

## ROLL WITH THE CHANGES

Week #4 of a 10-Week Series, "Your Spiritual Quest: The Adventure of Your Life!"

Sunday Feb. 4, 2024

How many people have ever had an area in your life that did go the way you planned it to go? Anybody? And how many people have ever had something in your life change that you didn't want to change? And finally, how many people would say that you don't like change and you're not very good at handling change? Okay.

So, today we are going to talk about change. And we're going to talk about how to learn to "ROLL WITH THE CHANGES." Now, for a second, I want you to think about change. And what kind of thoughts and feelings come up for you when you think about change? And particularly as change relates to your own life?

You know, change is natural; it is necessary; and it is a vital component of life. But as important as it is, it is not easy. I think there are four main reasons why change is a challenge for us. And the first one is because we have kind of a negative perception about change. We think the change is almost necessarily bad, always hard, and always unwanted. And when you ask somebody how something's going, they'll say like, "Oh, a lot of changes; a lot of changes" ... which usually means things aren't going well. And because we have that image, an idea that change is negative.

Second one is that change pushes us out of our comfort zone and makes us feel uncomfortable. It makes us feel uncertain and unfamiliar with whatever's going on in our lives, that shift.

And then the third one is that we don't like losing control. How many people like to be in control in your life? [Congregants laugh] You know, we all do. So when change happens, it feels like we've lost control. And that makes us feel vulnerable. It makes us feel powerless. Sometimes it makes us feel helpless.

And the final reason I say that change is so hard is because change represent endings. And we, as human beings, don't like endings. You know, we don't like to say goodbye. Endings feel like losses, and it creates a level of grief in our lives. And endings mean that we have to enter a process of healing ... a process of rebuilding; a process of starting over; a process of recreating. And sometimes that can feel insurmountable -- or just overwhelming -- for us.

You know, change is vital; it is important. But it is so unpleasant that we will resist and avoid change at any cost. But when it comes to change, it is one of those things that you can run, but you can't hide, because life is filled with change. But everything in life changes. And they come in all forms: big changes, small changes, changes that are expected, changes that are unexpected, changes that we like, changes that we dislike ... But no matter how you slice it, every one of us experiences a lot of change in our lives.

The book of Ecclesiastes kind of gives an idea of how life changes – how there are ebbs and flows in life - - when it says, *"For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born and a time to die; a time to plant and a time to pluck up what is planted; a time to break down and a time to build up; a time to weep and a time to laugh; a time to mourn and a time to dance."*

So you can hear that there's a huge, expression of the various ranges and differences and experience of changes that happen in life. That the seasons of our lives change. Our childhood, our young adulthood, our adult, our senior life. I mean, from the time we're born, things are changing. Our bodies change. We change our minds. We change the level of knowledge and understanding and wisdom that we have. We our attitudes, our values, our beliefs. I mean, so many things in our lives change! Relationships change,

our jobs change, our interests change, our circumstances change, our locations change. I mean, we have all kinds of change!

And you'd think with change from the time we're born, and the amount that we face on a regular basis, we would be masters of change. That we would love change; that we would rock change; that we would roll with the changes easily. But it is not an easy experience.

But I do believe that it is possible for us to learn to see change in a different light and utilize it in a greater way so we could roll with changes and have our lives even become better because of it.

I love today's affirmation: *"I accept change as a positive force of good in my life."*

Let's do that together: [with congregation]: "I accept change as a positive force of good for my life."

Take a deep breath and let's say it again: [with congregation] *"I accept change as a positive force for good in my life."*

Because like it or not, ready or not, willing or not, change is a happening thing that we all have to face. But the truth is: without it, we wouldn't grow. We wouldn't learn. We wouldn't expand. We wouldn't change. We wouldn't evolve into the amazing beings and the fullness of the person and life we are meant to live.

So this is Week #4 in our 10-week series called, "Your Spiritual Quest: the Adventure of Your Life." And the truth is we are all on a spiritual adventure. Everything in our life is leading us to that great quest of knowing our oneness with God, our oneness with the Divine, and aligning our mind with the mind of God. And you could call it attaining the Christ consciousness or enlightenment or self-realization. But the fact is: we are all on a spiritual quest.

Week #1 was called "Bring It On." I mean, if everything in life is supposed to teach us and lift us to a higher place, bring it on! Bring on that adventure, and bring on our awareness that we are on a spiritual quest. In Week #2, the title was, "Dream Big." Don't play small; dream big! We live in an abundant universe, and we are creators ... and dreams help us open up to the unlimited possibilities of good available to us. Last week, the message was "Love Large." To open our hearts and love more fully. Not holding back or withholding love, but loving God and ourselves and others wholeheartedly.

And then today we're going to look at how to "Roll with the Changes."

**And the first thing we need to do to roll with the changes is to strengthen our spiritual foundation.** In the Old Testament, multiple times it says, *"God is my rock."* *"God is my rock and my salvation."* *"God is my rock and my refuge."* *"God is my rock and my fortress."* *"God is my foundation."* *"God is my stronghold."* Over and over, it says that the basis and foundation of our lives are spiritual. It is God! And the best way to handle the uncertainty and the uncomfortable feelings and the unknown is to have a solid spiritual foundation. To have an unshakable and steadfast faith in God when things are rocking; when things feel so uncertain.

You know, Jesus in Matthew 7 gives this story. And he says, beginning at Verse 24, *"Therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who builds his house upon the rock. The rain came and the streams rose and the winds blew and beat against the house, yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears the words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against the house, and it fell with a great crash."*

And so what this is saying is: when we build our house on a solid spiritual ground, even when the winds have change -- even when the storms of life come upon us -- that it will not knock us down. You know, that that foundation is strong. That foundation will help us endure. That foundation will help us bounce back.

You know, life may ebb and flow, but God is constant. Same yesterday, today, and forever. You know, God is constant. God is everlasting. God is ever-loving, ever-present, and all-providing. And God is the absolute Source of our lives. So no matter how much the outer physical wavers, as long as we're grounded -- as long as we're anchored and centered spiritually -- that we can overcome all those things.

And the way to do it -- Eric Butterworth calls it being "prayed up." And it means to, on a consistent, regular basis -- whether you think you need it or not -- keep praying and connecting to the Source. Keep praying and connecting to our divine nature. And that builds a powerful and solid spiritual foundation for us. And the more consistently we do it; the more daily we do it; the more frequently we do it, that that foundation leaves us unshakable and unwavering. That, regardless of the storms and the changes that are going on, that we will be able to keep aware; keep focused; keep intentional; keep positive and productive; and not run or hide or cower or feel immobilized by fear.

You know, the first for us to roll with the changes is to strengthen our spiritual foundation ... and maintain that foundation with daily prayer; daily meditation; daily seeking God with all our heart and aligning our minds with the mind of God.

**The second thing we need to do to roll with changes is to grieve and process the loss.** Again, as I said, any time there's an ending, that there is a loss and there is grief. And we understand that when we think about the death of a loved one and a divorce, but somehow the other many losses we experience sometimes we minimize or diminish or don't think is significant or is important.

I would say all changes have some level of grief that we need to face and to process. And whether it's the "Empty Nest Syndrome" because your kids have gone away. Or sometimes even retiring -- going from very busy to retiring -- as good as it is, it can sometimes have a level of grief. Going from single to married can sometimes have a little grief. Sometimes even grieving the independence or the ease or the difference in our lives is an important thing. Getting a huge promotion with more responsibility can sometimes have us in a level of grief for, you know, simpler days. Winning a lottery could have a lot of grief and loss [laughs] ... usually a year after it does, about a million dollars' worth.

You know, but it's such an important thing to honor those feelings. Don't diminish them. You know, these losses absolutely make a difference. These changes that happen are the ending of one way of life and the beginning of a new. And sometimes we want to scoot across to the new so quickly to avoid the pain, but there's a lingering effect of what Eckhart Tolle calls a "pain body." And a pain body represents all the unresolved issues and hurts that we didn't feel, we didn't grieve, we didn't process that is still in us. us.

And sometimes that feeling of grief and loss can appear as being tired or unhappy or restless or unable to sleep. There are all kinds of different ways. Because it's unresolved energy. That pain in us that it wants to be healed, it wants to be liberated. And so it's an important thing for each of us to honor those feelings and to allow ourselves to feel them and process them so they can be healed and not always lingering or pulling us down.

So five years ago, my family celebrated the 50th anniversary of moving from Trinidad to Canada. And it was a cool little celebration. We went back to some places where there were flower gardens that we

took pictures of 50 years ago and retook pictures there. I mean, it was a cool thing. We had all kinds of dinners and parties and stuff; it was awesome! And for the first time ever, I asked my brother, Derek, the oldest, what it was like for him moving from Trinidad to Canada when he was 19 years old. I was six, you know; I had no other plans, so I went along with them. [Congregants laugh]

But I asked him, "*What were you thinking, man?*" And he said, "*You know what? It was really hard.*" He said, "*I didn't want to do it because I had to leave all my friends, everything I'd established, all the people that I knew, everything that was so familiar to me. And I had to start it all over again.*" And he mentioned how we kind of hit the ground here and it was survival mode. The oldest of 10 children has a lot of responsibility of slightly co-parenting. And there was never any time for him to process that.

And so it was interesting, even at that age and stage of his life, that he still had something unresolved -- a loss that he had to heal and talk through. And I'm glad we did, because we got to process them together. This guy loved Trinidad so much; in those 50 years, he visited Trinidad about 70 times. You know, what's that thing? You can take the boy out of the country, but you can't take the country out of the boy? That was him. I did not suffer from that ailment; I was happy to never go back to Trinidad ever again. But I have fond memories of it in a different way. But this was something important to him.

And so sometimes we have things like that that we just don't take time to stop and really process the grief; process the loss. It's so easy to skip by it. It's so easy to sweep it under the rug. But I would say it's a valuable and hugely important thing.

Something came up in our aging class last week and I asked the question: What is a loss that you've had in your life that you haven't allowed yourself to fully process and heal and grieve over? I would bet every one of us has some loss we have faced and experienced that we have not fully allowed ourselves to process it and to heal it and to feel the grief. It isn't significant; it isn't small. And it doesn't matter how many years ago -- even if it was 50 years ago! You know, allowing ourselves to process that -- whether it's through journaling or talking to a friend or going to a therapist -- is one of the most liberating, healing and wonderful things we can do for ourselves, so we can roll with the new changes and expand greater possibilities for our lives.

**And so the third one for us to roll with the changes is to learn from and adapt to change.** Charles Darwin said this. He said, "*It is not the strongest of the species that survives. It is not the most intelligent that survives. It is the one who is most able to adapt to change is the one who survives.*" And we even go as far as saying -- and also to thrive.

No matter what change comes in our lives, we can learn from it. No matter what change in our lives, we can adapt to it and make the best of it. But we must be teachable. We must be flexible. We must be willing. We must be open-minded. We must be creative in our thinking and think outside the box into greater possibilities. Instead of using the energy of resistance and hate -- and hating and complaining about change -- we can use that same creative ability to learn and to come up with greater possibilities and to make our lives even better.

You know, I read an article this week and it said, "*In the business world, the ability to adapt to change is essential for survival. Change is happening at an ever-increasing pace, and businesses must adapt or die. Many businesses fail to adapt and eventually die because they are unwilling or unable to change.*"

So Netflix started in 1998. And they did you know the mail DVD things for renting movies. Then they kicked it up a notch with a subscription thing where they'd give you an unlimited amount of movies. And you'd watch it and put it in the mail and go back and forth like that. And they were really hugely

successful. But in 2007, seeing the way technology was changing, they moved away totally from physical DVDs to streaming so that people would have instant access to what they wanted to watch. And it not only revolutionized and transformed their business, it revolutionized and transformed the entertainment landscape. In 2022, Nielsen did a study, and they found that more people watch streaming than cable. More people watch streaming than broadcast TV. And everything they have done -- and they've added more and more products of streaming. And this company went from millions to billions. They are worth \$213 billion. And why? Because they learned from the change. They're willing to adapt and do something different, do something to make it better in their new context.

Now Blockbuster, on the other hand ... [laughs with congregation] They weren't willing. And sometimes we want to dig our feet and heels on the ground and say, "*No, I'm going to keep doing this way, keep doing this way.*" And that's what happened. They filed for bankruptcy, and I think it was 2011. And so it's a message for all of us.

Life changes. And yeah, we have to grieve because some of those things aren't coming back. But what are we going to do about it? Keep complaining? Keep lamenting over those things? Or are we going to see it with new eyes? Are we going to, you know, make some adjustments and adaptations and find a greater and better way for things to work?

Look at the impact that COVID had on us. How many people now are working at home permanently? I mean, Zoom meetings; tele-doctor appointments. I mean, there's all kinds of things that have changed in amazing ways. You know, you can get almost anything delivered to your house now. It is stunning! And it's: a new way of life brought about a change. And yes, change is difficult. It's uncomfortable. Some things will have to be let go. But if we don't see things in a new way, that we're going to rob ourselves out of all sorts of joy and happiness and success and possibilities.

When we resist change, it holds us back. When we're willing to learn from change, we free ourselves. But we also elevate ourselves to a greater experience of life. When it comes to change, don't fight it; roll with it. When it comes to change, don't resist it; learn from it.

And that's the thing about change. It is a replenishing principle of life. It is always a renewal. And something has to die to be born anew. You know, something has to be lost for it to be greater, to be gained. And we need to use that perspective on all of our lives. Because it's calling us to new opportunities. It's calling us to new life and possibilities and new ways of living and being. But we need to look at the change in our lives and say, "What is this trying to teach me? What perspective is it that I'm not seeing? Is this trying to help me to look at my life? What good is in this situation? And what's possible from here in this new context? What's a new dimension of how I could live my life in a new way?"

Sometimes life looks messy. Sometimes it doesn't make sense. These changes, they rock our world. But I think if we're willing to learn -- if we're willing to gain the insights it has for us -- it can create something even more beautiful.

A pastor asked an old farmer to lead the prayer at the men's prayer breakfast. Dressed in his overalls, the old farmer started the prayer, "*Lord, I hate buttermilk.*" And then he said, "*Lord, and you know I hate lard.*" And the pastor is thinking, "*Uh oh; this prayer is not going the way I was hoping.*" And then the farmer continues, "*Lord, you know I don't care much for raw white flour.*" And the pastor's heart's starting to race and feel this thing's going really poorly. And then the farmer continues, "*But Lord, when you mix them all together and bake them, I do love warm, fresh biscuits.*" [Congregants laugh] "*So Lord, when things come up that we don't like; when life gets hard; when we don't understand what you are*

*trying to teach us or show us, help us to relax and wait until you are done mixing. And it'll probably be even better than those warm, fresh biscuits. Amen."* [Laughs; congregants laugh and applaud]

And so when it says in Scripture, "*All things work together for good for those who love God,*" it means that even these changes and these challenges -- even these areas of loss and where we're having some grief at this moment -- are meant to work for our highest good to bring about some new possibilities. Some new ideas, some new perspectives. And maybe even something better than we thought; maybe even better than warm, fresh biscuits.

**And finally, the last thing about rolling with the changes is to BE the change.** The only thing harder than dealing with change is being willing to change. Sometimes we want our lives to get better without us changing at all, or doing anything differently.

You know, Gandhi said, "*Be the change you want to see in the world.*" And what he is really saying in that is: if you want to change the world, you've got to change yourself. And the underlying message on that is even more powerful, because it's saying that you are so powerful that, if you are willing to change yourself, that you will be able to help change the world.

Someone once said, "*If it is to be, it is up to me, but I have to be willing to change.*" So my question is: What change would you like to see in the world? And would you be willing to be the change you want to see? And whether it's kindness, or whether it's being more caring, or joyful, or positive, or patient, or loving, would you be willing to be that change? And to stand for that to bring more change in the world?

I mean, are you willing to change? It's a question we need to all ask ourselves. Are we willing to change our negative words and thoughts into more positive words and thoughts? Are we willing to change our fear into faith and optimism? Are we willing to change our worry into wonder? Are we willing to change our anger into peace? Are we willing to change our resistance into acceptance? Are we willing to change our sadness into thankfulness? Are we willing to change our powerlessness into powerfulness?

Paul, the Apostle, said, "*Do not conform to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.*" And that's what change does. It is a renewing process that we're all gifted with. It's not comfortable, but it is renewing and transforming -- if we're willing to roll with the changes.

Can you imagine if nothing in life changed? Could you imagine if the weather never changed? Could you imagine if fashions never changed, people never changed, if you never changed? Could you imagine if everything stayed the same every single day all the time? Life would stagnate. It would be dull and lifeless and boring. There would be no growth. There would be no transformation. There would be no creativity and possibilities. Things would just stay the same.

Muhammad Ali said, "*If a person sees life at 60 the same way they saw life at 30, they have wasted 30 years of their life.*" We are meant to change and expand and grow and unfold in amazing ways. And change gives us that renewing principle and allows that to happen.

You know, the fact is: change is a renewing element that we need to welcome and look at more positively and allow it to help us become more creative, more positive, and resourceful spiritual beings. But we've got to be willing to welcome and to learn and to roll with the changes.

God bless you! And we're going to affirm our "Roll with the Changes" affirmation. Everybody got yours? Okay. It's up on the screen if you can't find your card. Here we go, everyone. Together: "*Change is the renewing principle of life. I handle the changes in my life by learning to accept, adapt and grow, seeing*

*things from a higher consciousness. I, [Richard Maraj], am open and willing to adjust to the ebbs and flows of life. I roll with the changes."*

God bless you all.

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