK UP. And we need to experience the presence and power of God.

So you ready for your homework? I want you to have a God journal. I mean, I want you to go and get a \$2 little notebook and I want you, every night before you go to bed, I want you to write the times and the moments that you experienced the presence of God. How did you experience God that day? Was it in a moment with someone else? Was it seeing a flower? Was it a moment of seeing somebody in the street? Was it an interaction that you had at work? How did you experience God that day? And I want you to write it down.

And I want you to see that -- day after day ... If you choose to participate, day after day you're going to see these moments that will literally take your breath away. Where God is showing up in your life over and over again. And as you write it down, and you see it, your ego cannot deny it. That God is fully present in your life. And that, if you tell yourself the truth, you actually no longer need to believe in God, because you know God.

And when you realize that you're having this deep, wonderful relationship with the Divine, you realize that your soul has truly been fed. That God has fed you! And all the times when you get so busy that you miss it, I want you to notice how empty you feel without God.

That, for most of us, we are ready to move on from the path of faith. Because we're ready to know God deeply, intimately, fully as part of every day.

So today, where did you notice God? Where did you see God at work in your life? What was the moment? What was the thing? What was the opportunity to experience the presence and power of God?

Will you pray with me?

I want you to take a deep breath. And I want you to hear the voice of God speaking in your soul. And the activity of God that says, *"Do you see me? Did you notice me today? Did you see my hand at work in your life? Did you see the moments; the beauty; the splendor; the power? Do you see me?"*

And we feel the thrill of being able to acknowledge to God, *"Yes! I saw it! I might not have seen all of it, but I saw it! Over and over again, I saw the way that you're showing up in my life and blessing me fully."*

I am committed to finding the sacred in my life; to looking for it; to uncovering it; to discovering it; to celebrating it; to rejoicing in it; and acknowledging that God is a powerful force in my life. So in all things we look to God, and in all things we give thanks. And so it is. Amen.

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