

WHAT IS HEAVEN?

Week #5 of a series on "Unity's Foundational Teachings"

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If you had to guess, how many spiritual directions do you think there are? [Congregant: "Infinite."] Maybe, I think there's basically three. Three directions. And those three directions are either upward -- and you're expanding into greater levels of light and joy and peace and peace. And your soul is getting greater and greater as you expand into the higher and higher levels of God's good. That's the upward direction. There's also a downward direction where your life is getting darker and scarier and smaller and uglier. And it's just not pretty.

How many of you have experienced both directions, right? It's kind of ... And we know that they are completely opposite directions. When you're going in a downward direction and your life is getting smaller and darker and scarier, like, you remember that. If you've actually experienced that, you remember how dark and scary that time was. And you do not forget that experience, because it's serious, right? Not only are you experiencing it, but the people that love you know that that's the direction you're going, and they can tell.

The upward direction is very different, right? It isn't contracting; it's expanding. And it's becoming happier, more joyous, more loving, more filled with light, more filled with goodness, more filled with God. And it's an expansion. Like, every day it's bigger; there's more good; there's more God; there's more love; there's more light. Every day is getting better and better, and you can feel it in every cell of your body -- that you're on the right track, that your life is moving in a goodly direction. And we still have bumps and there are still up and downs, but you know that you're on the right track and that your life is goodly.

And then there's kind of the stuck place. And the stuck place is where we just have kind of stopped. And it's not getting worse, but it's not getting better. And sometimes we're too afraid to move forward. We're too afraid to move on. We're too afraid to let go. We're in this stuck place and, you know, we can spend a lot of time in this stuck place. You know, weeks and months -- even years -- can go by and we're kind of too afraid to let go and do the inner work that we know we need to do. We're too afraid to forgive or let go. And we're too afraid to let go of our drama. So life's not getting worse, but it's not getting any better. And that stuck place is hard.

And if you're feeling like you're in that stuck place, I think the greatest thing that we can do is tell God you're ready to move forward. And to let go. And to be willing to ask God for help to move your life forward, because Spirit knows exactly how to move your life forward. And if you're in a dark place tonight -- like, if your life is getting smaller and darker and scarier; if you're in a dark place tonight, then God absolutely knows how to turn your life around and turn you around.

And the more that you ask God to be turned around -- the more you ask for more light and love and joy and peace and that you're ready to let go of the drama and the story and the problems and the issues ... And as you're in that dark place and you're sick and tired ... Because have we all had that experience of being sick and tired of wherever we are? And it's like, *"I don't know if there's a better place, but I can't stay here."*

And in that moment where we ask God for help, there's actually help. And we really don't know how God does that. We don't know how that infinite Intelligence and Wisdom and Love in our hour of need -- when we hit our bottom -- can actually help us; lead us to a better way, to a better place.

But those three directions of upward, downward, or stuck really are kind of all that we get. We're either moving in a goodly direction and our life is getting better and expanding and there's more love and light and joy. Or we're going into a scary, darker place. Or we're in that stuck place. And really, that's all we get! And the key is to become conscious enough in our own life to actually know where we are.

The hardest thing is to be in a stuck place and not even know you're in a stuck place. [Laughs] Or to be in a scary, dark place and realize or think that that's as good as it's ever going to get.

Because I want you to have a low tolerance for pain. Like, a high tolerance for pain is not helpful on your spiritual journey. It just keeps you stuck! When we have a low tolerance for pain, we are willing to ask for help because even a little bit of pain causes a course correction. A little bit of pain is like, *"Ooh, that was too much. If there's that much pain, I'm going the wrong way."* And then we change; we make a move; we make a new choice. We ask God for help. We let spirit lead us and guide us. And we put God first in our life. And, over and over, it gets better.

So tonight I want to talk about heaven. And I think those three spiritual directions are fundamentally important that we understand in our context of: What is heaven like? Because heaven is not a stuck place. Heaven is not a dark, small, scary place. Heaven is the experience of an ever-expanding relationship with the Divine.

So in heaven, what's the most important thing? I kind of focused on it during the meditation if you stayed awake for the whole meditation, right? So what's the most important thing in heaven? God! God is the most important thing! Every bit of heaven is about proclaiming, celebrating, rejoicing in God. Right?

And then we come into the world, and man! There's a lot of things that can be a distraction. There's so many things that can scare us and impress us and cause our heads to turn and spin around. And yet, what I want you to see is: in heaven, God is the most important thing.

Richard Bach wrote in *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*, *"Heaven is not a place; it is not a time. Heaven is being perfect."*

Okay. [Laughs] I debated this quote, but I'm going to use it. Belinda Carlisle sang this: *"Oh, baby, do you know what it's worth? Oh, heaven is a place on earth. They say in heaven, love comes first. We'll make heaven a place on earth. Oh baby, heaven is a place on earth."* Somebody was born in the -- or at least it was alive in the 80s -- to remember that song, right?

C.S. Lewis said that joy is serious business in heaven. Emily Dickinson said, *"Earth is crammed with heaven."*

And I want you to just open your mind to the possibility that there is room in your life for more God. That we get, from time to time, distracted by so many things. But as God becomes the most important thing in our life -- and we spend more and more of our time focused on God -- what I want you to see is that you move in a heavenly direction.

Jesus said it this way in Luke 17:20. *"Being asked by the Pharisees, 'When will the kingdom of God be coming?' He said, he answered them, 'The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed.' Nor will we say, 'Lo, it is here or there.' For behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you."*

He didn't say it's within you, as sometimes we think. He said, *"It's in the midst of you"* ... meaning it's within you and, yet, all around you. You're swimming in it! It's completely there! And yet we don't recognize it. We don't see it.

In the Gospel of Thomas, an uncanonized gospel, it's recorded in Verse 1:13: *"Rather, the kingdom of the Father is spread out on the earth and men see it not."*

And the implication is that every woman sees it and men just don't get it. [Congregants laugh] Right? Yay! Right? *"The kingdom of the Father is spread on the earth and men see it not."* That's why we don't take directions, right? That's why we get lost, right? [Congregants laugh]

And yet the opportunity here is that heaven -- the experience of God, the Kingdom of God -- is fully present, and all we have to do is see it. We have to see it!

So can you think maybe for a moment how much time you spend thinking about things that scare you? Anybody? Right? How much time and energy do you think about things that you want? That, you know, like, *"Oh, I want that, I want that, I want that!"*? And what would happen if in your life, God became the most important thing?

In Matthew, Jesus is recorded it saying, *"Seek ye first the kingdom and its righteousness, and everything else is yours."* Everything else is yours!!!

So what would happen in your life if God truly became the most important thing?

One hundred and fifty years ago, Unity was started by Charles and Myrtle Fillmore. And at that time -- 150 years ago -- heaven was considered a place, right? And it was a place where good people went. And hell was a place. Hell was a place where bad people went ... and they went there for eternal punishment. And you had to decide -- 150 years ago -- whether you were cutting the mustard or not. Because if you didn't have your act together, right? Bye-bye, Charlie. Right?

And still in our world today, there's people that believe that, right? That there's cut; you either make the cut or you don't make the cut. You don't make the cut? *"Uh, we love you, but ..."* Right?

And so what Charles and Merrill Fillmore were about was about looking at this thing from a new point of view, and inviting people to see it -- not as a city of gold somewhere in the sky -- but as a spiritual process. And their teaching was radically different. Right? Because for 2,000 years the church has been scaring people into being good. Because they did not believe that they would be good unless they were scared to death. Right?

So there wasn't a natural belief in the goodness of people. They had to be scared that, if they were bad, they were going to burn in hell. And that's just weird! Like, it's hard to say that in a sentence where you say *"God is love"* in the same sentence. *"God loves you, but you're gonna fry."* [Congregants laugh] *"It happens, right? We can't all get there, right?"* I mean, some churches teach that there's a limited number and, if you don't make the cut, *"Oh, sorry; you're in JV. You didn't make varsity. But maybe you'll be spiritual varsity next time."* Right?

And what if ...? The idea here is that we're all truly created in the kingdom and in the image and likeness of God, and that our joy is to put our focus on God and spend more and more of our time focused on God. And what if that doesn't open a door to a greater experience of heaven?

Charles Fillmore said this:

"Had the kingdom to which Jesus often referred been a city with golden streets in the sky, he could have easily have located it, but he did not do so. On the contrary, he again and again gave illustrations to show his listeners that it was a desirable condition which would be brought about among us through the power of spirit. He did not speak of a situation anywhere in particular, nor did he say that it could be attained quickly. For instance, he said, "Unto you, the kingdom of God whereto I should liken it to: I'd liken it unto a grain of mustard seed, which a man took and cast

into his own garden. And it grew and became a tree. And the birds of the heaven lodged in it.' And again, he said, 'likened to a leaven placed in bread; a woman took and hid three measures in the meal until it was all leavened, or until it all rose.'

"In both of those illustrations, he talks about a spiritual process of expansion. The mustard seed, the smallest of seeds, grows into a mighty tree. There's an expansion, because there's an upward movement of spirit in your life. That many of us have been worried about the afterlife when, the truth is, God loves us all. That we are surrounded and unfolded in God's infinite good. And that when you die, your body will no longer be infused with life. Your brain will no longer function, but your consciousness, your essence, your soul is alive as ever. Consciousness is the glue that holds us all together, but consciousness does not need a body or a brain. Consciousness is a function independent of a physical reality."

I'm going to tell a story on Verl. You know, most of you know that, last December, my mom passed. A couple of weeks after that – it wasn't very long; maybe not even a couple weeks – Verl came to me and said, "Your mom is very happy in heaven." And I said, "Is she now?" She said, "Yeah; she loves it there." And I thought, "Of course she would!" Right? You know, she had a stroke over 30 years ago. She'd been carrying this body around for years, and it just got heavier and heavier and harder and harder. And then she was free. How fantastic is that?

That there's this opportunity for all of us to move in a heavenly direction. To let go of the heaviness and to move into that experience of pure consciousness.

Now, I have a couple of books that I love about the afterlife. And if you want to make a note, you can. Or you can just file these under Richard being too much. [Congregants laugh] Okay? First one that I'd recommend about the afterlife is *The Afterlife of Billy Fingers*. It is a great book! It is a fabulous book. I think Julia has it in the bookstore. *The Afterlife of Billy Fingers*. It is; it is special.

And the other one that I would recommend is *The Fun of Dying*. And both of these, I think, are just great books. They talk to us about a possibility of life after physical life that is bigger and greater than we can imagine. That opens a space of possibilities for all of us that I think is fabulous.

So what do we know about the afterlife? What do we know about this journey? And I'm going to make some assumptions and you could say on anyone these assumptions, "Richard, how do you know that?" And I would say to you, "How do you not?" Right?

So I'm going to make 12 assumptions tonight about heaven and your experience -- and moving into that experience of afterlife experience -- and see if any of them resonate with you.

First one: **The body resists dying, but the soul does not.** Sometimes the ego resists dying, but the soul never resists its next step. And that many of us have witnessed people and their body, because the body is wired to live. The body wants to live, right? Even when the soul knows it's time to go, sometimes the body is the last thing to realize it. So one of the things when we're especially around loved ones who are passing, is just noticing that the life force in them doesn't always go quietly. It resists.

Two: **As a person gets closer to their time of passing, they may have deathbed visitors.** They may see friends or family members that were once a very important part of their life who begin to come back to them, to welcome them and prepare them for what's to come. They may hear music or see sights or sounds that no one else in the room sees, but for them it is as real as real could be.

Three: **The event of death itself is the easiest thing in the world.** I cannot tell you how many people I've had the honor of being with them in their moment of passing. And even if there was resistance or upset, when they get to the moment of passing, it's peace. It's a letting go. It's feeling that sense of freedom.

Four: When someone passes, three things really happen. **For a soul that has experienced trauma in this life, there's a time of healing.** And when a soul has known especially great trauma -- physical trauma, mental trauma emotional trauma -- there is a time for healing on the other side so that soul gets to be restored. And every soul is restored. And they get all the time they need on the other side to heal from the trauma and the wounds of this life.

Five: **My profound belief is, is that when a soul enters into the other side, there is a time either before the healing or after the healing when there is a great reception.** When the soul is welcomed into the other side and there is a fabulous celebration of that soul by their friends and loved ones, and they are welcomed in and welcomed home.

Six: **On the other side, there is no time, there is no place, and it doesn't line up exactly with earth time.**

Seven: **For every soul, when they move to the other side, there is a life review.** Often in the Christian church, it's called the day of judgment. And I don't know about you, but the day of judgment sounds scary! Does that sound scary? Right? But on the other side, there is a life review, but the life review is done in absolute, unconditional love. Where you get to look at everything, but it's done with so much love, there's no shame, there's no guilt. We are surrounded and folded in pure love as we look at those moments in our life; the choices we made; what we learned; what was good; what we could have done differently. There's a life review.

Eight: **There's a plan that will be created for your soul on what's next.** That, even on the other side, your soul has a plan for what's next for you: to grow and evolve and to be the most amazing version of you.

Nine: **Often the plan will include members of your tribe who want to be a part of your plan.** *"Well, let's do it together! Like if I do it, will you do it with me?" "Sure; let's go do it!"* And what's amazing is that we keep doing life over and over. Oh, I wasn't going to say that. We keep doing life with the people that are the most important to us! That we keep showing up together, right?

Ten: **Life on the other side has music and art and friends and family, and you'll have an etherical body.**

Eleven: **Colors and sound and beauty are more intense.** They're more beautiful; they're more alive; they're more vivid.

And twelve: **You will continue to learn from the masters.** Like, one of the coolest parts for me about being on the other side is: you get to sit in the presence of the masters; to continue to learn and grow and spiritually evolve.

Like, I believe that each and every one of us is an eternal spiritual being created in the image and in the likeness of God. And I believe that your 70, 80, 90, 100 years – however long you're going to be here -- is not the sum total of who you are. It's one chapter. And that chapter is a long story of you awakening to the glory of God. And heaven is that place where your soul goes from time to time to heal; to restore; to check in; to remember who you are; and to express more God and more good than you've ever known before.

You know, Unity's concept of heaven was radically different 150 years ago. For some people, it was crazy talk. I would suggest today, that 150 years later, it sounds far more normal. That, as a world, we're awakening beyond the fear and the damnation that many of us were still raised with into an experience of love, of God, of soul expansion, of spiritual growth. That we're not here to be scared anymore. We're not here to live in small little dark places. We're here to express God. And the more that God is the focus of our life, the better everything gets.

Will you pray with me?

I invite you to open your mind, your heart, your soul to the activity of God. Today, I want you to focus on God. As you go to sleep tonight, I want the focus to be on God. That all the problems, all those situations, all the needs; everything will be there tomorrow. But tonight, God gets to be the most important thing. And as you focus on God, I want you to feel that level of peace and light and joy that fills your soul. That heaven is right here. The kingdom of God is in the midst of us. And the more that we open our mind, our heart, our soul, we know that's true. So in the name and through the power of the living Christ, we give thanks. And so it is. Amen.

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