

THANK YOU, GOD, FOR SURPRISES

Week #3 of a 6-Week "Gratitude" Series

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Shout out to everybody who's watching us online. For all of you who aren't here tonight and are watching us tomorrow morning - we love you anyway. [Congregation laughs]

So I have a question for you: Can you think of your last surprise? You know, the last big surprise you had in your life? Was it a good one; did you like it? Or was the last surprise you had kind of a stinker? Anybody ever have a surprise that you just absolutely loved? That just blew you away, how much fun it was? And can you think of a surprise where you go, "*Oof. I wish I could have passed on that one. I didn't sign up for that one!*" Right?

And I want to talk tonight about surprises. Because I think surprises are really interesting as a spiritual process. And the problem is that sometimes in life, we want to be a little more controlling than is necessary. Sometimes we actually want to be in charge of the entire universe and everyone in it. And we have a deep belief in our wounded self that, if we were in charge of everything, it would be better. Can I get an amen? [Congregation: "*Amen!*"]

Like, do you all have a favorite family member that you just wish you could be in charge of their life? [Congregation laughs] Right? That you could just help them make better decisions than they ever have before?

Some of you have known me a long time. And you know [laughs] one of my learning, growing opportunities has been to let go of control. Right? Because that part of us that has been wounded by life wants to be in charge! It's a little scary if we completely let go and let God. Because we're convinced -- our ego is convinced -- that everything is just going to fall apart all around us.

So it's a question of: How deeply -- how profoundly -- are you willing to trust the process of life? And really exploring, when you look at your own life: Is life getting easier for you to let go of? Or are you noticing that you're holding on to it tighter and tighter, afraid to really let go and let God surprise you?

You know, there's so much in our life that demands that we let go. How many of you can think of a time in your life where you got answered prayer? Where it just worked, right? Answered prayer! Now, the question really becomes: Did the prayer get answered the way you thought it was going to be answered? For me, in my life: When I look at all the times when prayer was answered in my life, it was rarely -- if ever -- answered the way I thought it was going to be answered. It was answered; and a lot of times it was answered in a much better way. But it just wasn't my way!

And most of us, as we pray about things, we have an idea of how we think it should go. And in my experience, it doesn't always go that way! And some of us are still a little ticked off about that! [Congregation laughs] That my way would be a better way; if I was king or queen of the universe for 24 hours, I would get things handled pretty quickly!

And yet, what I want you to see is that it works. It just works. And there's this deep healing that happens within us when we're truly willing to allow the universe to surprise us.

Because how many, when you look at your life -- when you really look at your life -- how many times did it really go the way you thought it was going to go? Right? Did it all work exactly to your master plan? Did every step along the way, did it go exactly the way you thought it was going to go? For most of us, we say, "*No! It didn't go that way! It didn't go even close to the way I thought it was going to go. But it's worked out! In some ways, it's worked out far better than we could have imagined.*"

And I want us to open a space to allow for that unknown. To allow for that sense that we have no idea. You know, and the difficulty is that we tell spiritual people to set goals and to visualize and to affirm and join a Master Mind group. And as we empower people to take these action steps, there is this underlying belief that, if I take all these steps -- if I'm asking in prayer; if I'm visualizing; if I'm affirming the desires of my heart; and I've got my prayer group praying with me -- there's this idea that it's going to go that way.

And all those activities are valid; they're useful; they're sometimes even necessary. But it doesn't mean because we're doing all those things that we now get control of the universe! And sometimes, as spiritual people, it's like, "*Well then, why am I doing all this stuff? Why am I being so clear about my goals and my desires? And I'm writing them down every day, and I'm visualizing them, and I've got my prayer partners praying with me about it...*" And then it still happens.

And I believe that, most of the time, it happens in a way that we did not expect ... and was actually far better than we could imagine. And that we need to allow for this "gap." And the gap is between what you can think and what God can think. It's from what you can create and what God can create. And there's this gap.

And I believe that this gap is what we call surprises.

"I am open and receptive to all the blessings of God."

Will you say that with me?

[With congregation:] *"I am open and receptive to all the blessings of God."*

Let's say it like we actually mean it, one more time.

[With congregation] *"I am open and receptive to all the blessings of God."*

And as we open our minds, each week there's this opportunity that I want you to see how gratitude fits into this process. Because one of the things that happens when we give thanks over and over and over again: It actually deepens our faith. As we give thanks over and over again, we see that it worked out, even when it didn't work out the way we thought it was going to work out.

And by giving thanks over and over and over again, it builds and deepens our faith so that we can actually be in the flow of life ... and not control the flow of life, but actually be in the flow of life and allow life to bless us at the highest level.

Because there is this opportunity that we are facing, and it's a time of great change in our world. And some of us want to go back to where we've been before. And yet, I guarantee if we're willing to move forward, the future will surprise us! And it will bless us in ways that we can't even imagine. And as we open to the mysteries of life -- as we open to the surprises -- that it's going to be better!

"I am willing to be surprised."

Will you say that with me? [Laughs]

[With congregation:] *"I am willing to be surprised."*

Take a breath and let's say it again.

[With congregation:] *"I am willing to be surprised."*

So we have a [video] clip, right? We have a clip. How many of you ever saw the old movie, *Shakespeare in Love*? Oh, I love this movie! Okay, so we have a clip from this movie. Are we ready? Can we roll it?

[Video clip plays]:

HENSLOWE is making his way from the theatre to the marketplace when FENNYMAN and LAMBERT appear at either shoulder and propel him back the way he came. FREES follows behind.

FENNYMAN: This time we take your boots off!

HENSLOWE: What have I done, Mr. Fennyman?

FENNYMAN: The theatres are all closed by the plague!

HENSLOWE: Oh, that.

FENNYMAN: By order of the Master of the Revels!

HENSLOWE: Mr. Fennyman, let me explain about the theatre business ...

(They stop)

HENSLOWE: The natural condition is one of unsurmountable obstacles on the road to imminent disaster. Believe me, to be closed by the plague is a bagatelle in the ups and downs of owning a theatre.

FENNYMAN: So what do we do?

HENSLOWE: Nothing. Strangely enough, it all turns out well.

FENNYMAN: How?

HENSLOWE: I don't know. It's a mystery.

LAMBERT (grumbly): Should I kill him, Mr. Fennyman?

At the point a rising din is heard in the background. A messenger, ringing a bell, is running through the street.

MESSENGER: ...The theatres are reopened. By order of the Master of Revels, the theatres are reopened ...

FENNYMAN is intrigued.

FREES: Mr. Fennyman! Mr. Tilney has opened the playhouses.

FENNYMAN: Yes I heard.

HENSLOWE plays his temporary advantage modestly, shrugging himself free of LAMBERT'S grip.

HENSLOWE (to LAMBERT): If you wouldn't mind ...

HENSLOWE continues on his way. FENNYMAN watches HENSLOWE, curious.

FENNYMAN: Where is the play?

HENSLOWE: Oh, it's coming, it's coming ...

FENNYMAN, reflectively: It's coming.

Okay. So let me tell you the story. So that gentleman who's getting harassed by the loan sharks owns the Globe Theater. And he has borrowed money from those individuals with the idea that the next play is going to cover his debt. Right? So they find out that the theater's been closed because of a plague. Sound familiar? Sounds very similar, right?

So the theater's been closed because of a plague, and they want their money back. And he's in the predicament -- and I love that word: predicament! -- of having to tell them that he has no idea how that money's going to be forthcoming. But he believes it will be.

So they're asking him about it, and he said, *"It's a mystery!"* Right? *"It's a mystery!"* And the moment he gets it out of his mouth, what happens? The town crier comes in and says the theater is now being opened.

And I want you to see how much and how often that is your life. Where you have no idea how it's all going to work out. And when you're in that position, where you have no idea how life's going to work out, there's really two responses. You can work overtime with your mind, trying to figure it out. And you know that you're doing this when you are losing sleep. When your mind is racing so fast trying to look at all the possibilities. And there's a moment -- and it's a spiritual moment, if you will -- where you actually get to the point where you realize that you cannot figure it out. That 99.999% of life is a mystery. And you actually embrace the mystery! You embrace what you cannot know.

And oftentimes, it's that moment where everything opens and changes and transforms right before your eyes. And it's a surprise! It's a mystery!

And our job in spiritual community is to actually equip you (and me) -- us -- with the faith to embrace the mystery. Because how many times in your life has somebody asked you a question, and you thought you should know the answer? "Well, if they're asking me the question, apparently I should know the answer." And the only appropriate answer for life's deeper questions is -- together -- "It's a mystery." It's a mystery!

"How is this all going to work out?"

"I have no idea! It's a mystery!"

"Well, when is this going to change?"

"I have no idea; it's a mystery!"

"Well, when am I going to be healed or blessed? When is everything gonna happen in my life?"

"I don't know; it's a mystery!"

And the souls that can embrace the mystery tend to allow life to move with them and through them in a way that we call Grace. Grace requires the embracing that life is mystery. And your intellect actually doesn't have to know for you to function at a very high level. In fact, those individuals who learn to quiet their mind and embrace the mystery tend to be the ones who are the most adjusted. Because they're not constantly in anxiety.

"I embrace the mystery!"

Will you say that with me?

[With congregation:] *"I embrace the mystery!"*

Alright; I'm going to give you another quote, also from a movie, *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel*. The famous quote:

"Everything will be alright at the end. So if it's not alright, it's not the end."

Right? That's it! [Laughs] That's spiritual truth in a nutshell! Everything will be alright at the end, right? If it's not alright, it's not the end!

And so how many I said this last week. How many of you have ever gone -- because you were worried about what was happening in your book -- moved to the next chapter or the end of the book to read the last chapter so you knew if it was going to turn out all right? Anybody else done that? Alright; it's just me. Alright. Hmmm.

Do you know the difference between linear change and quantum change? Most organizations -- most companies; most individuals -- participate in linear change. And linear change is change that you can manage. Most organizations do 3-5% growth, and linear change is easier to manage. Because you actually set a level of change that you can manage. And so most organizations change in a very controlled way. And that's linear change.

Quantum change is very different. Quantum change means that you're changing at a significant level that isn't actually manageable. Not from your intellect. It's actually ... All you can really do in quantum change is decide you're going to go for the ride and just show up to what's next.

And many of us -- and many things in our world right now -- are going through quantum change. And we want to move them back into linear change so that we can have a higher degree of control. And yet, if we trust this idea that we don't have to know ... that life's a mystery ... that we can embrace surprises ... that it's okay if we even feel that we're out of control ... we can actually move to higher and higher levels of good. Because it's not being driven by our ego.

See, imagine that God wants to give you a life here [holds hand high above his head]. Right? And right now your life is here [moves hand much lower]. Now, if the possibility's here [high] and you're here [low], if you want to do that through linear change, what we have to do is: We have to move that about 30 years. [Congregation laughs] Right? So we can do 3% growth all the way up to that level of change so that we can manage it and make it happen.

Now, what if the possibility was that you could actually this level of life [holds hand high] and you could have it by the end of the year; six months; three months; whatever. Would you be willing to go through that level of quantum change to get to that level of good if it required that you suspended your need to be in control?

See, that's the real promise, right? Is: God is in charge of your life. And the question is: How much do we need to be in charge to feel secure in times of rapid change? Like, your soul picked a time of rapid change to be on this planet. And there's some that are telling us we should go backwards instead of embracing the level of change that's in front of us and trusting that God will take us to higher and higher levels of good if we're willing to let go of control, and just go for the ride.

"I am willing to be surprised!"

Will you say that with me? And you know how tough this is for me, right? [Congregation laughs] You ready?

[With congregation:] *"I am willing to be surprised."*

One more time, like we mean it!

[With congregation:] *"I am willing to be surprised."*

So the question then becomes: If your life could be significantly greater -- if you could be blessed in amazing ways -- and all it requires is for you to trust God enough to be surprised, to let go of control and allow the Holy Spirit to guide you to higher and higher levels of life, would you be willing to do that? Or do you need to move your good 20 years from now so that you can do it at a 3% growth rate so that you

actually feel like your ego was in control of the process that got you there, so that you actually know how to do it? Right?

Because, for some of us, the only thing that is keeping us from being wildly blessed by God is our need to be in control. That the moment we surrender that tendency, God has complete permission to move you to higher and higher and higher levels of life.

So here's five things that I want to play with tonight. Five ways that I think we actually move to the highest level of God's good.

The first one is ... The underlying principle of this is the idea: **I DON'T NEED TO KNOW**. You know, my friend, Daniel Nahmod, has written a song called "I Don't Need to Know." And the whole premise of the universe is: I don't need to know.

Together: [with congregation] *"I don't need to know."*

And it's hard for us! Because our insecurities tell us we should know. But the basis is that I don't need to know; that God knows. That God has got it all worked out. That God has a plan for my life. And the more I have faith, the more I don't need to know and the more I can take this ride into Spirit and live by Grace and trust. That life is just going to bless me in greater and greater ways. So the first idea I want you to play with is: How much do you need to know?

Now, is there something that's causing you anxiety in your life? And what if, tonight, you tell yourself: *"I don't need to know"*? I don't need to know! If I needed to know, God would reveal it. When I need to know, God will reveal it. My job today is just to trust the process and go with the flow. First one: I don't need to know.

Two. In uncertain times, it is absolutely fundamental that we **SHARE OUR FEELINGS**. Like, when we're going through times of great change, you are going to have feelings about that. If you are letting go of control of your life, you are going to have feelings about that. If you don't know what's going to happen next in your life, you are going to have feelings about that. And the most important thing, other than not needing to know, is that when feelings come up, that you have people in your life that you are willing to share that, *"I am having a feeling about this situation. I am scared to death about this"* or *"I am anxious about this"* or *"I really believe that I should know about this."*

And so when all those feelings come up, that you have a way of expressing those feelings so that they don't bite you. Because unexpressed feelings will bite you. That's a spiritual term; I think it's in Exodus somewhere ... where Moses said, "Be careful of feelings unspoken." Erm. Maybe not. [Congregation laughs] Should have been if it's not!

Three. In uncertain times, it's important that we **BREATHE AND STAY IN THE MOMENT**. In the presence of uncertainty, we have to remember to take our deep breaths and stay in the moment. Don't go into the past and all the ugly, scary thoughts from your past; don't go into the future and think about how bad it could get. Stay right here; take a deep breath and stay mindful. Just breathe! Stay in the moment! Stay present in exactly what's going on. Wiggle down into your feet and just stay in the moment.

Four. In uncertain times, realize that life asks to usually **JUST DO ONE THING AT A TIME**. One thing. And we feel like we should be doing 50 things. But usually God guides us to do one thing at a time.

There's a Scripture that says, *"Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet."* Now, if you put a lamp on your feet, how far will that light go? About three feet; maybe two feet; a foot-and-a-half? It's one step. *"Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet"* so that we get to take the next step ... and the next step ... and the next step. And all we get is one step at a time. God does not give us 57 steps. We're not that bright! [Congregation laughs] God gives us one step at a time. And when we do the one step, God reveals the next one ... and

the next one ... and the next one. And we realize that we've been traveling this path and we didn't even know where we were going, but that God had a plan for our life.

Five. In uncertain times, **THE MORE WE GIVE THANKS, THE MORE IT GIVES US CONFIDENCE TO KEEP GOING**. One of the things that always inspired me about the Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, is that when times got hard, the Israelites would tell their story. And they would tell their story about what God had done for them. And they would, over and over again, say, "*Look, this is what God did for us here; this is what God did for us here; and this is what God did for us here.*" Because when they would tell their story, it would remind them that, if God was with them in the past, the chances are very good that God is with you now. That the same God that was with you through all the trials and tribulations of your past, and has brought you to this moment, is with you now.

So the more that we give thanks, the more it builds our faith. And we can walk in greater and greater faith and feel the peace of Spirit. Because the reality is: Your future is going to unfold. The goodness of God is going to reveal itself in and through you. The real question is: Do you want to do it with grace and ease? or do you want to do it with trauma and heartache? That you have control over. That you absolutely have control over.

Whether your future is a graceful, easy expression of the Divine or it's one anxious heartache after another, you get to decide! And the more you decide that you don't have to know; the more you decide just to take your one step; the more you decide to feel your feelings and share them with a friend; the more you decide to take these basic spiritual steps, then we begin to move forward with greater grace and ease. And really, that's what this is all about.

The goodness of God is going to be made manifest in our lives and our world. It is! But it's either going to be done with our gentle cooperation, or despite us. And most of us can think of a time when we were so anxious that we didn't enjoy the process. And hopefully, you can think of a time when you surrendered to God and it was just a beautiful experience.

"I am willing to be surprised."

Will you say that with me?

[With congregation:] *"I am willing to be surprised."*

One more time!

[With congregation:] *"I am willing to be surprised."*

Will you pray with me?

I want you to take a deep breath. And I want you to feel your future out before you. That you have a rich, gorgeous future in front of you. That there are so many good moments; so many blessings; so much fun and joy and abundance out in front of you. And your job today is to say "Yes!" to that. To not put on the brakes. To not make it harder. To not make it scarier than it needs to be. That gorgeous future out in front of you can come to you with just ease and grace. And all you have to decide is if you're willing to be surprised. If you're willing for life to bring you a gorgeous future, even greater than you can imagine.

And you probably won't know how any of it's going to work! And yet, it's all going to work. It's going to work with grace and ease according to infinite Intelligence.

So today, take a breath. Give thanks for your gorgeous future: a blessed, wonderful future. And the spiritual maturity to let it be easy. In the name and through the power of the Living Christ, we give thanks. And so it is. Amen.

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