

CELEBRATE AND APPRECIATE

Week #8 of a 10-Week Series, "Your Spiritual Quest: The Adventure of Your Life!"

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I mentioned a couple of weeks ago I had lunch with a couple of congregants, and one was 97 years old. He was one of the sharpest, brightest, joyful persons I have known. And when we sat down, first thing he said to me was, "I've got to tell you a joke." Here's the joke

So a German Shepherd, a Doberman, and a cat all die, and they're up at the pearly gates facing God, and God asks them the question, "What do you believe in?" The German shepherd said, "I believe in discipline, training and loyalty to my Master." And God says, "Good! You can have a seat on my right side."

And then he asked the Doberman, "What do you believe in?" And the Doberman says, "Well, I believe in love and care and protection of my Master." And God says, "Ah! You can have a seat on my left."

And then he looks at the cat and he says, "What do you believe in?" And the cat says, "I believe you're sitting in my right." [Congregants laugh and applaud]

Thanks to Bob for the joke. Okay.

So how many people believe that life is supposed to be fun and we are here to be happy and fulfilled? And how many people would say you believe that life is hard and there are struggles and adversities we all have to face on our journey.

And how many people say you believe in the Law of Attraction? So if the Law of Attraction is true, how does our belief that life is hard and we get a struggle and work and fight to succeed -- how does that affect our ability to attract more peace and more happiness and success in our lives?

One more question: How many people believe that life's struggles could be -- and are meant to be -- way easier if we just got out of the way and allowed it to be easier? [Congregants murmur] Okay.

So I want to read you four Scriptures that are really the foundation of what I want to talk about today. And in the first one Jesus said, "In this life there will be trials and tribulations, but be of good cheer, for I have overcome the world."

The Apostle Paul said, "Count it all joy, brethren, when you face trials of various kinds, for the testing of your faith will produce perseverance. And let perseverance finish its work in you so that you may be whole, complete, and lacking in nothing."

Jesus also said he came "that we may have life and have it more abundantly." And, finally, he also said he came "that his joy may be in us and that our joy may be complete."

So yes, there are trials. There are adversities; there are challenges; and there are losses that are a part of the deal of being alive, and that are an important part of our spiritual quest. And we also have the power and the capacity to be of good cheer; to count it all joy; to be able to overcome; to rise above; and to live our lives more abundantly, and more joyously. And to have more fun, and to live it with greater ease.

You know, I think the difference-maker between having a hard life and having one that's fun and easy comes down to the mindset and the consciousness out of which we see and interpret and experience and interact with life.

You know, when we've developed a mindset that is filled with negativity -- dominated by fear, or worry or anxiety or lack or unworthiness -- it weighs us down, and life is hard. And then when we have a mindset that is filled with positivity, with hope, with peace, and love, and passion, and intention -- that is filled with good cheer -- it uplifts us and makes our lives easier and more fun.

Today, I want to talk about two aspects and elements of what it takes to live a life with greater fun and ease. And it is through the mindset and the consciousness of celebration and appreciation. You know, life is easier and way more fun when we celebrate and appreciate more. And life is more hard and difficult when we do not appreciate and do not take time to celebrate.

And it might sound frivolous celebrating and appreciating, but I think they're both vital parts of a happy and fulfilling life, and vital parts of a deeper and spiritual life as well.

Today we are in Week #8 of our 10-week series called "Your Spiritual Quest: The Adventure of Your Life." Every one of us is on a spiritual quest, whether we realize it or not, and that quest is to know our oneness with God. That quest is to achieve the Christ consciousness or self-realization. It is to unify our mind with the mind of God. It is to fulfill our divine potential. Whatever it is that we call it, every one of us is on a spiritual quest.

In Week #1, the message was called, "Bring It On!" Because sometimes we turn and run away and shy away from experiences. And the truth is: if we're on a spiritual quest, it means everything in our lives is there to help us on this quest.

Week #2 was called "Dream Big!" Because sometimes we play small in life, and we are called a dream big. We live in an abundant universe. We are creators and dreams help us expand the possibilities of good in our lives and in our world.

Week #3 was called "Love Large!" Sometimes we close our hearts off fully to some people. Sometimes we try to love with our hearts half open. But if we want to truly experience a fullness of life, we're got to love large. We're going to open our hearts to love more deeply and more fully ourselves, others, and God.

The next week was called, "Roll with the Changes!" Life is always changing! And the funny thing is we don't like change; we sometimes resist change. Yet we are resisting the thing to help us expand and grow and experience greater things. You know, changes are the renewing principle of life that can expand and bring so much more good if we're willing to roll with those changes.

The next week was called "Go Deeper!" You know, we all pray and meditate, but are we really going as deep to experience the profound depths and inspiration and love of God? And to do that, we need to surrender fully to God. We need to seek God with all of our hearts ... not just the gifts, but to seek the Giver and to know our oneness with Spirit.

And then we had "Show Up Fully!" And we have to ask ourselves how we show it up in life for ourselves and others. And the four we talked about was to be present; be positive; be purposeful; and be patient to show up to be our very best in life.

Last week, Rev. Stacy talked about "Forgive and Let Go!" When we are holding on and unwilling to forgive, it means we're living in the past. Forgiveness frees us from the pain of the past to live in the present and to create a greater future.

So today we're going to look at Week #8. We're going to look at "Celebrate and Appreciate!"

Let's start with **APPRECIATE**. You know, I really believe that appreciation and gratitude are two of the fundamental principles on our spiritual journey and spiritual path. You know, I think that anyone on the

spiritual path absolutely practices some form of gratitude and appreciation, because we know how powerful and important it is. How many people do gratitude lists? Or do meditations of gratitude? Or speak words of gratitude? We all do! Because we know it is a vital component of deepening our connection and experience of God.

In Psalm 95, it says, *"Enter the presence of God with thanksgiving."* Literally every time we pray our hearts should be open in thanksgiving and gratitude to give thanks to God for the gift of life, for all of the good and the blessings. Like, gratitude really connects us to God. Gratitude connects us to our spiritual nature and to all the good that is available in our lives.

The 13th-century Dominican monk, Meister Eckhart, said, *"If the only prayer you ever prayed was 'Thank you,' it would suffice."* Could you imagine that? If the only prayer you ever prayed was *"Thank you,"* that it would do amazing things in our lives. He said that only praying *"Thank you"* helps you with these things" it helps us see the good that we don't always see. It helps us feel a sense of gratitude and thankfulness. And it helps us feel closer to God. It helps us appreciate and enjoy what we have. And it raises our vibration to create a magnetic force to attract even more things in our lives to feel grateful for.

A daily practice of gratitude is a powerful, life-transforming practice that we should all engage in. In Luke 17, there is a story of the 10 lepers. And they asked for a healing. And when they were healed, only one came back to give thanks. And Jesus was really disappointed. And Jesus wasn't disappointed because he didn't get acknowledged; he was disappointed for the nine others, because they robbed themselves of that experience of feeling thankful and feeling connected to God. They robbed themselves of feeling that good feeling of gratitude and thankfulness. And they rob themselves of being able to attract even more good in their lives. He was almost saying like, *"Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."* To not be grateful and appreciate our lives, to not to acknowledge and thank God, really robs us of a more fulfilling and joyful life.

Gratitude is such a powerful thing that in 2 Timothy it compares not being grateful to being a sin! To not being grateful of being unholy; as being disobedient and like not listening to your parents. Because to not to be grateful and to take things for granted is like rejecting God and denying the good that's in our lives, and robbing ourselves of appreciating and enjoying how blessed we really are.

Socrates was born 400 years before Jesus, and he said these words: *"A grateful mind is a great mind that eventually attracts to itself great things."* [Repeats] A grateful mind is a great mind which eventually attracts to itself great things. So if a grateful mind attracts to itself great things, what does an ungrateful mind attract? You know, when we don't appreciate; when we don't give thanks; when we aren't grateful, we absolutely block and limit the amount of good, and the amount of joy, and the amount of fun that we have in our lives.

Whatever do you call it -- appreciating our blessings or an attitude or gratitude or a thankful mind or a grateful heart -- it is a vital and important daily practice we should do every single day. Every day we should give thanks to God. Every day we should give thanks for our body and our health; for our jobs; for our money; for our family; for our friends; for our homes; for electricity; for ceiling fans. For Amazon! [Congregants laugh] For Bounce sheets in the dryer! For the smell of coffee; for meditation; for sunsets; for air travel; for vacations. For my air fryer; I really love my air fryer! [Congregants laugh] I'm very grateful! I'm grateful for Lookout Mountain, because I get to see it from my backyard every single day.

You know what I really am grateful for -- even though I look at it too much -- is my iPhone. Can you believe that, in the phone -- in the pocket -- you can watch movies; you can pay bills; you can take pictures. You know, you can use a calculator; it can be a flashlight; you can be on the phone and see

people. I mean, is it crazy amazing or what? I'm so thankful! My life is so much more efficient and better and enjoyable because of technology.

So I could go on and on. There's so many things for us to be thankful for; so many things to be grateful for. Practicing gratitude is a powerful, positive practice that shifts our mindset and elevates our consciousness. It moves us from negativity to positivity; from lack to abundance. It is a powerful and important thing to practice gratitude and to appreciate all the good in our lives daily.

Let's go even deeper. Hundreds of years ago in Japan, there was a Zen monk, and her name was Sono. She was known for incredible wisdom and she was always called upon for healing of all kinds. And she healed people's hearts, their minds, their bodies. And no matter what their pain was -- no matter what their affliction was -- she had one remedy ... and only one remedy. Many people thought the remedy was so silly they didn't even bother trying it or give up on it. But those who followed it, they say, absolutely changed and were healed and transformed in great ways.

This was the mantra and the remedy she had for a better life: *"Thank you for everything. I have no complaints whatsoever."* [Repeats] Thank you for everything. I have no complaints whatsoever. And the mantra is to develop a consciousness of gratitude, and a heart that is so grateful that we embrace everything in our lives that unfolds with a level of thankfulness, knowing that it is supposed to be there and to utilize it gratefully on our spiritual quest to know our oneness with God.

"Thank you for everything. I have no complaints whatsoever."

I want you to think about your life, and let's affirm that together: [with congregants] *"Thank you for everything. I have no complaints whatsoever."* Take a deep breath.

And now let's say it again, but more sincerely. [Laughs] Okay. [With congregation]: *"Thank you for everything. I have no complaints whatsoever."* Deep breath.

Half voice now: [with congregants] *"Thank you for everything. I have no complaints whatsoever."* Deep breath.

And now just a whisper: [with congregants] *"Thank you for everything. I have no complaints whatsoever."*

Do you know speaking that demonstrates a few powerful things? To get to that level of consciousness -- to say, *"Thank you for everything; I have no complaints whatsoever"*? Number one: it shows the power and the consciousness of choice and mental discipline that we could get to that place where we just say *"Thank you,"* and have no complaining. Secondly, it is a statement of acceptance and surrender to our higher purpose. And then the third is that it helps raise the level of positive energy. That, instead of putting out blame and hate and anger, by not complaining we are able to put out more positive energy that will attract a greater solution and inspiration and lead us through that process to the highest and best outcome and result.

To say *"I have no complaint whatsoever"* is to choose to be of good cheer. It is to choose to realize I have the power and the spiritual resources within me to make the best of this and channel it into something greater through the power of gratitude and appreciation.

"Thank you for everything; I have no complaint whatsoever" is equal to the words of Paul in Thessalonians when he said, *"In all things give thanks, for this is God's will for you."* In all things be grateful! Don't complain; in all things, realize that God is right there and things are unfolding for your highest good. You know, the first thing for us to go deeper into our spiritual life -- and to make life fun and easy and not harder -- is to practice a level of appreciation.

And the next one is to **CELEBRATE**. You know, the Bible recommends -- the Bible mentions -- a ton of different festivals and feasts and celebrations. You know, killing a fatted calf and drinking of the sweet. And songs and praise and music and singing and dancing. Celebrations in honor of God. Celebrations in honor of the harvest. Celebrations in honor of a big catch or on a hunt. Celebrations of weddings and marriages. There are all kinds of things; there were a lot of celebrations.

You think it's a coincidence that Jesus' first miracle was at a celebration -- at a wedding feast -- and he turned water into wine. He kept the party going! [Congregants laugh] You want more celebration, more celebration.

And so celebrating is really about acknowledging something good and creating an activity or ceremony to express our joy. That's what it really is: a ceremony is an activity of expressing joy. And do you know the Bible says the word "joy" or "joyful" or "rejoicing" 430 times? It says stuff like, "*Let the heavens rejoice.*" "*Let the earth rejoice.*" "*Let the people rejoice.*" "*Let the nations rejoice.*" "*Let the skies rejoice.*" "*Rejoice always.*" "*Rejoice in those who rejoice.*"

And what that's saying is: let the heavens express joy. Let the earth express joy. Let the people express joy. Let the nations express joy. Let the skies express joy. Express joy in those who express joy. And it is a powerful thing! We don't think of celebration as a powerful spiritual practice, but it absolutely is!

And my question for you is: How much are you expressing joy in your life? And how much are you celebrating in your life?

You know, celebrations are usually thought of special occasions, and they tend to already be at a certain time. Christmas and Thanksgiving and Easter; Fourth of July. They're kind of built in. But we could be celebrating more frequently! And we could be celebrating at the times when we actually wish and desire. But often what happens in our lives is: we don't celebrate until something happens that usually you weigh down the road.

We'll celebrate, but I'll wait until I get the promotion." Or, "*We'll celebrate; let's wait before I lose 10 pounds.*" Or we'll wait 'til the summer; or we'll wait 'til September; or we'll wait 'til we get married; or we'll wait 'til we get divorced. [Congregants laugh] Or we'll wait 'til the kids leave; or we wait 'til we make our first million; wait 'til we get a little older. You know, wait 'til the outfit fits us again. And they're all kinds of things. But we keep deferring celebration. We keep deferring our happiness to "someday." We're going to wait 'til someday.

Someone said that someday is not a day of the week. If we keep waiting until someday, we'll be waiting a long, long time. I'll go on my dream vacation someday. Gonna finish that project someday. Gonna start my own business someday. Gonna write that book someday. Gonna start dating again someday. Gonna re-bottle that bathroom someday. Gonna take piano lessons someday. I'm going to learn how to speak Spanish someday. I'm going to call my estranged family member someday. I'm going to clean out that closet someday.

We've got so many "somedays," we keep putting off celebration. We keep putting off, you know, happiness. Psalm 118 says, "*This is the day that the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it.*" This is the day; we don't have to wait until "someday." This is the day!

And rejoice is to express your joy. This is the day we are meant to express joy; that every single day we can express joy. We have national days. Yesterday was the National Play Outside Day. Today is National Anthem Day. There are all kinds of days! I'm going to read you these are actually real. There's National Homeopathy Day; National Handwriting Day; National Handshake Day. There is a National Deep Dish Pizza Day. [Congregants laugh] There's National Kiss Day; National Hug Day; National Promise Day; National Propose Day. Then there's National Breakup Day. [Congregants laugh] National Heartbreak

Day. But thank goodness it's followed by National Chocolate Cake Day [congregants laugh] and National Bloody Mary Day. There's a National Bring Your Teddy Bear to Work Day; National Something on a Stick Day; National Penguin Awareness Day; National Squirrel Appreciation Day. National Spaghetti Day; National Hypnotism Day; National Whipped Cream Day; National Green Juice Day; National Pharmacist Day; National Fun-at-Work Day; National Curried Chicken Day. [Congregants laugh] National Dress Up Your Cat Day. [Congregants laugh] National Nutella Day; National Send Your Friend a Card Day; National Honesty Day; National Licorice Day; National Laughter Day; National Nurses Day. National Clean Up Your Room Day; National Sewing Machine Day. I mean, there are all kinds of days! National Polar Bear Plunge Day; National Run-It-Up-the-Flagpole-and-See-If-Anyone-Salutes-It Day. [Congregants laugh]

And the point I'm trying to make is: there's a lot of things to celebrate. There are a lot of things to rejoice in. And what would be your list of things that you would make each day as a celebration of? I mean, if we can celebrate Nutella and licorice on a day, what other amazing and wonderful things could we be celebrating in our lives? And so what are you going to celebrate today? It could be anything you want!

I remember when I was a kid, my mom would say, "*Hey; no, no! We're going to save the good dishes until company comes.*" Any of you ever do that? We do all kinds of putting off -- saving the good stuff, too. Why not make a National Eat Off the Good Dishes Day? [Congregants laugh] I mean, it doesn't need to be big. What about celebrating I Lost Two Pounds Day? Or celebrating I Paid Half My Mortgage Day?

Last week, we had a Zoom meeting with my family -- mostly in Canada -- because it was the 13th anniversary of my mom passing away. And we did a little celebration and storytelling to honor her. But that was a special day for us. There are all kinds of special and important days that are valuable and meaningful for us, that it behooves us all to take time to celebrate.

Do you know that celebrating studies show how valuable and important it is at any age, any stage of your life. Celebrating helps your mental well-being; your mental happiness; your emotional happiness. You feel a sense of joy and specialness. It breaks the monotony of life. You know, you feel that it has meaning and value and importance. And we get to create those! Between the Christmas and the Thanksgiving and those, we get to create what kind of things that we want to celebrate in our lives.

So celebration ... **First thing is: pick what is important to you and meaningful to you.**

The second one is: take time to choose and plan how you want to celebrate it. Sometimes we say something's important, but we're so busy, you know that we keep putting it off to someday, someday, someday. You know, it's important for us to take time. And we get to choose however we want to celebrate it! I mean, we could all dress up or, you know, there could be food involved or candle lighting or reading or telling stories. It could be picnics or a reunion.

My friend Mike and I ... for 24 years -- he lives in North Carolina -- we've been meeting someplace to connect. And last week was the 24th anniversary we've been doing that. For the first 18 years, we went to NBA cities, because one of my goals is to watch an NBA game in every NBA city. After eight years, he said he didn't like going to basketball games. [Congregants laugh] After 18 years! So now it's changed to places we've never been. And now, Little Rock, Arkansas; neither of us had gone there. And we had an absolute blast! We sat by the Arkansas River and we did some meditation there. We went to the Arkansas Zoo. Anybody know *Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives*? Yeah, well I googled a couple of them and we went to a vegan restaurant. It was fabulous! And a Thai restaurant; it was great. More importantly, we celebrated and appreciated each other, and we created our tradition exactly our way, under our own guidelines and rules. We planned for it and it's a commitment we've done for 24 years.

I mean, if we did something like the Eat Off the Good Dishes Day, that could be every week! It could be a weekly thing. Eat in of your best dishes! I mean, any tradition you want to celebrate your life and the good that's in it. It's important to take time to celebrate it.

The third one I want to say about celebration is celebrate the small stuff. It doesn't have to be huge. We think it's got to be birthdays and anniversaries; no! There's all kinds of little important things. You know, people said, *"Don't sweat the small stuff."* It's really, *"Celebrate the small stuff."* And savor it.

I don't eat dessert very often, but I went to a restaurant this week and the meal was great. And then the waiter recommended this dessert. And it was ice cream in this puff pastry, and not drizzled milk chocolate ... slathered milk chocolate all over this thing. That puff pastry was so soft, my fork just cut right into it. Put that thing in the mouth: the softness of the puff pastry, the cold, sweet ice cream, and the creamy milk chocolate was so heavenly. [Congregants laugh] It was so heavenly. It was a party in my mouth, for real! It was so exquisite and so delicious; so sweet. I had to pause and close my eyes two, three times, because it was so good, I didn't want it to end. [Congregants laugh] That's how good it was.

You know, there's a professor and his name is Fred Bryant. And he's a social psychologist at Loyola University in Chicago. And he's called "the father of research" in what he calls savoring. He says we are so in a rush all the time that we don't take time to really be there and savor the moment; savor the experience. I savored that ice cream! I savored that! But there's so many other things that go by in our lives. Even when they're good, we gloss over them quick. And we don't take no time to let them sink in.

A couple of weeks ago, I mentioned my karate instructor, Louie, would always say, *"When you feel great feelings, breathe it in and let it just fill all your cells. Let it fill your heart and your mind and your consciousness, and it will not only help you in that moment, but it'll help you have more lasting experiences of joy and greater levels of happiness."*

Studies show that celebrating small wins as we go increases our joy; increases our motivation; increases our level of confidence. Little wins and celebrations are actually big wins in many ways in making our lives more fun and making it more easy.

Only two things I want you to remember today, and they are two affirmations. And the first one is, *"Thank you for everything. I have no complaints whatsoever."*

Let's say it together: [with congregants] *"Thank you for everything. I have no complaints whatsoever."*

To thank God for your blessings; thank God for the gift of life; thank God for everything and have no complaints.

And then the second one: *"This is the day that the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it!"*

Let's say it together: [with congregants] *"This is the day that the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it."*

Think about what it is that you want to celebrate today. What is it that you want to rejoice and express your joy in about how wonderful your life is?

You know, life is tough and challenging and it's also supposed to be fun. And it's also supposed to be easy. And so my thing is that: let us all be of good cheer. Let us all realize how wonderful our lives are. You know, I've got a 'fridge magnet and it says. "Life doesn't have to be perfect to be wonderful." Let's not wait till "someday" or wait till "one day" to rejoice and be happy. And the difference makers are truly. if we are willing to celebrate and appreciate. God bless you all!