



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of

the Southern United States

Monthly Questions and Answers September 2019

Q22: Sometimes I share a matter that troubles me, with Your Grace, and it seems like Your Grace doesn't do anything about it. So, then I'm more troubled...

A22: When an athlete is training for a sport, does his coach help him perfect his skills or, when he sees a weakness in him, goes on to the field instead of him?

A Spiritual Guide guides in order for you to fight your own battles so that, with your free will, you apply the commandments of God and grow in spirituality and experience.

Sometimes the devil will try and cast doubts, in the minds of the disciples, suggesting that they do not have proper guidance because their father is not always physically present, but this is wrong. Do not quench the Spirit.

"And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. Now it came to pass, while He blessed them, that He was parted from them and carried up into heaven. And they worshiped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple praising and blessing God. Amen" (Luke 24:50-53)



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Monthly Questions and Answers September 2019 (2)

Q23: If being poor means having insufficient resources or an inability to meet basic needs, then how can I live my vow of poverty here?

A23: We have taken a vow of voluntary poverty, which means that it isn't happening to you but that, with your free-will you choose it. If all resources are being offered to you, it's within your free-will to make of it what you'd like.

Let's say you enter into the kitchen and there are many food options for you to select from, it's your free-will to take little or a lot — this allows one to practice the virtue of self-denial and self-control. The same goes with your reaction to being refused something you would like — if we find the means to get the thing ourselves or to bypass the system in order to get it anyway, then maybe we are not practicing poverty.

The external environment does not need to be poor in order for you to live your vow of poverty.

It also does not only apply to material things but, for instance, if you consider recognition and respect a "basic need" then accepting that you do not have this, is living the vow of poverty.

May the Lord grant you the gift of living all your vows faithfully.



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Monthly Questions and Answers September 2019 (3)

Q24: If I'm not feeling joyful, is it always due to a tribulation or is it my own sin? Or could it be from God?

A24: We can breakdown your question into three parts:

1. Can tribulation be the reason I am not feeling joyful?

Yes, it can. We are human and it is completely normal that we may feel sad when certain tribulations come our way and we go through the fire of purification. However, we must not forget that it is exactly that (we are going through the fire of purification) and so we should take courage and regain our joy in the Lord!

Saint Peter wrote, "In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, through it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ," (1 Peter 1:6-7).

Someone once said that our Lord Jesus Christ did not come to take our crosses away; He came to give us the power of the Holy Spirit to bear them, and so remember that Saint Paul said, "And He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore, most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." (2 Cor. 12: 9)

When we have a good foundation in our faith and hope in God, then we are not easily shaken—"These likewise are the ones on stony ground who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with gladness; and they have no root in themselves, and so endure only for a time. Afterward, when tribulation and persecution arise for the word's sake, immediately they stumble." (Mk. 4:16-17)

2. Can my own sin be the reason I am not feeling joyful?

Yes, it can. Saint Peter said, "But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters." (1 Pt. 4:15)

In the case, when we have committed a sin, then our sadness should be a godly sorrow leading us to repentance as written in the letter to Corinthians, "For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted;" (2 Cor. 7:10) Joy should, therefore, not be far away, for as said in the psalms, "In the multitude of my anxieties within me, Your comforts delight my soul" (Psalm 94:19)

Furthermore, the Desert Fathers teach us to take blame and to accept all difficult matters as a result of our own sin— "An old man used to say, 'In all your trials, do not blame any man; only blame yourself, saying, 'These things have happened to me because of my sins.'"

However, with regardless to the *feeling* of sadness in such trials, no— God will not instill in us a sadness, as a punishment, for a sin we have commitment.

3. Can it be from God that I don't feel joy?

St. Paul, in his letter to the Philippians wrote, "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I will say, rejoice!" and in his letter to the Thessalonians he wrote, "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." Therefore, to not feel joy will never be something that comes from God—it is God's will that we are joyful even in the midst of our tribulations.



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Monthly Questions and Answers September 2019 (4)

Q25: Time management

Q: What is Your Grace's general advice to us on time management?

A: We must be careful with our time as said by St. Paul's in letter to the Ephesians, "redeem the time, because the days are evil" and not to simply be pulled in any direction.

If possible, have a daily schedule written out. If this is not possible, then have a task list written out.

Q: Is it ever okay to put things off until tomorrow or is this procrastination?

A: Yes, it is okay but it depends on the priority. If we are putting off a priority until the next day, when God has granted us the time to do it today, then this is procrastination and this is not good.

Q: In that case, should we make sacrifices in our schedule in order to get the high priority things done?

A: Yes.

Q: What should we sacrifice?

A: Sleep, if we can.

Q: What if we have written out a schedule and then unexpected things happen in our day?

A: Any good schedule has room for unexpected events. One should not build a schedule with back to back tasks in it, but should have room for flexibility and in this manner neither we or the schedule will be disturbed.

Q: Let's say we are given a certain task to complete and we've allocated a certain number of hours to it; once the hours are complete, should the task be put aside until the next day, or completed in full, if possible, the same day?

A: It is okay to go over the expected hours of a task in order to complete it - work in the monastery/convent is a blessing not a chore and if one views it in this manner, then the flexibility in one's schedule should permit us to be able to work a little extra and finish what we started.

It also important to mention that if this constantly occurs in a certain task, then we can adapt our schedule and increase the hours allocated to the given task.

Q: Sometimes we work a little number of hours but somehow feel exhausted.

A: This could be due to a lack of focus, organization and a specific aim. If we simply wake up in the morning without a specific goal and carry out the day as it goes, then we are letting ourselves be pulled by the current and it will lead us where it wills. This will quickly exhaust us. As we mentioned earlier, one should be in control of their time.

St. Anthony said, "Whoever hammers a lump of iron, first decides what he is going to make of it, a scythe, a sword, or an axe. Even so we ought to make our minds what kind of virtue we want to forge, or we labor in vain." It is the same with everything in our spiritual life, we must have a goal, a specific aim and not just go about things aimlessly.

Q: What does Your Grace consider to be the greatest cause of wasted time?

A: Idleness, idle talking, being curious about matters that do not involve us, and letting people pull us in every direction.

There may come a time when we have fallen into a lukewarm state and we simply don't feel like managing our time and doing all that thinking. But we should not give up. We are serving God and our own personal rest should not be the goal. He will grant you the strength to continue. In one of Pope Shenouda's books, Characteristics of the Spiritual Path, His Holiness speaks about self-coercion. HH mentions that "the difference between the saints and ordinary people is that the saints forced themselves to practice virtue from the beginning until they got used to it and loved it."

When we have a busy schedule, managing our time can be difficult, but it is a skill that needs perseverance like anything else. Consider prayer for a beginner, HH said that, "the beginner in the spiritual path is not trained in prayer. He is not used to standing long before God and has no spiritual feelings to help him pray with love, tenderness of heart, solemnity and contemplation. Yet he forces himself to pray, and if he is tempted to conclude his prayer he forces himself to continue. He feels at night that he is weighed down by slumber and physically exhausted, having neither the energy to

stand for prayer nor the desire to pray. Yet he forces himself, putting before his eyes the words of St. Isaac: 'Force yourself on the night prayer, enhancing it with psalms.' In this way the person forces himself to pray, to stand or kneel or make prostrations. He forces himself to lift up his hands, to concentrate his senses in prayer and to control his scattered intellect, restraining it from straying and wandering."

"Do not respond to the love of ease not to the call of desire. Do not spoil yourself but know that self-coercion will continue with you until you find pleasure in the life of virtue and then it [the feeling of having to force yourself] will leave you spontaneously and the life of love will start!"