



**Coptic Orthodox Diocese of
the Southern United States**

**The Monthly Message
to the Priests' Wives
April 2019**

Dearest Sister in Christ,

So, your husband was called to the priesthood. What does that mean for your life and your purpose?

Sometimes we can confuse our purpose with our husband's or with each other's, as though we are not each unique with our own gifts and talents. Our priority in life should be to find our own life's purpose in three actions:

- Seeking God's Will
- Submitting to God's Will
- Fulfilling God's Will

Or as Father Manasseh Youhanna puts it in The Crucified Jesus:

"Truly, the greatest knowledge is the knowledge of the will of God, the greatest valour is submission to it and the greatest vocation is its accomplishment" (p. 23)

Each action comes with its own struggles and requires us to grow in new and different ways. While whole books could be written about each of these actions, let's take a brief overview of them, one by one.

SEEKING GOD'S WILL

First, we have to seek God's will, and, in order to find it, we need to create time and space to listen to Him, have courage to listen, and ask help from trusted advisors.

We can't figure out what God's will is in our lives unless we spend time with Him. Not just any time but dedicated time. Christ said, "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you" (John 15:7). Abiding doesn't mean a short visit here and there. It means living with God, staying with Him without fading away in interest or attention.

Abiding with God and listening to God requires some courage. Often, we shy away from spending time with God because we don't really want to hear what He has to say. We don't want to know what He has in store for us. As C.S. Lewis put it, "We are not necessarily doubting

that God will do the best for us; we are wondering how painful the best will turn out to be.” Think of Jonah and how eager he was to avoid God’s will, how he’d already decided he wouldn’t like it.

God doesn’t want to force us into His will. He wants us to choose Him. In Deuteronomy, we’re told *“You will seek the Lord your God, and you will find Him if you seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul”* (Deut. 4:29). We have to seek God wholeheartedly in order to find Him, and seek His will with all our soul in order to find it.

It also helps a lot to have a few trusted advisors, people we can turn to in times of doubt or fear, like our father of confession, a spiritual father or mother, and Godly friends. His Grace Bishop Youssef once said that to confirm God’s will for a priest’s ordination, there should be six parties in agreement. In the same way, in our lives, we should seek input from those we trust as listening to God. So, *“Listen to counsel and receive instruction, that you may be wise in your latter days”* (Proverbs 19:20).

If we choose our advisers carefully, we’ll be able to hear God’s will amplified and find peace in it. That doesn’t mean we’ll always agree with our advisors, but it does mean that through conversations and discussions with them, we’ll be able to hear His voice loud and clear. *“A wise man will hear and increase learning, and a man of understanding will attain wise counsel”* (Proverbs 1:5).

SUBMITTING TO GOD’S WILL

Next, and I will argue that this is the most difficult action, we must submit to God’s will. Here we take Saint Mary’s example, saying, *“Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word”* (Luke 1:38). This is easier said than done.

In order to submit to God’s will, we have to believe three things. First, that God is all powerful, fearful, and to be revered. Second, that God is faithful and that His promises are true. And third, we have to reject one kind of discomfort and embrace another, that holy discomfort.

Scripture is filled with references to the fear of God and with references to how awesome and almighty He is. My favorite is Job, when confronted with God, saying, *“I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You. Therefore, I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes”* (Job 42:5-6). To look at the galaxy hanging in the sky and to fathom that this same Creator formed us is a requirement for submitting to His will, believing that He knows all and controls all.

It’s not enough to know that God is all-powerful. We have to also believe that God really is faithful in His promises. We can take small steps in His will. Then stop and listen, confirm we’re on the right way, and walk again. Saint Paul describes the faith of the holy men of the Old Testament in this way: *“These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having*

seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth” (Hebrews 11:13). We have to die to our own will, believing in promises we can’t yet see up close. But we are assured of them. This assurance helps us to submit to His will.

The last part of submission is getting comfortable with discomfort, or more accurately choosing our discomfort wisely. Christ calls those who are burdened and weary and says, *“Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light”* (Matthew 11:29-30). You see, my sister, we are always uncomfortable. If we run away from God’s will, we are uncomfortable. If we run towards God’s will, we are uncomfortable. But His yoke is easy. His burden is light. In Him, we find a travelling companion beyond compare.

Isaiah the prophet says, *“Tremble, you women who are at ease; be troubled, you complacent ones; strip yourselves, make yourselves bare, and gird sackcloth on your waists”* (Isaiah 32:11). Let’s arm ourselves for the kind of discomfort that bears spiritual fruit. Let’s run with God in His Way.

We can begin very simply, by practicing this kind of obedience in our relationship with our father of confession. By submitting to his advice, we train ourselves to submit to God’s will, too.

FULFILLING GOD’S WILL

Finally, our ultimate calling is to accomplish God’s will, as Father Manasseh said. Our lives ALWAYS have a purpose. I love to imagine our lives like an oil lamp. The oil must be refilled nightly in order to stay lit. The Psalmist says, *“I lie down and sleep; I wake again, because the Lord sustains me”* (Psalm 3:5 NIV). We are being sustained for a reason. Each night God refills the lamp of our lives on purpose. And one night we will lie down, and He will not add oil to the lamp. We must take advantage of this precious time He gives us to do all that He desires of us in this life—as large or as small a task, as public or as private.

Our lives can also have more than one purpose. Too often I hear people who are still healthy and active but are older speak as though they have already fulfilled their purpose, resigned to fading into the background. We women can be especially guilty of this. But *“to everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven”* (Ecclesiastes 3:1), and our lives too have seasons and a purpose for every season.

And again, King Solomon says, *“I have seen the God-given task with which the sons of men are to be occupied. He has made everything beautiful in its time”* (Ecclesiastes 3:10-11). Indeed, there is no one purpose in your life that is more important than another in God’s eyes. His only purpose is for your salvation and every season, every “sub-purpose” so to speak, walks you towards that destination.

Lastly, we have to make peace with the fact that, here on earth, we may never see the fruit we expect. I like to think of the tasks we do in life as having an earthly salary and a heavenly salary. The earthly salary is not guaranteed. Perhaps we die before we see a young person we have mentored return to Christ. Perhaps we are hated and reviled by those we serve. But our heavenly salary IS guaranteed. Saint Paul says, *“We hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance”* (Romans 8:25).

My husband describes it this way. Seeking God’s will is finding a recipe for a cake. Submitting to God’s will is getting out the ingredients. Fulfilling God’s will is pulling that cake out of the oven at the end of it all and having a big delicious slice.

It’s not enough to read the steps. We have to do them. And we don’t always know whether all the steps are working in advance. We have to trust. If we open the oven door too soon and have a peek, we might ruin the cake. And some steps only make sense later, in the order they are given.

But we can’t know how the cake tastes until we bake it. We can’t see the beauty and majesty of the big picture of God’s will until we seek it, we submit to it, and we fulfill it.

(You can learn more about finding your life’s purpose in His Grace Bishop Youssef’s talk called [“What Is Your Purpose?”](#))

Seek Him.

Your sister in Christ,

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