

A WORD FROM GOD

Wednesday, Dec. 27, 2023

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Have you ever had a friend or a co-worker -- or maybe a boss -- say to you, *"Can we have a word?"* [Congregation laughs] And when somebody says that to you -- *"Can we have a word?"* -- like, do you get excited? [Congregation laughs] It's like, *"Oh, great! Let's have a word!"* [Congregation laughs] *"I so want to have a word with you!"* Right? Because for most of us it just is scary. It's like, *"No! I don't want to have a word with you. I don't want to have a word with anybody! Let me do all the talking; you can just listen!"* Right?

But tonight, I want to talk about a word from God. Because what I truly believe is that we could have a better relationship with the Infinite. I truly believe that we could listen more, follow closer, and have a much better life because of it.

And I think that, for many of us, God is a concept. You know, it's a concept of a God somewhere, right? But it doesn't always feel like a real presence that is guiding and directing our life in the little minute details of our lives.

And in this last Wednesday of the year, I'm going to challenge you. That if God is a concept, or if God is distant, or if God is "out there" somewhere, I want you to feel that living presence and power of God that will guide you and direct you in the smallest detail of your life ... if you are willing to listen.

Have you heard of this idea of walking in grace? This idea of walking in grace is this concept that, every step we take, we are in the grace of God; that we're in the flow of the Divine; that it's just the hand of God goes before us to clear our path, to open doors, to make things happen. And I believe that, for all of us, that there's this higher level of good that we could walk in. But we can't walk in that level of grace -- or that level of goodness -- if God is somewhere "out there."

And what would it look like in your life if in every moment, every day, you felt profoundly guided in whatever your next step was? Because sometimes people say, *"Well, I'm not sure."* It's like, *"Well, then listen!"* *"Well, yeah, but God doesn't speak to me."* Yeah; God does! We just have to kind of get quiet enough to listen and actually trust that we are being guided.

So tonight, as we complete this last Wednesday night service -- as we make room to move into this new year -- I want you to truly look at the power that you have to access infinite wisdom and intelligence. I believe that God wants a word with you. I believe that, no matter what you're going through -- no matter what is in front of you in your life; no matter what the situation or the condition is in your life -- God can guide you and direct you through all of it. And all we have to do is listen!

Do you know they're using AI now -- artificial intelligence -- to predict the future, to predict the stock market, lottery numbers, weather, gambling on football games, traffic, crime? They're using AI right now to try to discern over and over again what's going to happen next. And what if I tell you that I believe that God -- the Spirit of God in you -- has that power to guide and direct your life in the most minute detail if you're willing to listen?

Now, the difficulty is: you can't be driving your life from your intellect. I mean, you can, right? But it's just not divinely guided then. Because you're making the decisions; you're looking at what's going on in your life; you're analyzing it; you're looking at what's good or better or best for you and your life. And you're making choices based on how your intellect perceives your life and your world.

And there's nothing wrong with that! Ninety-nine percent of the people in the world are intellectually driven ... are making choices of their life based on how it looks intellectually. But there's a very small

percentage of people that have decided: *"I want to put God first."* And they are literally willing to ask God: ask for guidance, ask for direction, ask in the moment what the highest and the best is.

Now, one of the challenges with this way of being is that you kind of have to check what you want to do. Because sometimes what we're guided to do is not what we want to do. Has everybody had that experience already at least once? Which what you want to do -- what you feel guided to do -- is clearly not what you want to do? And it's like that joke where, you know, the guy is hiking and he falls off the cliff and he grabs a root from a tree and he's hanging on and he says, *"Okay, God, if you're really there -- if you're really present in my life -- I need help. What do I need to do?"* And the voice says, *"Let go."* And the guy goes, *"Is there anybody else up there?"* [Congregation laughs] *"Like, can I get a second opinion?"* Right?

Because if we're truly going to live by grace, we have to be willing, over and over again, to trust that which we don't completely understand. And it's hard! It is so hard to live by grace when your ego steps in and tells you you're an idiot for doing it. Has everybody had that experience? Where you want to live by grace and your ego says you're just stupid for doing it? Saying, *"Nobody does that. Nobody does that! You're too vulnerable. It's too weird!"*

You just do what you want to do and it all works out, even though we know sometimes it doesn't. And over and over again, what would it look like if, in every moment -- every experience -- you simply got quiet and allowed the Spirit of God to guide you and direct you? That we could literally walk in grace! We could literally live in grace. That God -- in infinite wisdom and intelligence; knows the past, knows the future, knows everything -- would literally walk with you, making the decisions of your life, and that you could trust that to move to a higher level of good. That you could actually trust that level of infinite wisdom and intelligence to move to a higher level of good. And it actually becomes easier because you no longer have to figure it out! You just have to listen.

And as you listen, you see over and over again, *"Oh, it worked!" "Oh, it worked!" "Oh, it worked!"* And as it works, you're actually building faith. Your faith becomes greater and greater and greater, because you see it working. And you put it to work over and over and over again. And it actually gives you the strength to do it -- not in just the easy situations of life -- but in the times when it's hard. Because sometimes it's hard to trust God!

There are moments when it's like, *"Please, let's go a different direction!"* Even Jesus said, *"Not my will, but thy will be done"* when he wanted to bail out and not take the next step that was in front of him.

So this isn't an easy life, but it's profound with its blessings. So how do we access this greater level of faith? of good?

Well, the first thing I think we have to do if we're going to access a higher level of good as we move into this new year, **we actually have to believe that we have a divine connection with God.** We have to believe that infinite wisdom and intelligence is actually present for us. That God just isn't a concept -- a universal concept -- but that God is a presence in all of our lives that will guide us and direct us if we are willing to ask for it; if we are willing to align with it; if we are wanting that level of relationship.

Because you don't have to have that level of relationship! You can keep God as a distant God. God's out there somewhere and God's doing God's thing, and you're doing your thing. [Congregation laughs] And you maybe talk on holidays or special occasions or, you know, right before you hit the center divider, you say, *"Oh, by the way, is there a way can I get out of this situation?"* But it's not really an intimate relationship. It's kind of like, God does His thing; I do my thing. And, you know, we're good with that. You know, we're nice to each other. We're cordial. [Congregation laughs] You know, I send him a Christmas card. We're good. [Congregation laughs] You know?

But when it comes to that intimacy, we have to believe that it's available. And it's kind of a stretch. It's kind of a stretch to believe that infinite wisdom is available to all of us. That the infinite wisdom of God actually loves each one of us enough to be fully present in our life to guide us through everything. It's like, "Why would God have time for that? Does God really care about me enough that God would guide me and direct me in everything?"

And I believe the answer is yes. I believe the answer is absolutely yes: that each and every one of us is so important that God will devote whatever is necessary to assist you in living your best life.

And I think that, over and over again, Jesus taught this. You know, he talked about when one of the sheep escapes from the shepherd, that the shepherd actually leaves the 99 to go find the one. Like, that's who you are to God! That when you're lost -- when you're distant, when you're struggling, when it's not going well for you -- God is fully present to guide you in grace to bring you into a higher level of good. And all we have to do is actually believe that it's available to us and are willing to participate in it.

Because we have to be willing. Because in the entire universe, the number one principle is that we all have free will. So if we're not willing, the universe is available ... but if we're not willing, it all goes on, but we're not participating in it. But the moment we believe and are willing, then we can access this infinite goodness that is always ready for us, always available to us.

And then the next step. **At some level, we have to ask for it.** We have to ask for help. Because it's the fulfillment of us believing and being willing is for us to say, "Okay, show me the way." Ask for help. "Okay, Spirit, what's the best way for me to walk through this situation?" Or we have to say, "Okay God, I need help right here, because I have no idea how this should play out. I don't see a workable situation in any of the choices. I absolutely need help right here."

And the moment we ask for it, heaven and earth begins to move on our behalf. But we have to ask.

And then three: **We have to follow through.** That if we ask for help, and we don't use it, it doesn't build our faith. But as we ask for help, and the way is made clear, and we actually execute the help that is provided for us, it actually builds our faith. And so we become more and more inspired to allow more and more of our life to be God-focused and God-led and to really truly live by grace.

So as we end this year, I want you to really open a space to say:

How willing am I to move into the new year being led by God? Could I really put my ego in check and say, "Thank you very much for all the decisions you've made this point in my life, but from now on, I'm going to make the decision that everything I'm about to say and do -- to the very best of my ability -- I want God to be in charge of"? And I want to really see -- if I did this for 365 days -- where I would be from where I am now. I want to put this to the test so that, every day when I wake up, I say, "Okay God, what do I need to know today? Guide me, lead me, direct me today. My answer is 100 percent yes! Wherever you want to take me, I want to be so curious about where you want to take me in my life that I am willing to follow whatever guidance and direction you give me, no matter how crazy it may seem."

Now, do I promise you there's going to be some days when you get crazy guidance? Where it does not make sense?!? And it's like Spirit says, "Okay, let's see. You're gonna play; let's play." And you're like, "No, God; come on, give me a plan B here. Or even a C or a D." And it's like, "No! Put it to the test!"

See, everything in life has a beginning, a middle, and an end. Everything. And we love the beginnings. We're not so keen on the endings. Right? Sometimes when we get to the endings and things, people want to bail out and just race to the beginning. Like, "Ooh, this is getting messy. I don't want an ending. I just want a new beginning."

But the ending defines the new beginning. That we can't have great new beginnings if we don't have great endings.

So in the next few days -- you've got a few days to say, *"Where in my life do I need to have some endings so that I'm ready for the new year? Where in my life am I hanging on to good that's really not my good anymore? That's not where I'm supposed to be in the new year?"*

And to allow ourselves to have some great endings so that we can have some great new beginnings. Because you can't take old, tired endings and drag them into the new year and have your best year. It just doesn't work that way. You actually have to let go. And sometimes that's the hardest part: is deeply, truly letting go of those things that are no longer working. And especially those things that are good.

Have you ever had something that was good and you wanted to hang on to it just because it was good? But you knew it wasn't great. And you knew that their God was promising you something great, but to get to something great, you had to let go of the goodness. And it's like, *"No; this is pretty good. These shoes fit pretty good. They may not be great, but they're good."*

But those things in our life that are just good -- those are the ones we have to watch the most. Because those are the ones that will steal great from us all the time. That we keep hanging on to the outfit or the car or the situation or the thought or the belief that's good, but it's not great. And God created great. God knows how to create great. But we have to be willing enough to let go of the good to open the space for what's great, so that our life can only get better and better and better. And sometimes we're hanging on to the good. And sometimes the good minus -- because it's what we know. And to not make room for all that is great and all that could be.

So let's have good endings. What do you need to let go of in a new year? What do you need to forgive? What do you need to hold on to? And what's the most important thing?

You know, what's interesting for me is that every year is a spiritual process. You know, we go through a whole year and just at the last moment -- the last, like, like 40 days -- we have Thanksgiving. And I think that that's just fantastic. That we have a whole year of all these activities and all these things go on. And in the last 40 days of the year, we have this opportunity to spend some time in profound gratitude. To really give thanks for everything that has happened in all the other months.

And it's really, always the last thing, right? It's the last little bit of November and into December when you have this opportunity to give thanks. And then after we give thanks, then we move into Christmas and we celebrate the holy birth. And I don't think that's a coincidence. That as we give thanks, we celebrate the holy birth. And then the very next thing -- a week later -- we start all over again.

Now, you might think, *"Well, maybe it would be better if we started with gratitude, started with Christmas, and then we'd have a whole year of this spiritual experience."* Well, maybe. But I really believe that, as it comes in the end of the year, there's a reason for that. Because it invites us into the new year from a new point of view, from a higher spiritual point of view.

And there's five points about the Jesus' birth story that I want to talk about tonight in closing. And I know I'm talking a lot tonight. And those five points are really what I believe are the spiritual significance of Jesus' story and why it's so important that I talk about them tonight.

The first thing I want you to see in Jesus' birth story is that it all begins with the angels speaking.

Angels speak to Mary; they speak to Joseph. They speak. And what's interesting for me is: those that are willing to listen to the angels and actually put that into work -- to listen for grace, to listen for guidance and actually use what the angels said to them -- created the whole birth story, created the whole experience.

And I want you to see in your life, the angels will literally speak to you. God will speak to you. God will guide you; God will direct you; God will speak to you.

The second thing that I think we should realize about the birth story is that the star shines. And they called the wise men “wise men” because they followed the star when it was shining. And, for me, the star represents the guidance of God, the direction of God, the path of God. And that we are wise when we follow the shining star; when we allow the angels to speak to our soul -- speak to us directly. And then when God guides us -- when God gives us that shining star -- that we have the good sense to follow it.

Because are you ever amazed at how many people in your life do not seem to have the wisdom to follow the guidance that is right in front of them? Have you ever done that? Like, the guidance is right in front of you! And it's like, “*Don't see it; can't be for me.*” Right?

Angels speak. The star shines.

And the third aspect of Jesus' birth story is every member of the story -- whether it's the shepherds, the wise men, Joseph, Mary -- everybody has to go on a journey. Everybody has to move. That when you're being guided and directed by God ... Once the angels whisper in your ear, it is required that you move on that guidance. That you don't get to stay home and watch Hallmark movies. [Congregation laughs] I don't care how good they are, right?

That the whole point of the birth story is that, once you're guided, and once the star shines for you, you have to move. And over and over again, you have to move. You have to be willing to take a journey. You have to leave the thought process of the old thoughts behind. You have to leave the old attitudes, the old beliefs, the old ideas. You have to move and you have to make room for what's new.

Four: you have to be prepared to give your gifts. If you look at Jesus' birth story, everybody gave their gifts: Joseph, Mary, everybody. The wise men, the shepherds; everybody gave their gifts. If you want to access the next level of good in your life, you have to give all your gifts. You have to give your gifts in greater and greater ways; maybe ways that will scare you, but you have to give your gifts.

And the fifth point I think of the birth story is they all had to go home in a new direction. Like, once you've had a spiritual experience, once you've had an awakening, once God has spoken to you, you can not go back the same way.

Reading from Matthew 2 – and this is to the wise men: “And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.” And speaking to Joseph, Verse 13: “*And now they had departed. Behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, ‘Rise, take the child and his mother and flee to Egypt. Remain there till I tell you, for Herod is about to search for your child to destroy him.’ And he rose and he took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt. And he remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: ‘Out of Egypt, I have called my son.’*”

See, I want you to see tonight, right? That, over and over again, Spirit will speak to you. Spirit will guide you. Spirit will call you into a new land -- into a new level of good, to a new level of abundance, to a new life. But we have to be willing to travel and not go back the ways we've always come. To be willing to invest in that which we're not sure of so that we actually are required to put God first.

You ready? This is a new year. I believe that there is so much hope and promise available to each and every one of us! But we actually have to hold it in a new way ... not just put it in the old wine skins or the old ideas or the old consciousness. We have to be willing to allow God to guide us in directions that we've never been before. And it may be scary! And you may not know how to do it! And that's why you

have to listen to God over and over again, and walk close to God. And as we do that, I believe you're going to have your best year ever. Because there's a level of good for all of us that we've never known before -- that is infinite good.

Will you pray with me?

I invite you to open your mind, your heart, your soul to the activity of God. To feel the presence, the power, and to know that God is at work in your life for good and greater good. So in the name and through the power of the Living Christ, we give thanks. And so it is. Amen.

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