

Walk Your Talk

Nobody Knows What They Are Doing and That Is the Point

Rev. Blaine Tinsley | Unity on Maui | September 27, 2026

The Job He Never Applied For

In September 1901, Theodore Roosevelt was hiking in the Adirondacks when word came that President McKinley was dying. Roosevelt descended through darkness, traveled to Buffalo, and became President at forty-two with almost no transition. “Well, here we go” is not a documented Roosevelt quotation; it is the honest refrain of the story. He did not receive certainty on the mountain. He received a next step, and he took it. Sometimes life does not wait for us to feel ready. Sometimes the holiest response is simply, “Here we go.”

The Universal Secret

The surgeon, the new parent, the CEO, the teacher, and the person who just gave directions while privately wondering whether they were right all share a secret: everyone is winging it. Experience brings skill, but it also reveals how much remains unknown. Mature competence sounds less like “Obviously” and more like “Here is what I know, here is what I do not know, and here is the next faithful step.”

The most competent people tend to be the most acutely aware of how much they don't know.

The least competent people are often the most certain.

This is not an argument against preparation. Preparation gives us something to bring; humility keeps us teachable. Uncertainty is not proof that something is wrong with us. It is part of being human.

What the Mystics Knew

The Desert Fathers and Mothers entered the wilderness without a five-step program. The Buddha sat beneath the Bodhi tree without proof that awakening would come. Thomas Merton prayed, “My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me.” Maya Angelou admitted that even after writing eleven books she still feared people would discover she had “run a game on everybody.” Yet Merton kept walking and Angelou kept writing.

The mystics weren't certain. They were surrendered.

Certainty says, “I know the way and I have the map.” Surrender says, “I do not know the whole way, but I am willing to take the step that is mine.” Surrender is not passivity. It is active cooperation with the living moment. Faith was never a synonym for certainty. Faith is willingness practiced one step at a time.

The Problem with the Plan

We often treat the spiritual life like a fitness app: How many minutes did I meditate? What is my compassion streak? Why is my inner peace score lower than last Tuesday? By the third quarter, shouldn't I be more enlightened than I was in the first? Practice can support transformation, but a plan cannot control it. When we perform certainty, we also lose contact. Real connection begins when someone says, “I don't know. I'm figuring this out as I go.”

The Living Moment

A few weeks ago, I was giving my prepared Sunday talk at Unity on Maui and sensed that it was not what the room needed. I closed my notebook, breathed, and said, “I had something prepared. I'm going to set it aside.” What followed was less polished but more alive. The lesson is not to stop preparing. It is to hold preparation loosely enough that Spirit can still surprise us.

Like jazz, spiritual improvisation brings structure and listening together. Its rule is “Yes, and”: yes, to what has arrived, and yes to what I can bring next.

Spirit Is Already Here

Spirit is not withholding itself until you get your act together.

Presence is not waiting for us to reach a minimum level of spiritual competence. Spirit is here—in the room, in the interruption, in the unfinished conversation, and within us exactly as we are. Spirit is never contingent on our competence; it asks only our willingness. Having everything figured out was never the entrance requirement. The door is already open.

Three Practices for This Week

- 1 Notice the Performance.** Catch yourself pretending to have things more together than you do. Notice the tightening, smile warmly, and let one honest breath replace the performance.
- 2 Try the Two Word Prayer.** Pray, “Okay, God.” Not “I understand” or “I approve.” Just “Okay, God”—willingness without a map and surrender without a guaranteed destination.
- 3 Find One Person to Be Honest With.** Tell one trustworthy person, “I’m figuring this out as I go,” or “I’m winging it a little.” Honest contact gives another person permission to exhale. That is where community begins.

Nelson Mandela Walks into the Sunlight

On February 11, 1990, Nelson Mandela walked out of Victor Verster Prison after twenty-seven years. At seventy-one, he entered a changed world and faced a vast crowd in Cape Town without knowing exactly what the future would bring. He offered words of peace, democracy, and freedom, then kept walking into the work before him. Four years later he became South Africa’s first democratically elected president. His journey from prison to presidency began not with control, but with willingness.

The Whole Practice

Roosevelt descended a mountain toward a responsibility he had not sought. Mandela walked out of prison into an unpredictable future. Between them stand the Desert Fathers and Mothers carrying questions into silence, the mystics trusting a road they could not see, Merton praying without a map, and Angelou writing another page while doubt kept talking. They were not perfectly prepared. They were available. They listened and took the next step.

Nobody knows what they’re doing—not completely. And that is exactly the point. The spiritual life was never designed for the certain; it was designed for the willing. You do not need the entire map. You need enough faith for the next honest step. Okay, God. Here we go.

Affirmation

I release the need to know every step before I take the first one. I am guided, held, and supported by a Presence that never requires my certainty—only my willingness. I move forward in faith, and faith is always enough.