

Martin Luther King, Jr. on Rediscovering Lost Values

Because of his extraordinary impact on the civil rights movement, it's easy to forget that MLK was a minister as well as an activist. In his 1954 speech *Rediscovering Lost Values*, King explores the reasons people fail to live lives of integrity. In the speech he discusses the ways science and war have influenced humanity and how people have abandoned their sense of ethics by taking on a relativistic mindset. King's conclusion follows:

"My friends, all I'm trying to say is that if we are to go forward today, we've got to go back and rediscover some mighty precious values that we've left behind. That's the only way that we would be able to make of our world a better world, and to make of this world what God wants it to be and the real purpose and meaning of it. The only way we can do it is to go back and rediscover some mighty precious values that we've left behind...

"Sometimes, you know, it's necessary to go backward in order to go forward... And so that was the thing that Jesus' parents realized, that they had to go back and find this mighty precious value that they had left behind, in order to go forward. They realized that. And so they went back to Jerusalem and discovered Jesus, rediscovered him so to speak, in order to go forward to Nazareth.

"Now that's what we've got to do in our world today. We've left a lot of precious values behind; we've lost a lot of precious values. And if we are to go forward, if we are to make this a better world in which to live, we've got to go back. We've got to rediscover these precious values that we've left behind.

"I want to deal with one or two of these mighty precious values that we've left behind, that if we're to go forward and to make this a better world, we must rediscover.

"The first is this—the first principle of value that we need to rediscover is this: that all reality hinges on moral foundations. In other words, that this is a moral universe, and that there are moral laws of the universe just as abiding as the physical laws. I'm not so sure we all believe that. We never doubt that there are physical laws of the universe that we must obey. We never doubt that. And so we just don't jump out of airplanes or jump off of high buildings for the fun of it—we don't do that. Because we unconsciously know that there is a final law of gravitation, and if you disobey it you'll suffer the consequences—we know that. Even if we don't know it in its Newtonian formulation, we know it intuitively, and so we just don't jump off the highest building in Detroit for the fun of it—we don't do that. Because we know that there is a law of gravitation which is final in the universe. If we disobey it we'll suffer the consequences.

"But I'm not so sure if we know that there are moral laws just as abiding as the physical law. I'm not so sure about that. I'm not so sure if we really believe that there is a law of love in this universe, and that if you disobey it you'll suffer the consequences. I'm not so sure if we really believe that. Now at least two things convince me that we don't believe that, that we have strayed away from the principle that this is a moral universe.

"The first thing is that we have adopted in the modern world a sort of a relativistic ethic... Most people can't stand up for their convictions, because the majority of people might not be doing it. See, everybody's not

doing it, so it must be wrong. And since everybody is doing it, it must be right. So a sort of numerical interpretation of what's right. But I'm here to say to you this morning that some things are right and some things are wrong. Eternally so, absolutely so... It's wrong to throw our lives away in riotous living. No matter if everybody in Detroit is doing it, it's wrong. It always will be wrong, and it always has been wrong. It's wrong in every age and it's wrong in every nation. Some things are right and some things are wrong, no matter if everybody is doing the contrary. Some things in this universe are absolute. The God of the universe has made it so. And so long as we adopt this relative attitude toward right and wrong, we're revolting against the very laws of God himself.

“There is something in this universe that justifies the biblical writer in saying, ‘You shall reap what you sow.’ This is a law-abiding universe. This is a moral universe. It hinges on moral foundations. If we are to make of this a better world, we've got to go back and rediscover that precious value that we've left behind.

“And then there is a second thing, a second principle that we've got to go back and rediscover. And that is that all reality has spiritual control. In other words, we've got to go back and rediscover the principle that there is a God behind the process. Well this you say, ‘Why is it that you raise that as a point in your sermon, in a church? The mere fact we are at church, we believe in God, we don't need to go back and rediscover that. The mere fact that we are here, and the mere fact that we sing and pray, and come to church—we believe in God.’ Well, there's some truth in that. But we must remember that it's possible to affirm the existence of God with your lips and deny his existence with your life. The most dangerous type of atheism is not theoretical atheism, but practical atheism —that's the most dangerous type. And the world, even the church, is filled up with people who pay lip service to God and not life service. And there is always a danger that we will make it appear externally that we believe in God when internally we don't. We say with our mouths that we believe in him, but we live with our lives like he never existed. That is the ever-present danger confronting religion. That's a dangerous type of atheism.

“And I think, my friends, that that is the thing that has happened in America. That we have unconsciously left God behind. Now, we haven't consciously done it; we have unconsciously done it. You see, the text, you remember the text said that Jesus' parents went a whole day's journey not knowing that he wasn't with them. They didn't consciously leave him behind. It was unconscious; went a whole day and didn't even know it. It wasn't a conscious process. You see, we didn't grow up and say, ‘Now, goodbye God, we're going to leave you now.’ The materialism in America has been an unconscious thing. Since the rise of the Industrial Revolution in England, and then the invention of all of our gadgets and contrivances and all of the things and modern conveniences—we unconsciously left God behind. We didn't mean to do it.

“We just became so involved in getting our big bank accounts that we unconsciously forgot about God—we didn't mean to do it.

“We became so involved in getting our nice luxurious cars, and they're very nice, but we became so involved in it that it became much more convenient to ride out to the beach on Sunday afternoon than to come to church that morning. It was an unconscious thing—we didn't mean to do it.

“We became so involved and fascinated by the intricacies of television that we found it a little more convenient to stay at home than to come to church. It was an unconscious thing—we didn't mean to do it. We didn't just go up and say, ‘Now God, we're gone.’ We had gone a whole day's journey and then we came to see that we had unconsciously ushered God out of the universe. A whole day's journey—didn't mean to do it. We just became so involved in things that we forgot about God...”

http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/documentsentry/doc_rediscovering_lost_values

Letter from a Birmingham Jail

“How does one determine whether a law is just or unjust? A just law is a man-made code that squares with the moral law or the law of God. An unjust law is a code that is out of harmony with the moral law.”

I Have a Dream

“I go back to the South not with a feeling that we are caught in a dark dungeon that will never lead to a way out. I go back believing that the new day is coming. And so this afternoon, I have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream.

- “I have a dream that one day, right down in Georgia and Mississippi and Alabama, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to live together as brothers.
- “I have a dream this afternoon, I have a dream that one day, one day little white children and little Negro children will be able to join hands as brothers and sisters.
- “I have a dream this afternoon that one day, that one day men will no longer burn down houses and the church of God simply because people want to be free.
- “I have a dream this afternoon, I have a dream, that there will be a day that we will no longer face the atrocities that Emmett Till had to face or Medgar Evers had to face, that all men can live with dignity.
- “I have a dream this afternoon that my four little children, that my four little children will not come up in the same young days that I came up within, but they will be judged on the basis of the content of their character, not the color of their skin.
- “I have a dream this afternoon that one day right here in Detroit, Negroes will be able to buy a house or rent a house anywhere that their money will carry them and they will be able to get a job.
- “Yes, I have a dream this afternoon that one day in this land the words of Amos will become real and ‘justice will roll down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream.’
- “I have a dream this evening that one day we will recognize the words of Jefferson that ‘all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.’ I have a dream this afternoon.
- “I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, and ‘every valley shall be exalted, and every hill shall be made low; the crooked places shall be made straight, and the rough places plain; and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.’
- “I have a dream this afternoon that the brotherhood of man will become a reality in this day.

“And with this faith I will go out and carve a tunnel of hope through the mountain of despair. With this faith, I will go out with you and transform dark yesterdays into bright tomorrows. With this faith, we will be able to achieve this new day when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing with the Negroes in the spiritual of old: ‘Free at last! Free at last! Thank God almighty, we are free at last!’”

<https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkhaveadream.htm>

Others’ Quotes about God

Albert Einstein

“God did not create evil. Just as darkness is the absence of light, evil is the absence of God.”

“My religion consists of a humble admiration of the unlimitable superior who reveals Himself in the slight details we are able to perceive with our frail and feeble minds. That deeply emotional conviction of the presence of a superior reasoning power, which is revealed in the incomprehensible universe, forms my idea of God.”

G. K. Chesterton

“Christianity has not been tried and found wanting; it has been found difficult and not tried.”

Fyodor Dostoevsky

“If God does not exist, then everything is permitted.” -- from *The Devils*

Civil Rights Movement Parallels/Differences, Race vs. Orientation

Racial Equality	Sexual Orientation/Preference
Nature	Nature or Nurture?
God-given Freedom	Man-given License
Restore Morality	Sanctify Immorality
Sacrificial love	Erotic love
Fill in others...	