

THE POWER TO STOP

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So this guy breaks into someone's house at night and starts putting valuables into a bag. And then he suddenly hears a voice that says, "Jesus is watching you." And he's shocked and he's a little stunned. And then he's thinking he must be hearing something; it must be the voice of his mom or his Sunday school teacher, who wouldn't approve of this. So he goes back to robbing and stealing.

A couple of minutes later, he hears again, "Jesus is watching you."

And so he flashes his light towards where he heard the voice and he sees a parrot. And he says to the parrot, "Was that you?"

And the parrot said, "Yeah."

And he said, "What's your name?"

The parrot said, "Moses."

He says, "Moses? What kind of stupid name for a parrot is Moses? What kind of people would name their parrot Moses?"

And the parrot says, "Well, the same people that named their pit bull Jesus." [Congregation laughs] Okay. So ...

This morning I want to talk about the spiritual superpower that we don't realize is a superpower. And that is the power to stop.

How many people have a bad habit or an unhealthy behavior or pattern in your life that you would like to stop? How many people know that your life would get better if you stopped it?

So my question for all of us is: What is it time for us to stop? Every single one of us has something in our lives that would benefit us from no longer doing. Maybe it's stopping worrying so much. Stopping complaining so much. Stopping procrastinating so much. Stopping seeking approval. Stop overeating. Stop drinking. Stop all the drama. I mean, there are all kinds of things; we can go on and on.

We can fill in the blank: My life would improve if I just stopped (_____). In our culture, we live in a "go, go, go; we want action; we want movement; let's make it happen; let's do it now!" So the idea that the best thing we could do in our lives is to stop seems really foreign and unproductive to us. But the truth is: If we can't stop ourselves from certain things, life will always be a struggle. If we can't stop, in fact our life will get worse.

So we need to look and assess our lives and ask, "What is it that I need to stop? What is it that isn't working? What is it that is blocking my own peace and happiness and success?"

Warren Buffett says, "If you find yourself in a hole, stop digging." [Congregation laughs] And the fact is, sometimes we just keep digging.

I read a book this week called *The Power to Stop* by Karen Bentley. And in it she says all of our unwanted behaviors stem from an ego-based impulse to self-destruct. We all have an impulse to self-destruct, which is the root cause of all our bad habits, whether we realize it or not.

I'm sure every single one of us would say, "I'm not self-destructive." But when we look at certain things in our lives, they can be destructive. Like holding on to anger or bitterness or blame. Of being jealous. Engaging in unhealthy habits and patterns. Feeling sorry for ourselves. There are all kinds of things that

really don't help our lives, but are more likely to have a destructive and limiting impact on our lives. Overeating. Drinking too much. Using drugs. There are all kinds of things that we do -- that we engage in -- that actually limit and can be destructive in our lives.

So that's why I say the power to stop is one of the most important things that we can learn, because it's a real life-changer. It will change and transform and open our lives in great and amazing ways.

And her premise is this: That we can move and override from our ego self -- that self-destructive self -- to a higher consciousness to engage in more positive, more wholesome and more prosperous types of behavior.

Karen Bentley tells her story: that she was from a large, loud Italian family. They had all kinds of celebrations. But one of the things they weren't good at was that they all tended to hold grudges collectively as a family. They had vendettas and family feuds within the larger family that they would hold on to for years and sometimes generations. After people died, they were still hated and regretted. And carrying on the family regret was seen as loyal. And they had this philosophy of *"If you're not for us, you're against us."*

So she did not feel in agreement with her mom about one particular issue and that created a huge wedge. And, in fact, her mother felt like it was the worst crime -- that she betrayed her! -- because she didn't support this.

And so with her own personal struggles and her family dysfunction, she started turning to alcohol and food. And she said she used to love pigging out, because she'd feel peace in that moment. She used to love binging. But ultimately what it got her was a bunch of hangovers; being quite overweight; and she said she was seriously unhappy.

She didn't think there would ever be a solution to this, but over time and her work over a 10-year period, she was able to transform this and found a sense of clarity; a sense of freedom; and a sense of healing. And her friends who knew 10 years later said they couldn't believe it was her because she was so positive. And she credits it all to discovering the power of how to stop.

Now this isn't to replace any self-improvement work or therapy or AA, but it is to supplement it. And what I like about this process is that attacks it at four levels: at the mental level; the physical; the spiritual; and the emotional. Because these are deep-seated things that sometimes have a grip on us that really require all parts of us to be fully engaged and committed to it to create this change and transformation that stopping can give us.

So here's the first one. **BODY SKILL.** It's the mental discipline and practice. The first thing we have to do is to make a clear decision and set an intention to stop whatever that thing is. That it requires intention and a commitment to hold that in our mind in a steadfast, unshakeable way.

One of the things that she says is that life energy responds to clear, decisive direction. Somebody once said, *"The world clears a path for those who know where they're going."* That it is important to be clear.

So my question is: Are you clear about what it is you'd like to stop? And are you clear about why it is that you want to stop?

She says here's an intention line to make it easy. She said, *"I break free from (let's call it drama) by healing myself with God's peace and love."*

I break free from (_____) by healing myself with God's peace and love.

And whatever it is for you, it is to set a clear and strong and unshakeable intention.

All things transform and manifest from intention. And the fact is: It's got to be your intention. You are the one; you have that power to change and transform ... but only if you're fully engaged. Only if you're fully committed to transforming your life.

In the Book of Matthew, Jesus says, *"You shall say to this mountain, 'Be lifted up and thrown into sea.'"* And it's saying: You shall take this challenge or addiction or ability to not stop and it will be thrown into the sea. That's the power we have! But only if we are fully committed and engaged to it.

Somebody once said, *"If it is to be, it is up to me."* And it is important to get help. It is important to get support. But all the help and support in the world won't make a difference unless we are owning it. Unless it's our own determination.

Nobody can do our push-ups for us, as beautiful a thought as that is! [Congregation laughs] Nobody can do our push-ups for us. Martin Rutte said, *"You have to do for yourself and you can't do alone."* So we can't do it alone! But you still have to do it for yourself. You have to be the driver; you have to be the decider.

The truth is: We all have areas where we act in self-destructive, limiting ways, and we all have the power to rise above it. We all have the power to move that mountain and transform it. But it takes work. It takes work!

And why? Because we're going to slip up. Why? Because we're going to make mistakes. Why? Because we're going to have to start over. And that's why the mind being so intentional and steadfast and clear is important. Because it's going to help us keep coming back on those times when we slip.

One of the things that's an important thing for us is to understand that, any time we're engaging in watching too much TV or numbing out or procrastination, it's because there's something we're not willing to deal with. There's some wound or pain or hurt that we would rather have temporary relief from, or distract from, rather than dealing with it. We think something in us is so painful, we don't want to look at it. That we don't want to face it.

But the truth is: We can't go any further until we accept that this is what's going on. That there is some hurt or pain in me that I'm not willing to deal with, and we need to just own that and say, *"This is where I am right now"* with no shame; with no blame or judgement. Just, *"This is where I am."*

Because the truth is: Every single one -- every single person -- is here to heal something. There is something inside every ... We have gifts to share and incredible things to do AND we also have something in us that needs to be healed. And if it isn't accepted and faced, we're never going to be able to transform it. We're always going to look for ways to duck and find a way to avoid or sedate those feelings."

So we need to ask ourselves: What is the feeling that I get when I want to stop this and I won't let myself stop it? What is that feeling like? What is that deeper wound? What is that feeling and pain that I want to avoid? And as we embrace that -- not with shame, but with compassion and understanding and asking, *"What is this trying to tell me? How is this trying to heal me?"* -- that the process really begins.

Now, we would all agree that when there's life energy that's happy and positive, it's easy to be present to it. But when it's chaotic and confusing and deeply painful, we don't want to be a part of it. But we have to be a part of it. Because that is the only way it can be processed so it can be transcended.

And so that's the first thing: We have to fully engage our mind with a strong, unshakeable intention and a willingness of being aware of, *"What is that?"* And accept what it is that we're hurting and dealing with.

BODY SKILL. The second one is to engage our body. Because physically, when we have more energy, we just feel better. The mind is sharper; it diffuses tension and energy. Like, could you imagine just trying to change with only your mind alone? But you add your body in there, and it adds a vibrancy and energy. And when you treat your body well, and you're healthy and exercising, it gives you more of the optimism and the positive energy. And it's like a double-barreled approach to be able to help ourselves.

And so in the same way we set a daily intention -- writing it down three times; saying it three times; and even visualizing ourselves turning down or turning away that bad habit -- that we need to exercise daily. That it's got to be a daily approach of some kind: strength, aerobics, stretching, whatever it is. Getting your body active is a vital and important thing.

Something I added to the body and the physical is to set boundaries. To set a boundary of not going to any bars; or not hanging out with your friends who love to party and drink; or not going to an all-you-can-eat buffet. Or not -- I don't know -- sitting in front of the TV during the day, or sitting on the couch. There's some way for us to support ourselves by physically not putting ourselves in a position where we are vulnerable. It is an act of support and care for ourselves on a physical level.

So mental, physical ...

HEART SKILL. And the next one is our heart. It's from that emotional area. And it is about getting ourselves to feel happy and positive; focusing on the joy; focusing on the love in our lives. And asking ourselves the question: *"So what would make me happy about stopping? What would be the feel-good benefits if I stopped engaging in this particular activity? And how much love do I feel in my life for myself and for others?"*

The more we can bathe ourselves and bask in the positive energy and emotions of our lives, that definitely helps keep us up, as well.

And so something -- as I already mentioned -- that we are all here to heal something, and the thing that heals that we all absolutely need, that is the most powerful healer, is self-love. When we are struggling in our lives, the thing we need the most is not to beat ourselves up; to judge or shame ourselves. It is to express love and support and compassion.

I would say self-love is the thing that holds us all back from our healing and transforming, including stopping the thing that we want to stop.

We are always told that love is unconditional, but in reality -- when we live it -- we see that it is very conditional. It's, *"You behave the way I want you to behave, and I will love you. And if you don't behave the way I want you to, well ... not so much."* [Congregation laughs] We see it over and over. And it sends a message that *"I'm not loved and I'm not good enough ... so I need to please. I need to impress."* Taller, prettier, or whatever we think it is that has to be so that we will get attention. So that we will get love. So we will "earn" that love and that care and that respect.

And dealing from that place, five feet below, makes it harder to live our lives fully and not be always seeking approval. Not always trying to be good to "prove" ourselves to ourselves and others.

We have heard that God's love is unconditional. How many people believe that God's love is unconditional? And so we believe that, and that means that God loves us whether we fail or succeed. Whether we win or lose. Whether we're tall or short. Whether we're rich or poor. Whether we're Black or White. Whether we're Republican or Democrat. Whether you live in Scottsdale or Ahwatukee. [Congregation laughs] I mean, God loves us!

And so the thing is: Can we extend that unconditional love to ourselves? To love ourselves even if we fail or if we succeed. To love ourselves whether we win or lose; if we're tall or short. Whatever it is, can we

give ourselves that unconditional love? Because I'll guarantee you: Could you imagine if we lived every day believing that we are absolutely unconditionally loved how differently we would live? We would live so freely ... that we wouldn't have to prove anything to win anybody's love. We would just be fully who we are and be living life in the most abundant way. If we really loved ourselves, would we really engage in destructive behavior that would be hurting us? And limiting our own happiness and success? I would say that the more we love ourselves, the better we would treat ourselves; the better we would focus on the good things in our lives.

And so, from a heart perspective, it is to focus on the joy and the happiness of what stopping is going to do, and then bring healing into our lives by giving ourselves unconditional love and unconditional support and unconditional encouragement with ourselves. Because as we begin to expand in love, we will feel whole. We will feel more complete. We will feel more fulfilled. And we will live our lives more joyously and abundantly.

SPIRIT SKILL. And so the last one is your spiritual discipline and practice. You know, our work is really to transcend the ego and to really unify ourselves in the Mind of God. To unify ourselves in spirit; to be one in God. Every time we stop and let go of things that are not of our highest good, we realign with the truth of who we are. and that is such an important thing.

And one thing to do is to discover that peace of God that surpasses all human understanding. That, in the midst of all the challenges, we can stop and feel God's peace by just being still. And just knowing our oneness. Letting go of all the things ... And even if it's just for a moment here and a moment there, it is the most worthwhile thing we could do ... is to unify our mind with the Mind of God and feel that peace that surpasses all human understanding.

You know, stopping is not a loss; it's not a sacrifice. It's a huge gain! It is a great gain of freedom. It's a gain of peace of mind. It's a gain of our personal power back again to create something greater and better for our lives. Stopping affords us the benefit of three things: healing ourselves with self-love; reclaiming our personal power to shape our lives the way we want; and feeling a spiritual awakening in the sense of our divine purpose.

Here is what Karen Bentley says. She says, *"The unwanted habit is essential, because it provides the needed resistance and a practical daily reason for getting spiritually strong."*

Is that bold or what? So it's saying the thing you're avoiding the most -- the thing you're struggling most and having a hard time with -- is the thing that you need to have the greatest soul awakening. The thing we're running from is the thing that has the gift that can awaken -- if we're willing to boldly step into it. To step into it with our mind and our intention and our body; and with an open heart and a heart of self-love and compassion as we move through that process.

Let me give you a Scripture line that basically says this same thing. It's from the Book of James, Chapter 1, Verse 2 and 4. And here's what it says. It says, *"Count it all joy, brethren, when you face trials of any kind. For the testing of your faith produces perseverance. And let perseverance finish its work in you so that you know that you are whole, complete and lacking in nothing."*

We are here to do spiritual work. And it isn't always easy, but it's powerful and it's hugely liberating and transforming if we're willing to go to it. I love when it says, *"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death ..."* Because we've got to walk through some valleys in life; that's just the deal. There will be trials and tribulations, and we have to walk through it and face it. And those things can elevate us at the highest level of our spiritual awakening, if we do it.

Stopping is a vital practice. It's not fun and easy, but it is one of the most powerful and liberating. Stopping is important.

Kind of reminds me of this big-city lawyer who was driving through this small town. And he gets stopped by the local, small-town sheriff. And the lawyer's a little arrogant. He says, "What'd you stop me for?"

He said, "Because you didn't come to a full stop at that stop sign."

The lawyer said, "What do you mean? I slowed down; I checked it out. It was safe and I moved on."

Sheriff said, "But the law says you've got to stop."

Lawyer says, "Any fool could see that is safe enough, what t did. It seems ridiculous!" He said, "I will pay the ticket if you show me some functional difference between stopping slowing down."

So the sheriff asks the lawyer to get out of the car. and as soon as he gets out, the sheriff takes his baton and starts whacking him on the shoulder really hard and fast. And the lawyer says, "Are you nuts? What are you doing?"

And the sheriff says, "So ... do you want me to stop? Or do you just want me to slow down?"

[Congregation laughs]

Minus the violence, I thought it was a pretty good joke! [Congregation laughs]

Every one of us has some negative patterns and some unhealthy habits that limit our peace and our freedom and our happiness. And they're so deeply engrained that they require the four-pronged approach; every aspect of our being. It requires our mental intention; it requires our physical fitness; it requires our deeper spiritual practice; it requires opening our heart space with great love. And if we're willing to do that work, it will bring healing through self-love. It will increase our personal power. And it will deepen our spiritual connection and have our lives be more free and fulfilling than we can imagine. But we must be willing to practice the power to stop.

God bless you all!

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