

Virtue

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Humility - HG Bishop Peter Sermon

St Mina's Feast 2020 in Nashville, TN

Was it right for disciples to ask "who will be greatest?" - Yes! Christ did not rebuke them as He rebuked some other questions. Also... Everyone should strive to be great! Greatest dad, teacher, husband, etc.

Humility is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less

Humility takes strength - someone who is weak, low self-esteem, etc is not humble. Christ was not like that.

Humility is a decision (like love). Being humble is the key to a joyful and peaceful life.

Psalm 91:1 (911... Emergency) - He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High Shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.

Two parts to humility

- Humility with God
- Humility with Man

Just like a prostration has two parts:

- Going down
- Rising up

I need to go down and humble myself before God and rise up and practice the humility with man

Humility of man with God

- When was the last time you stood and spoke to God (genuinely)
- Stand in the presence of your Father - even if you don't speak a single word
- Humility is to spend time with God, understanding that if God doesn't give me ___ then I won't have it! (joy, peace, solution to my problem, etc)
- The worst thing we can do is depend on ourselves - "Fix It" Mentality (e.g. disciples at feeding the multitude)
- The solution is spending alone time with God.
- Spending time with God leads to humility. Spending time with people leads to pride

- I cannot sit in a room alone and feel important. But among other people, I might feel important

Humility of man with man

- "I am sorry" - hardest three words
- Na3am 7ader Akhtet
- My temper gets me into trouble. My pride keeps me in that trouble
- In order to have humility, I must train myself to say "I am sorry" as much as I can

What is the result of humility?

- Grace - the power of God in your life
- But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble." (James 4:6)

Fr Daoud Lamei - 8 Exercises in Gratitude

<https://soundcloud.com/frdaoudlamei/01-let-us-give-thanks-to-the-lord?in=frdaoudlamei/sets/let-us-give-thanks-to-the-lord>

- Thanksgiving is the easiest and most important virtue to talk about
- We'll discuss 8 Exercises to insert Thanksgiving throughout the whole day - if we become accustomed to them, we will find our life become more thankful
- Exercise 1: As soon as you open your eyes in the morning, give thanks to God
 - Some people have a bad habit of first thing in the morning, the instant their eyes open, they're on their phone
 - For others, as soon as they open their eyes they're off to make coffee
 - Let "I thank you, Lord" be the first words out of your mouth every morning
 - Some people will put a sign on their bed or on their mirror - as soon as they wake up, give thanks to the Lord.
 - "make it known that one must rise before the sun to give You thanks, and must pray to You at the dawning of the light" (Wisdom 16:28 NRSV)
 - This is the monastic rite, too - they wake up in the darkness so as to pray and praise before the animals and plants and sun and the rest of the world wake up
 - Grow in this exercise:
 - Some people say "I'll do the whole Prayer of Thanksgiving as soon as I wake up"
 - Others say "I will thank God 20 times as soon as I wake up"
 - What to thank God for?
 - Life
 - Those who you love
 - Your senses are still working (hearing might be 50/50 but it still works!)
 - New day is a new opportunity to do good, to repent, etc.
 - Rest
- Exercise 2: Every time you eat or drink, give thanks to God
 - Every spoonful and every sip
 - We're looking for the things that can remind us to give thanks
 - What to thank God for?
 - The presence of food in a world that has hunger and thirst... people are dying of hunger and thirst, but you are one of the ones who has it
 - The fact that you are alive and even able to eat
 - The food, itself
 - Maybe it will remind you about spiritual food and drink (Bible and Prayer) - ate a hamburger, read a chapter! Drank a soda, pray a psalm!

- Exercise 3: Every time you see someone
 - Some people you see and you love them... and some people when you see them you...
 - See your children, your friends, your wife, your manager, your co-worker
 - Those who cause you trouble are playing a role in your salvation
 - At the very least, they will teach you prayer!
 - I thank you Lord because Georges annoyed me this morning - at least it got me to talk to You
 - What to thank God for?
 - Those who you are happy to see
 - Those who are bothering you or clashing you or conflicting with you
 - Those who give you the opportunity to serve them
- Exercise 4: Every time you move - "el 7araka baraka"
 - At some point you were trying to move and your neck hurt, or your back hurt, or your knee... and when you get older it will be more often
 - There was a servant who had lots of pain and discomfort, but he was serving and visiting the sick. He went to a very sick person one day and saw that he was very happy! So he said "I don't understand... why are you so happy?" And the guy replied "This is the first time in several years that I can move my neck!" He said that phrase made me turn 180 degrees.
 - What to thank God for?
 - That you are able to move
 - That you are able to go out
 - That you are able to leave the house
 - That you move without pain!
 - Remember how hard it was during the Quarantine Period of COVID
- Exercise 5: Every message and phone call
 - I'm not encouraging you to use the phone a lot, but imagine if with every text, WhatsApp message, Facetime, phone call, etc. you thanked God! How many times a day would it be?
 - Teach those around you and that you are communicating with about God - some words like "Thank God", "God willing", "God bless", etc. are our language. And they can be the easiest way to witness to the Lord in the world.
 - What to thank God for?
 - Good news
 - Bad news ("I thank you Lord, that it may be made good") - "Say thank God and wait a few weeks"
- Exercise 6: For Pain
 - This one is harder... but it has its own blessings
 - One lady had cancer and Abouna went to visit her before her departure and she said she wanted to confess. And she started crying "I made a mistake" - what was her mistake? "One time, I said 'that's enough Lord'" and Abouna asks her "well what do you usually say?" - She said "I thank you, Lord... but this one time I made a mistake and told the Lord that's enough"
 - It may not be that the Thanksgiving will bring you physical healing, but it will soften and prepare your heart

- Exercise 7: For the Spiritual Work
 - The Church teaches us a Life of Thanksgiving - starts and ends with a Thanksgiving Prayer
 - What to thank God for?
 - Went to a convention - thank God
 - Entered into the Liturgy - thank God
 - Heard a sermon or a lecture - thank God
 - Served at the church - thank God
 - Called someone to console or mourn with them - thank God
 - Every time you pray, every time you read the Bible
- Exercise 8: For your mind and what's on it - Thank God instead of dwelling on thoughts
 - Our minds are disorganized, they are a collection of ideas and thoughts and sensory data... what did I see? What did I hear? What did I feel? What do I remember? What did I think? And all of it comes together in an unorganized way, and this is what we see when we dream at night... a combination of everything from that day or week. And sometimes we just think and think and think and dwell on a problem or dwell on something... but instead, let's transform it into Thanksgiving. Sometimes we even make up stories and believe them - "Oh he's talking about me behind my back" or "Oh he did this to spite me or because he hates me." Instead, let me thank God and in this way I can turn it into a prayer about the problem.
 - What to thank God for?
 - Any problem on my mind, I thank You O Lord for holding it in Your hand
 - Any past problem or thing in the past, I thank You, O Lord, for taking care of it
 - Any person I am thinking about, I thank You, O Lord for putting him/her into my life"

The Virtue of Discernment & Wisdom - HE Metropolitan Youssef

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What is Wisdom and Discernment

- "But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil." (Hebrews 5:14)
 - Wisdom is for the Spiritually Mature
 - Lack of discernment is an indicator of spiritual immaturity

Wisdom in the Scripture

- Wisdom is a requirement for those who will serve as deacons
 - "Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; ... And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which [Stephen] spoke." (Acts 6:3, 10)
- Wisdom is one of the titles of our Lord Jesus Christ
 - "[Christ,] in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." (Colossians 2:3)
- The Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of wisdom and understanding
 - "The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord." (Isaiah 11:2)
- Wisdom is one of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit
 - "For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12: 8)

Heavenly Wisdom vs Earthly Wisdom

- Wisdom of the world is called "cunning" or "craftiness"
 - "For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, 'He catches the wise in their *own* craftiness'" (1 Corinthians 3:19)

- Heavenly Wisdom is that which comes from above
 - "Who *is* wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct *that* his works *are done* in the meekness of wisdom." (James 3:13)
 - Wisdom of the world comes with arrogance, but heavenly wisdom comes with meekness.
 - "But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but *is* earthly, sensual, demonic. For where envy and self-seeking *exist*, confusion and every evil thing *are* there." (James 3:14-16)
 - If the wisdom that I have is self-seeking, selfish, with pride - then it is craftiness or cunning. It's not heavenly wisdom.
 - "But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy." (James 3:17)
- Examples of Earthly Wisdom
 - The Serpent in Genesis 3 who is described as "more cunning" than the other animals
 - Jezebel who used craftiness to acquire Naboth's field and have him killed, with some false witnesses
 - Rebecca, the wife of Isaac and mother of Jacob and Esau - when she told Jacob how to deceive his father
 - Ahitophel's counsel to Absalom which would have enabled Absalom to steal the kingdom from King David - but the Lord dispersed the counsel of Ahitophel (as we say in the liturgy)
 - Balaam who in his earthly wisdom advised Moab to send their women to Israel to cause them to fall into the sin of sexual immorality and God will not be with them

How can we acquire Heavenly Wisdom?

1. **Prayer:** "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him" (James 1:5)
 - King Solomon, when he became king after his father, King David, felt the weight of his responsibility. And the Lord spoke to him and told him to ask for whatever he wants and King Solomon asked for wisdom. And he was the wisest man to ever live.
 - In the Bishop Canon: "You were granted... the wisdom of Solomon"
 - If this wisdom comes from above, let us ask for this wisdom from above
2. **The Scripture:** "I have more understanding than all my teachers, for Your testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the ancients, because I keep Your precepts." (Proverbs 119:99-100)
3. **Counsel:**
 - Any president in any country has many counselors; Many people retire and work as advisors
 - Ask, and learn wisdom! Especially from the elders, from the clergy, from your Sunday School servants
 - When you ask and learn with the spirit of a disciple, you will build up your wisdom

- St Athanasius described St Anthony as a bee - a bee flies from one flower to another flower to collect the nectar. St Anthony used to go from one father to another father to learn from them.

4. **Learn from the Mistakes of Others:**

- You need to learn from your own mistakes, but don't wait to repeat the mistakes of others to learn!
- You know from statistics, life experience, research, etc. how drugs have destroyed many youth. So learn from this! Don't go into drugs or smoking or gambling or alcohol... learn from the mistakes of others!
- If someone told you that fire burns, you don't need to put your hand in the fire to know that it burns.

Wisdom is Needed for Making Decisions and Choices

1. Some decisions are well known to be very very bad
 - Drugs and sexual immorality
 - I know it is bad, I will stay away from it. This decision is easy.
2. Some decisions are well known to be very very good
 - Fasting, Helping the poor, Visiting the sick, Attending Youth Meeting, Going to Church
 - I know it is good, this decision is easy to make
3. Some decisions are more difficult - I don't know if this will help me or hurt me
 - e.g. you are accepted to a college in a state that does not have a church. Every situation is different, and it requires discernment to figure out what is the best decision for you.
 - Pray about wisdom from God to help me to discern
 - Ask myself which one is better for my Spiritual Life? Which one is edifying?
 - Is it edifying or wise to live in a place where the closest church is 4 hours away?
 - Is it suitable for me and my family?
 - Go and get the opinion of others
 - Get counsel from wise, godly people. Don't get opinion or advice from people who are not wise, or from people who are ungodly.
 - Use your mind
 - Make a table, write the choices and the pros and cons. In writing. And this table should not be filled in one session - my thoughts are in one direction now, but tomorrow may be in the opposite direction. I need to fill out this table over a period of 7-10 days. When I remember a point, I write it down.
 - So at the end, when I look at the table, it will be clear (through the guidance of the Holy Spirit) which decision I should make
 - Don't make quick decisions. Quick decisions can be a hinderance to wisdom.
 - St Macarius one time had the idea to enter into the inner desert to find the anchorites. From outside, this decision looks good... but, he writes, "I examined

this thought for three years to know whether it is from God or not from God."

- Someone upsets you and you immediately say "okay I quit, this friendship is over... I'm not gonna talk to him anymore." - you did not use your mind, you followed your emotions. And since your emotions are negative, your decision was bad.

Wisdom's Benefits

- Wisdom protects you from falling into false spirituality
 - Someone might say "I want to grow in the virtue of obedience... I will obey everyone who is older than me." - it sounds good... but it needs wisdom and discernment. If someone older then comes and tells you to do something that is sinful, or that will not edify you, or that will hurt you, and you do it "out of obedience" - that is false spirituality! You need discernment and wisdom to know NOT to obey in that instance.
- Wisdom will help you in dealing with cunning and crafty people
 - They went to the Lord and told Him - "we know you are a man of God and you don't have any partiality and you don't fear people, so we want to ask you a question... should we pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" It's a trap. If He says yes, they will tell the Jews: "See? He is not the Prophet or the Messiah... He's encouraging you to submit to the occupying government." And if He says no, they will go to Caesar and say: "He is turning the people against your empire." It's a no-win question. The Lord, in His wisdom told them to show Him a denarii and He asked whose inscription it was... it's Caesars! He said "then it's Caesar's! So render to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and render to God what belongs to God"
 - HHPS was attacked by crafty people like this many times because he was wise.
 - They asked him who will go to heaven? Christians, Muslims or Jews? And in the wisdom of the Holy Spirit he answered "he who has sound faith and does good deeds will go to heaven" - which is true.
 - Another time, he was asked about where a prominent Muslim leader was going after he died. Of course, HH couldn't say that he isn't going to heaven as that would cause issues between Muslims and Christians. But HH responded "he is going with his beloved Mohammad" - which was an answer that appeased both the Muslims and the Christians.
- Wisdom will help you to discern when to speak and when to be silent
 - There are times when silence is a sin - if St Athanasius was silent at hearing Arius' heresy, that would have been sin.
- Wisdom is needed in dealing with others
 - Some people clash with others - how to sympathize and how to empathize, requires wisdom
 - Rejoicing with those who rejoice, and weeping with those who weep
- Wisdom is needed in studying the Scripture
 - Some people use earthly wisdom to interpret the text - "No one will believe if you say that this is actually Body and Blood... no it must be a symbol"
 - Some people take one verse - "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved" - and throw out the rest of the Bible

- Wisdom will help you to know when to be submissive and when to be assertive

Wisdom vs Intelligence

- Wisdom is not the same as intelligence
 - Wisdom can be acquired by the experience of life
 - Many people who are not educated, but are filled with the Holy Spirit, you can find wisdom in their mind and heart.
- One thing that hinders wisdom is lack of knowledge
 - We need to read more and be particular about what we choose to read - not always just novels and stories; not wasting hours on social media; not just reading headlines.
 - Feed your mind with good reading
 - Food is the nourishment of our body
 - Spiritual Exercises like prayer and Scripture is the nourishment of our spirit
 - Reading is the nourishment of the mind
 - Choosing a spouse? Read books about choosing a spouse, about marriage, about the engagement period, about the role of man and woman in marriage, how to keep the bond and fellowship.
 - Having a child? Read about parenting, how to deal with children, characteristics of children at certain ages, etc.
 - People who read a lot from good resources are very wise. When you go and ask them for advice, their advice is very helpful.

Fr Mikhail Ibrahim on Prayer in Conflict

Fr Boules George here is describing a story that was told to him by Fr Shenouda Maher during Fr Shenouda's 40 days in the monastery after his ordination.

Fr Shenouda tells the story like this:

"When I was a young servant, I served in the church of St Anthony in Shobra, but I confessed in St Mark Shobra. The Sunday School service in St Anthony Shobra at the time took place inside the main church. It was split into sections where every set of pews was dedicated to a Sunday School class. About six classes in the church all at the same time. And it was the beginning of the year, when the day came to pass out to the kids, the calendars with saints on them, as a gift. And I took what I needed for my class, and I went to them to give the lesson.

There was another servant, who went to get some calendars and it seemed they were all taken by then. And looking over, he saw that I had many. And he was filled with anger. So he started to approach me and my class, as I'm giving the lesson, and he shouts from far "YOU CALL YOURSELF A SERVANT?" and as soon as he said that, the whole church was in silence and all the kids from all the classes jumped up on the pews to see what was happening, thinking there was going to be a fight in the church. "YOU CALL YOURSELF A SERVANT?" and he shouted about calendars and taking gifts and not leaving any for other people, but I stood in silence. I was speechless. And I was in silence until some other servants came and took him away, telling him "not in front of the kids" or "not in God's house." And when he had left, I continued my lesson.

The next week, I was going to St Mark in Shobra to confess. And I sat with my father of confession Fr Mikhail Ibrahim.

[Fr Mikhail Ibrahim is considered by many to be a great modern-day saint. Often portrayed as meek, gentle, quiet, he was also powerful and uncompromising, and demanded a high standard for his spiritual children].

And I told Fr Mikhail the story, how I was berated in the middle of church, how I was embarrassed in front of the kids, how I stood in silence and did not retaliate or talk back. Here, I was expecting him, as my Father of Confession, to tap on my back and say "it's ok, my son. Just endure, just endure." But Fr Mikhail looked at me and said: "Have you sinned, and come to me to complain?"

And I was in disbelief! Sinned? Maybe he didn't hear the story... so I told him again. And he responded "I heard it the first time, and I asked you - Have you sinned, and come to me to complain?"

I didn't know what he meant so I asked "in what way did I do something wrong?"

And he explained to me:

"Is this man not your brother?" Yes.

"And didn't the devil trick him?" Yes.

"And he fell into the sin of anger?" Yes.

And then he asked:

"When the devil has tricked your brother, how much did you pray for your brother, before you came to me?" and I had no answer.

"How much did you fast for your brother, that the Lord removes his anger, and removes any of your sins against him, before you came to me?" and I could not answer.

"How many metanoias and prostrations did you do for your brother, before you came to me?" I had done none.

"Did you do metanoias?" No

"Did you fast?" No

"Did you pray in tears for him?" No

"Didn't I tell you that you sinned, and have come to me to complain?"

And he instructed me: "Go. Pray. Fast. Do Metanoias. And after that, may God absolve you to receive the Eucharist."

And Fr Boules adds to the end of the story: "This is how Fr Mikhail raised saints from his spiritual children. Because the commandment of God was not taken lightly."

Fellowship - HE Metropolitan Youssef

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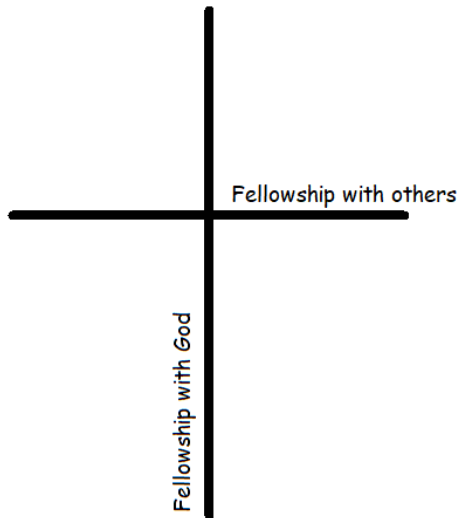
"Behold what is so good or what so pleasant, as for brothers dwelling together? It is as ointment upon the head, that came down upon the beard, the beard of Aaron that came down to the fringe of his clothing; as the dew of Aermom, that comes down upon the mountain of Zion, for there the Lord commanded the blessing and the life forever. Alleluia." - Psalm 133 (132 LXX)

The ointment and the dew signify the blessing - this is the blessing that we receive when we gather together in the Holy Spirit

Fellowship = κοινωνία = Having things in common

Fellowship with God and Others

- "God *is* faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord." (1 Cor 1:9)
 - The ultimate purpose and goal of our life is to be in fellowship with God (Theosis)
 - Fellowship is the destiny, it is the end; preaching, teaching, helping the poor, evangelism, etc. are all means of achieving the end: Fellowship with God
- "that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have **fellowship with us**; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ." (1 John 1:3)
- So our fellowship is in two dimensions: vertical (fellowship with God) and horizontal (fellowship with others)



- This fellowship on earth is fulfilled in the Mystery of the Eucharist: **ALL OF US** are eating and drinking from the same paten and chalice (horizontal) and we are eating the **BODY AND BLOOD OF GOD** (vertical)
- This is why our life is CENTERED around the Eucharist. The centrality of all services in the Church is the Eucharist.

Blessings of Fellowship

- Fullness of Joy (1 John 1:4)
 - "And these things we write to you that your joy may be **full**." (1 John 1:4)
 - **Fullness** of joy results from fullness of fellowship with God and with others
- Cleansing from sin (1 John 1:5-10)
 - "This is the message which we have heard from Him and declared to you"
 - Divine reality that is declared to us
 - "God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth."
 - If we entertain a wrong attitude, we are in darkness and thus excluded from the light. If God is light, then we are excluded from the fellowship of God
 - "But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin"
 - Produces fellowship with one another and produces continual cleansing
 - We are all sinners, but the differences between those walking in darkness and walking in light is repentance. The Blood of Christ does not cleanse from sin those who are walking in darkness
 - "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."
 - Walking in light is NOT the same as being sinless, but the key is repentance
 - "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."
 - John 3:19-21
 - If I run away or escape from the light, then I will have no fellowship with God
 - But if I come to the light in order to be cleansed, then I will have true Koinonia with God and others

- Isaiah 31:9b
 - "Says the Lord, whose fire is in Zion and whose furnace is in Jerusalem"
 - Fire and furnace refer to purification - where does purification happen? In Zion and Jerusalem = **In the Church**

Fellowship is the Birthplace of God's Purpose

- God's purpose is revealed in fellowship, not in isolation/separation
- Fellowship between the Holy Trinity
 - The decision to create mankind came out of Fellowship
 - "Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness;'" (Genesis 1:26)
 - The decision to expel mankind from the Paradise came out of Fellowship
 - "Then the Lord God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever" - therefore the Lord God sent him out of the garden of Eden."
 - The decision to disperse mankind and confound their language came out of the Fellowship of the Holy Trinity
 - "Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech." (Genesis 11:7)
 - In the time of Isaiah, the quest for a messenger for Israel came from the Holy Trinity
 - "Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: 'Whom shall I send, And who will go for Us?' Then I said, 'Here *am* I! Send me.'" (Isaiah 6:8)
- Fellowship between God and us
 - Acts 13, 14, 15
 - John 3:6
 - 1 John 5:4

Fellowship's Demands from Us

- "Submitting to one another in the fear of God." (Ephesians 5:21)
 - Commitment to walk in the fear of God
 - Submission to one another (in the day-to-day)
 - Our ego makes us rigid, stubborn, not flexible
 - One of the features of Divine Wisdom is "willing to yield"
 - "But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy." (James 3:17)
- "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers." (Acts 2:42)
 - Apostolic Doctrine
 - Be a disciple to the Scripture, Early Church Texts, Apostolic Canons, Ecumenical Councils, Liturgical Texts
 - Fellowship

- Coming together in fellowship (Bible Study, Midnight Praises, Aghapy meal, meetings and assemblies, etc.)
- Breaking of Bread
 - Eucharist
- Prayers

The Outcome of Fellowship

- "And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved." (Acts 2:47)
 - "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."
(John 13:35)

Life of Giving - Fr Daoud Lamei

<https://www.youtube.com/embed/sD3box3WN58?si=mC1boIAiRuTDU4Kn>

"Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom." (Luke 6:38)

Give a smile, give a good word, money, time, a listening ear, a warm welcome

The more you give, the more you receive

The Giving Church:

Acts 11

- "Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul." (Acts 11:29-30)

2 Corinthians 8:

- "Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia"



- "that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality."
 - Christians in Macedonia was persecuted (as were Philippi and Thessalonica)

- Despite their persecution and afflictions, they were rejoicing in their giving
- Deep Poverty
 - Reminds us of the widow with two mites... entee na2sa fa2r?? Are you lacking poverty that you give even what you barely have?
- Riches of their Liberality
 - Reminds Fr Daoud of a man in the service of the poor once, who seeing the poor did not realize people were living like this. So he took out everything from his wallet and asked Abouna "would God accept this from me?" and they told him "it's a lot, it's too much" and he said "if I knew people were living like this, I would have done more but this is what I have right now. Will God accept it?" This is a man who acted without thinking - he acted from the love that was in his heart. Once we introduce thinking, we start to get in the way of the giving heart
- "For I bear witness that according to *their* ability, yes, and beyond *their* ability"
 - There is one who gives according to his ability and this is great (katar khero)
 - There is one who gives beyond his ability
 - Fr Daoud has seen people over 80 years old serving the Lord in such a way that is beyond what their body would allow, or what their age would allow and it is beyond biology and you wonder how are they doing it? Beyond their ability.
- "*they were* freely willing,"
 - You may ask someone for help with something and he says "I'll think about it" - but freely willing means without thinking. They are willing
 - Giving has to be from a willing heart, not forced
 - Don't wait for someone to say "give me" - this can even ruin the giving
 - Some of these Macedonians heard about the need in Jerusalem, and they encouraged each other to give as much as they could and even more, freely. They did not wait for St Paul to tell them or to ask them.
 - Not waiting for the church to say "come serve" but to come and serve
 - The day of service is the most valuable day of the week
 - Not waiting for the church to say "we have a project and we need funds" but to come and give
 - The day of giving your tithes and more than your tithes is the day of your happiness because you are laying up for yourself treasures in heaven
- "implored us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints."
 - With respect and humility, they urged St Paul
 - The "gift" or "the grace" (al ne3ma) - it's not called money, but grace. It's God's grace
 - He who gives is just a middleman, taking from the hand of God and putting in the hand of someone else who needs it
 - And ministering to the saints - not "the poor" but the saints
- "And not *only* as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and *then* to us by the will of God"
 - Before the giving, there was consecration to the Lord
 - They gave themselves to St Paul and said "whatever you need from me"

- "So we urged Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also complete this grace in you as well."
 - There is organization in what is given. Titus here is responsible for receiving their gift, organizing it, recording it, and making sure it is delivered appropriately. (as he had begun, so he would also complete)
 - Just like in the 5 loaves and 2 fish (those were a gift!) and yet the Lord organized. He told the disciples to separate them into groups of 50 and then each disciple took a basket and started to distribute to the groups - this is how they knew there were 5000 men!
- "But as you abound in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all diligence, and in your love for us—see that you abound in this grace also."
 - Just as you hear sermons, just as you pray the psalms, just as you read the Bible, just as you serve in Sunday School, see that you abound in THIS GRACE also. Giving.
 - Don't say "well I attend many liturgies and I read the Bible" - yes but not without giving.
 - Giving is a grace that gives more to the giver than the receiver
- "I speak not by commandment, but I am testing the sincerity of your love by the diligence of others"
 - He is not giving a commandment to the Corinthians here to give a certain amount or to do anything, but he is giving them the example of the Macedonians and how they gave, and how their joy was full
- "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich."
 - Christ, who was the richest - decided to be born in a manger, to a poor family, to live as a carpenter
 - You will be rich by His poverty - when He became poor, He gave us the whole of the heavens
- "And in this I give advice: It is to your advantage not only to be doing what you began and were desiring to do a year ago; but now you also must complete the doing *of it*; that as *there was* a readiness to desire *it*, so *there also may be* a completion out of what *you* have."
 - Again, he's not giving a commandment but advice
 - "Shed 7elak" - what you started a year ago, complete today
 - Giving has a weird effect... you give at first as you are unsure. Then you see that there is a blessing, so you give more. The blessing increases and there is peace and goodness, so you are transformed from the Act of Giving to the Desire of Giving

What to Give

Although we discussed here the giving of money or things, there are other equally important ways of giving:

- Some people don't need money, but need for someone just to ASK about them
- Some need a smile
- Some need encouragement
- Some need comfort (tab tab 3aleh)

- Some need medicine
- Some need visitation
- Some need guidance
- Some need to mourn and someone to mourn with them
- All of these are needs that have in front of them the virtue of giving

HE Metropolitan Youssef: Effective Discipleship

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HE Metropolitan Youssef ~ فسوي ابن الاله فاي ناطع · Effective Discipleship ~ LECTURE

Different Ways of Learning

1. Pupil

- The word "pupil" comes from the pupil of the eye)
- Pupils learn passively (e.g. by seeing, hearing)
- Children in Elementary School are pupils

2. Student

- The word "student" comes from the same root as "study"
- Students learn by studying (e.g. experiments in a lab, research in the library, writing papers, etc.). There is more effort than just sitting in a classroom and learning by feeding.
- Those in MS, HS, College, etc. are students

3. Disciple

- From the root word "discipline"
- Disciples learn through discipline. Followers of a teacher imitate him and he disciplines them.
- Followers of a Teacher (e.g. followers of Christ, followers of desert fathers) are disciples
- The Lord disciplined His disciples:
 - He started by teaching them as pupils
 - Then He sent them out to do some ministry and then come back with a report (Luke 9: "And the apostles, when they had returned, told Him all that they had done")
 - When the disciples told Him they could not cast out a demon, He told them "because of your unbelief"
 - When James and John argued about who would sit on the left or right, and the disciples were jealous He told them "no, to be the first, you must be last. To be the greatest, you need to be servant of all."
 - Through discipline, He formed their personalities so that they became His disciples

Christian means Disciple

Acts 11:19-26 When Barnabas and Paul went to Antioch they found there followers of Christ, and they added more to the Lord, "And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (Acts 11:26)

The word Christian and the word Disciple are **synonymous**

The day I stop being a disciple, I have stopped being a Christian

Christianity is a religion of discipleship: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20)

A servant who simply gives a lesson is making pupils. A servant who assigns homework or activities or research on top of that, is making students. But a servant who disciplines to transform others into the Image of Christ, is the one who makes disciples. Part of making disciples is to teach them as pupils and letting them do research as students; but the discipline which aims toward transforming others into the image of Christ is an essential part of the ministry.

The Copy Machine Analogy

- A disciple of Jesus Christ should look like Jesus Christ - "are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory" (2 Cor 3:18).
- The original image is the image of the Lord Jesus Christ. The copy machine is the servant. The paper is the disciple.
- The goal is to make an identical copy of the original - the Lord Jesus Christ. When you are seen looking like Christ, they will say "he is Christian" - "he is a disciple of Christ."
- Challenges:
 - The original image is PERFECT
 - You can never make an IDENTICAL copy to the original in this analogy (i.e. the Lord Jesus Christ)
 - You don't have a perfect copy machine.
 - If a copy machine has a scratch, all the copies will have the same scratch
 - If there is a weakness in the life of the servant, you may see this weakness in all of the copies.
 - A servant who doesn't attend vespers, his class will be a copy of him
 - A servant who doesn't pay attention to prayer, his class will be a copy of him
 - A servant who doesn't pay attention to fasting, his class will be a copy of him
 - If parents don't care about fasting, their children will be the same
 - If parents don't care about confession, their children will be the same
 - If parents are smoking and drinking, their children may be the same
 - You don't have perfect paper.
- In order to have an image as similar as possible to the original, I need a copy machine and paper that are as perfect as possible. Even with the best copy machine and the best paper, the first challenge still exists - you will never have a PERFECT copy. But you can

have something that reflects the original.

- The factory that produces the copy machine is the Church. So the Church needs to prepare the servants very well
- A very good copy machine like St Paul, with very good paper like Timothy, Titus or Philemon, results in very good copies.

Discipleship is Continuous

- "And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also." (2 Timothy 2:2)
- Five Generations:
 - St Paul (2) learned from Christ (1)
 - St Paul is teaching St Timothy (3) to commit to faithful men (4) to make disciples (5)
- The chain of discipleship of the Church:
 - St Mark --> St Anianus --> --> Pope Shenouda --> Pope Tawadros
- We can trace our own discipleship
 - I was disciplined by my Sunday School service who was disciplined by this Abouna who was disciplined by this bishop who was disciplined by this pope... back to St Mark, back to the Lord Jesus Christ

In order to make disciples, you yourself must be a disciple

All of us are called to make disciples. Parents should make their children disciples of Christ. Sunday School Servants, Clergy, etc. If you are not a disciple, then you are not a Christian.

How do I become a Disciple?

How do I become a learner?

"The Lord God has given Me
The tongue of the learned,
That I should know how to speak
A word in season to him who is weary.
He awakens Me morning by morning,
He awakens My ear To hear as the learned.
The Lord God has opened My ear;
And I was not rebellious,
Nor did I turn away." (Isaiah 50:4-5)

These two verses are about the Lord Jesus Christ. "I gave My back to those who struck Me, And My cheeks to those who plucked out the beard; I did not hide My face from shame and spitting." (Isaiah 50:6)

The Lord Jesus made Himself a Disciple before making disciples

1. Developing the Heart of the Disciple

“The Lord God has given Me
The tongue of the learned,

The Lord Jesus had the Tongue of the Learned

- When Jesus was 12 years old, He sat in the Temple among the teachers, asking questions and listening to them.
- "Now so it was *that* after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers." (Luke 2:46-47)
- The Lord Jesus was **submissive to His Parents - St Mary and St Joseph the Carpenter**. Even though St Joseph was not His father biologically. He submitted them and obeyed them.

One problem in this generation is that I know everything.

- If someone gives me advice, I don't take it well.
- If my parents give me advice, I say:
 - "I'm in college"
 - "I'm in grad school."
 - "Why are you treating me like a kid?"
 - "I know what I'm doing!"
 - We think that we know and understand more than our parents, more than our Abouna, more than our servants.
 - If this is how you think, then you lost the spirit of discipleship.

Pope Theophilus went to the desert to listen to a word of wisdom from the elder St Arsenius. He went as a disciple (despite being the POPE!)

Some people go to confession not to listen to advice, but to challenge and convince Abouna to approve their agenda.

- If you're here for approval, if you think what you're doing is right, go do it.
- But if you're here for advice, here is the guidance according to the Scripture and the Church Teaching.

If I have the Tongue of the Learned, I will go to seek advice without intention of showing off, or of convincing someone, or starting a debate, make an argument, but with the intention of learning.

The Tongue of the Learned is...

- When we open the Scripture, we have to have the heart and tongue of a learner. Be a disciple to the Scripture.
- Be a disciple to the Early Church Fathers and their writings.
- When we go to our Father of Confession, we have to have the heart and tongue of a learner. Be a disciple to your Father of Confession.

- "Go to the ant, you sluggard! Consider her ways and be wise" (Proverbs 6:6-8) If you have the heart of the disciple, you will learn even from nature.
 - Look at the ant
 - Look at the birds
 - Look at the lilies of the field

A true disciple, at every moment of his life, is learning something

St Antony is said to be like a bee going from one flower to another flower in order to learn spirituality and how to live the true monastic life.

Parents can discipline, Abouna can discipline. But if you do not have the heart of a learner, all of this discipline will be in vain and produce nothing.

2. The Purpose of Becoming a Disciple

"That I should know how to speak
A word in season to him who is weary."

Selflessness

In college to be a doctor, lawyer, engineer. Maybe I am learning to have a good career, good money, comfortable life. But how many are learning in order to serve others and to help them? The heart of the disciple, is the selfless heart. A person who denies himself.

In season

- If you are in a difficult time and no one asked about you and then one month later, someone came and gave you a word of comfort, you might say in your mind "it's too late. I needed this one month ago."
- When the Lord spoke about the faithful and wise steward, He said: "to give them their food in due season."

The Purpose of Becoming of Disciple is to Serve Others

- "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." (Matthew 20:28)
- To be truly in the likeness of Christ, I must serve others

3. The Discipline of the Disciple

He awakens Me morning by morning,
He awakens My ear To hear as the learned.

It is not "I will attend seminary, graduate, and now I've finished my discipleship" - "I will go through preservatives and when I'm finished, I'm done with discipleship"

Discipleship is a continuous life-long process

"Bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas when you come—and the books, especially the parchments." (2 Timothy 4:23) - even in the last moments of his life, St Paul asked for the books and parchments so he could read, learn and continue his discipleship. St Paul who preached in three continents, saw the third heaven, wrote more than half of the New Testament, who was disciplined at the hand of Gamaliel and learned by revelation from the Lord Jesus Christ directly - and in the last breaths of his life, asked for the books and parchments to read and to study and to learn.

The Lord gives us an opportunity to learn every morning - and not just every morning, but every moment of every day

4. The Attitude of the Disciple

The Lord God has opened My ear;
And I was not rebellious,
Nor did I turn away."

A true disciple is the one who is not rebellious and does not turn away.

Does not pick and choose "I like this, I will take it. I don't like this, I will leave it." Sometimes even with the Scripture or Early Church Fathers - I like this verse, I will use it. I don't like this verse, I ignore it "It's not fit for the 21st Century." Open Buffet style.

The Lord Jesus did not turn away

- The Father told the Son "You will go and be High Priest. And as High Priest, You will have something to offer. I am not pleased with the blood of animal sacrifices. You will take flesh and offer Your Body." And the Son's response: "The Lord God has opened My ear; And I was not rebellious, nor did I turn away. I gave My back to those who struck Me, and My cheeks to those who plucked out the beard; I did not hide My face from shame and spitting." (Isaiah 50:5-6)
- ⁵ Therefore, when He came into the world, He said:
"Sacrifice and offering You did not desire,
But a body You have prepared for Me.
⁶ In burnt offerings and *sacrifices* for sin
You had no pleasure.
⁷ Then I said, 'Behold, I have come—
In the volume of the book it is written of Me—
To do Your will, O God.' " (Hebrews 10:5-7)

Q&A

https://soundcloud.com/his-grace-bishop-youssef/effective-discipleship-q-a?in=his-grace-bishop-youssef/sets/d-discipleship&si=d4e6f0e4d87849b683b924a30a05591b&utm_source=clipboard&utm_medium=txt&utm_campaign=social_sharing

How can I, as a servant, disciple my children?

1. I must, myself, be a disciple
2. My eye is on them to see their points of strength to help them to grow, and weaknesses, to guide them in the right way.
 - We have activities in the Church, conventions, sports, spiritual days, trips, outings, etc. The purpose of all these activities is not to have fun or enjoy a trip or a day, but the purpose as a true servant is to watch my servant; watch their attitude, see the point of weakness and point of strength.
3. Follow-up

HE Metropolitan Youssef: Discipleship Requirements

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HE Metropolitan Youssef ~ فسوي ابن الاله فاي ناطع · Discipleship Requirements (English & Arabic)

Heard this live in St Mina Nashville and didn't take full notes, but wrote down these points

Discipleship

- Pupil (by feeding)
- Student (by studying)
- Disciple (by discipline)

Five ways Christ taught them:

- Teaching (both private and public)
- They lived with Him and watched Him (when He forgave, when He prayed, from His faith, from His care)
- He let them participate in the service (like shadowing Him and participating with Him).
E.g. in feeding multitude He took their opinion, then had them split the people, then had them distribute, etc.
- He sent them to serve by themselves (under His indirect supervision - they told Him all that they had done and He corrected the part they missed)
- Retreat (He took them to be away from the crowd, in reflection, meditation, etc)

Humility - Fr Meena Ramzy

Fr Meena Ramzy talking about Joseph and focuses on his humility. He mentions it in the first half a few times, but really focuses on it in the second half.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q9vchp_D1Kc