

# Youth Meetings

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# 2022-10-04: Dealing with Burnout (OCCM)

## Visual Aid

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/1dd74ty6rcbm8vg/Dealing%20with%20Burnout.pptx?dl=0>

## Introduction

I'm very happy to be joining you here today at OCCM and here at UCF – I graduated from UCF in 2013 and I haven't actually been back on Campus since then. And we didn't have OCCM back then, we had OCF (Orthodox Christian Fellowship). OCF at UCF – not sure if that is still around or not. The topic that we have for you today is one that most college students struggle with these days. Dealing with Burnout. Raise your hand here if you've experienced burnout before... yeah, let me tell you – it doesn't get easier.

But today, God willing, we'll talk through some of the causes of Burnout and some exercises to help deal with burnout.

## Exodus 18 - Burnout is Not Good

Let's start by opening the Scripture and reading together from Exodus 18. At this point in the story of the Exodus, Moses has taken the Israelites - the people of God - out of Egypt and they've crossed the Red Sea and God is sending them manna from heaven and God gave them water from a rock. God has been doing wonders in their sight. And now we'll read about Jethro - Moses' father in law - coming to visit Moses and the Israelites from his own land.

<sup>7</sup> So Moses went out to meet his father-in-law, bowed down, and kissed him. And they asked each other about *their* well-being, and they went into the tent. <sup>8</sup> And Moses told his father-in-law all that the Lord had done to Pharaoh and to the Egyptians for Israel's sake, all the hardship that had come upon them on the way, and *how* the Lord had delivered them. <sup>9</sup> Then Jethro rejoiced for all the good which the Lord had done for Israel, whom He had delivered out of the hand of the Egyptians. <sup>10</sup> And Jethro said, "Blessed *be* the Lord, who has delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians and out of the hand of Pharaoh, *and* who has delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians. <sup>11</sup> Now I know that the Lord *is* greater than all the gods; for in the very thing in which

they behaved proudly, *He was above them.*" <sup>12</sup> Then Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, took a burnt offering and *other sacrifices to offer* to God. And Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat bread with Moses' father-in-law before God.

<sup>13</sup> And so it was, on the next day, that Moses sat to judge the people; and the people stood before Moses from morning until evening. <sup>14</sup> So when Moses' father-in-law saw all that he did for the people, he said, "What *is* this thing that you are doing for the people? Why do you alone sit, and all the people stand before you from morning until evening?"

<sup>15</sup> And Moses said to his father-in-law, "Because the people come to me to inquire of God. <sup>16</sup> When they have a difficulty, they come to me, and I judge between one and another; and I make known the statutes of God and His laws."

<sup>17</sup> So Moses' father-in-law said to him, "The thing that you do *is* not good. <sup>18</sup> Both you and these people who *are* with you will surely wear yourselves out. For this thing *is* too much for you; you are not able to perform it by yourself. <sup>19</sup> Listen now to my voice; I will give you counsel, and God will be with you: Stand before God for the people, so that you may bring the difficulties to God. <sup>20</sup> And you shall teach them the statutes and the laws, and show them the way in which they must walk and the work they must do. <sup>21</sup> Moreover you shall select from all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place *such* over them *to be* rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. <sup>22</sup> And let them judge the people at all times. Then it will be *that* every great matter they shall bring to you, but every small matter they themselves shall judge. So it will be easier for you, for they will bear *the burden* with you. <sup>23</sup> If you do this thing, and God so commands you, then you will be able to endure, and all this people will also go to their place in peace."

<sup>24</sup> So Moses heeded the voice of his father-in-law and did all that he had said. <sup>25</sup> And Moses chose able men out of all Israel, and made them heads over the people: rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. <sup>26</sup> So they judged the people at all times; the hard cases they brought to Moses, but they judged every small case themselves.

<sup>27</sup> Then Moses let his father-in-law depart, and he went his way to his own land.

So in this chapter we see that Jethro, Moses' father in law, came and spent time with Moses. Moses told him all the things God did with them. Then Jethro offered a burnt offering to God. Then he kind of just observed Moses. He saw that Moses stood "from morning to evening" listening to the people's problems and judging between them.

So Moses basically had a never-ending todo list. Do you know how many Israelites walked out of Egypt with Moses? It's estimated 2.4 million. Moses is standing from morning to evening with the

people lined up. It would be impossible to ever finish. And it's not like he's doing things that are pointless or of no value. They're important! He's helping people. He's serving God. He's being a leader.

How many of us have a todo list of things that never seems to get shorter? As you get older it only gets longer. I remember my to-do lists...

- When I was in College, I had my schoolwork, my Sunday School Service, my deacons service. I kept telling myself "wow I can't wait until I graduate, I'm gonna have so much more time"
- And then I graduated and I started working... and work takes way more time than school ever did... and the service kept increasing, and I started to serve in the Asaph Hymns Institute
- And a year later I started grad school
- Then I bought a house, got married, had kids
- The list NEVER gets smaller. I remember when I was doing grad school and I told my wife the same thing I said in College "I can't wait to finish grad school I'm gonna have so much extra time." And she said stop talking crazy. You're just gonna find something else... sure enough I joined LEAD right before graduation and started looking into Seminary right after.

So Moses was in that same situation but x100! And Jethro was clear with him "the thing that you do is not good. Both you and these people who are with you will surely wear yourselves out." Jethro was clearly telling Moses - you're going to get burned out. And he recognized that burnout is NOT a good thing. Remember that by this time Moses was over 80 years old. So he gave Moses some advice - write out God's law for the people, and put judges over them - rulers of thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. And Moses heeded his father in law's advice.

So it's established here pretty early in the Bible - and pretty early in human society that burnout is a bad thing. And we aren't the first ones to experience burnout. And there are solutions and exercises to burnout.

## Outline

One strategy that I learned from Abouna Daoud a long time ago was to treat something like burnout as a disease.

A disease manifests as symptoms, and then you find out the Diagnosis (in this case Burnout) and you start to look for the root cause while pursuing treatment plans. It's the same with burnout. We will look at the Symptoms, some common Root causes and some treatment plans.

And in general, I'll say that we're going to look at it holistically - we'll see the Physical, Emotional, Mental and Spiritual Symptoms, Root Causes, Treatments.

Let's start with Symptoms. I'm going to show you two very short videos - about 10 seconds each - of people who are burned out. People of completely different backgrounds, ages, genders, etc. They are burned out for completely different reasons, but they respond to burnout in exactly the

same way.

## Symptoms

### Video 1 (Alexandra)

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/9k73p2kpy4sm1ve/Alexandra%20Burnout.mp4?dl=0>

This is my daughter Alexandra about 3 years ago. She had a very long and difficult day with a very hectic and full schedule. She had to wake up at the crack of dawn - 11:30am. She then was forced to change her diaper and eat breakfast. She had about two hours of play time. And then had to go down for a nap. After a three hour nap, she had about two more hours of play time before having to eat dinner. Then another hour of play time before her dad came home. Then she had another four hours of play time with him. At that point the day was long and she was burnt out. We'll watch a few seconds of her reaction here

### Video 2 (Malcolm in the Middle)

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/xi1yq8ubc41l4nh/Hal%20Lightbulb%201080p.mp4?dl=0>

This second example is from an old show called Malcolm in the Middle.

I love this clip. It's hilarious; it gets me every time. But look how he responded to his wife - "WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE I'M DOING??" This is a man dealing with some real burnout. He's been changing a lightbulb for probably four hours.

## Symptom 1: Stress

Stress is a bad thing that is not normal; not created for us by God. God created humans and didn't intend for them to have stress.

Stress is closer to being a sickness - like the flu. And sometimes you won't feel stressed out and think "oh I need to do more" - can you imagine if you didn't have the flu and thought "oh I need to go get the flu" - of course not!

So stress is a physical symptom of Burnout, and one that I'm sure all of you are familiar with.

## Symptom 2: Lack of Productivity

Another symptom of burnout is being less productive. And this is a mental thing - it's the Law of Diminishing Returns.

The more you try to do in less time, the less productive it will be. The higher the quantity, the lower the quality.

Imagine you are reading 30 pages of a book in an hour and it's taking the whole hour. Then you up it to 40 pages in an hour. You'll get less from the 40 pages than you got from the 30 pages.

It's like a farmer who has two people help him run the farm and they get everything done in a timely manner. So he hires two more... he starts to make less money! Because even though he has more employees, he only has three wheelbarrows! Each person is doing less work than before.

When we are burned out - doing too much, trying to fill our time, etc. we become less productive.

This happens to me all the time. I look at the list of things I have to do - I have this and this assignment for work, I have assignments for school, exams to study for, sunday school lesson to prepare, and whatever else - sometimes I will look at this list and I'll stare at it for like 10min, I'll write it out in ten different ways, and then I'll go play video games.

### Symptom 3: Sacrificing Relationships

We also find that we sacrifice relationships with others when we're burned out. Someone asks you to go out or to spend time together and we say "I wish I could man but I'm so busy. I have to study for this and that and I have work and etc." And actually we start to isolate ourselves and this isn't good for us.

### Symptom 4: Deaf to the Voice of God

Probably the most important, most common, and most affected symptom is that we simply can't hear God's voice.

The Lord said in the Psalms "Be still and know that I am God" - but when I'm burnt out, there is no "being still" or "knowing God." When I'm burnt out, the first thing I'm going to sacrifice is my prayer and Scripture time. It's the first thing I won't have time for. Sometimes I may even sacrifice my Church time - I don't have time for Vespers this week, I need to study. I don't have time for Tasbeha this week, I have exams. Or I may be standing in the Church and I'm physically there, but mentally I am somewhere else completely... I'm thinking about all the things I need to do.

### Conclusion

We saw these symptoms in both videos. Alexandra was definitely stressed. And standing there crying about it wasn't going to make her any more productive. And she wasn't about to stop crying on my behalf. And I don't think she was thinking of God at that moment (or being still). The same with our friend Hank - stressed, less productive, not bothered by his relationship with his wife.

So we've essentially defined burnout. And usually when you are burnt out, we said the first thing you sacrifice is your Spiritual Life. Usually the second thing is sleep or your health - "I'm gonna stay up all night to get this done"; or just chowing down on fast food and chips. Usually the third thing is relationships. And the last thing we'll sacrifice is the things that are burning us out in the first place.

# Root Causes

So now we're going to go through four root causes. These are not all the root causes. And our goal today isn't that you memorize them, but try and see what you relate to. You may relate to one or more of them. You may not be burned out right now, but you feel burnt out at other times. So try and relate to one or more of these.

For each one, we will see some examples of it, and then we'll see the appropriate Treatment for it, of course using the Scripture and the Church Fathers as our guides.

And you'll notice that most of our treatments are spiritual in nature. We'll have some practical applications, of course, but do you have any idea why our treatments must be spiritual in nature?

Because we are spiritual in nature! We are physical and spiritual. Outward man who is perishing, is physical. Our inner man who is being renewed day by day is spiritual. And we focus on nourishing our outward man; our physical, but we forget to nourish our Spiritual. And it's unfortunate because it is our Spiritual Man that will help us navigate the world and give us strength to complete the things we commit to, and revitalize us from burn out.

In any case, let us go through each of these root causes one by one.

## Root Cause 1: Fast-Paced Life

- Fast food - when it came out it was revolutionary. Walk in, pay, get food quickly. No sitting or waiting. A little while later they got rid of the walk-in step! Even faster. Now they're making it even faster! In the app, you put in your order so they know what it is before you even get there. All of this to shave off a few seconds. These apps cost thousands of dollars to produce... and probably millions to distribute and implement. And all of that to save you a few seconds.
- Internet - obviously revolutionary. Most revolutionary invention of the 20th Century - completely changed the course of humanity. We have answers at our fingertips. Ask a question, translate a word, find a picture of something, remember the name of an actor in a movie and you don't even remember the name of the movie. Fast-paced life. Sometimes when we don't have signal on our phone, or the internet is slow, we get so anxious. We might even get mad at the phone. We're not used to waiting.
- Social Media and Texting - we no longer have to call someone and exchange pleasantries or anything like that. Shoot off a text "Hey man hope you're doing well. I was wondering..." and put it in the back of your mind. And if someone doesn't reply within a few minutes - God forbid if your phone tells you that he READ the message and still didn't reply. We have these crazy thoughts going through our head. And actually this also contributes to burnout because we are not satisfying our social needs to actually see people and read their faces and hear their voices and feel their touch.
- Driving - People (especially in Orlando) are willing to risk their lives and limbs to shave off a few seconds. Weaving through traffic, cutting off 18 wheeler trucks, whatever it might be. All of that to save a few seconds. Sometimes not even because they get stuck at a red light and everyone they passed comes right back to them.

This fast-paced, always-busy life leads to being overtired or fatigued which are other words for burnout.

We are ALWAYS running

So what do you think the treatment is?

## Treatment 1: Rest and Retreat

Rest: Remember that the fourth commandment in the OT is to honor the Sabbath. Keep the Sabbath holy. The day of rest. So this is a commandment from God and not just any commandment it's one of THE ten commandments. Like the top ten list. Raise your hand if you've never murdered. Raise your hand if you've never stolen. If you've never committed adultery. Great. We always say those are the important ones. But keeping the Sabbath and resting - we never really consider that one. But God had it right there in the top five. That means it's important!

Some people say "I don't rest because the devil never rests" - when did the devil become your role model?? God, Himself, rested. He took time - 1/7 of the time to admire His creation and rest on the seventh day. Are we more capable than God??? This was also the solution for Moses - delegate so that he can rest. So how do we rest? What do we mean by rest?

We ALWAYS get this wrong. The true concept of Rest that was assigned by God for the Sabbath and performed by God in the 7th Day of Creation is not what we think it is today. Today we think Rest is sleeping all day, or rest is playing video games and just numbing our mind. But the true concept of Rest is to Delight. When God rested on the seventh day, He didn't just leave humanity and the world to do what they wanted - He admired His creation. Genesis tells us that God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good. Rest doesn't mean running errands, or numbing our mind, or just going to sleep. It means delight. Delight in three things...

1. Delighting in ourselves - The Physical and Mental Rest come from delighting in ourselves.
  - Physically resting of course is the Physical rest - this is what even Moses had to do.
  - Mental rest comes from doing something you love - if you love painting, reading, cooking, programming, singing, playing games, solving puzzles, playing sports, woodworking. Having healthy hobbies to do in moderation and that give you rest. It's important to have time to ourselves to do the things we love. And we use those things to glorify the Lord in His Creation and in using and revitalizing the mind and the talents that He gives us.
2. Delighting in others - Emotional Rest comes from delighting in others.
  - Spending time with family or friends. Talking to them, sharing with them, relating to them. Sometimes we let Social Media numb this idea for us, but it hits different when you're physically with someone. You see their facial expressions, hear their voice, feel their touch. And it's healthy - we need it.
  - Sometimes you spend time with family or friends and you get home - even though it was a long day, even if you did something labor intensive - and you just feel rested. Delighted.
3. Delighting in the Lord - This is Spiritual Rest.



- Reading His word. His Psalms. Singing hymns. Speaking to Him. Remember that the true rest comes from God.
- Giving yourself retreat. Look what St. Paul writes in Hebrews: "For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls." (Hebrews 12:3)
- Remember the words that David wrote in the Psalms - "Be still and know that I am God" - to hear God's voice, and to rest spiritually means to be still. To have some quiet time to hear God's voice and delight in God's presence.

If life is fast-paced, then the solution is to Be Still.

How do we do it Practically? A concept called "Retreat"

- The Lord, Himself, practiced the concept of Retreat.
  - We read in Luke 4, after the Lord cast out a demon in the Synagogue of Capernaum, and then healed Peter's Mother-in-Law the same day, and then that night, "all those who were sick with diverse diseases were brought unto Him and He laid His hands on every one of them and healed them", what did He do the next morning?
  - He departed and went into a deserted place.
- We need to practice Retreat. We need to escape the fast-paced life and we need to do it on a regular basis.

Imagine if someone was running a business and didn't take inventory every day... he would just wait until his shelves were empty, and then order more stuff. The business would fail! He wouldn't be ready for customers. No, he needs to take stock every day and see what needs to be ordered. So by the time the shelves are empty, he can restock them. This is the purpose of Retreat, to take inventory.

You can practice Daily Retreat in a very easy way every morning (or if your schedule doesn't allow, then every evening). 20 Minutes per day. Read your Bible. Then give yourself some time to think and reflect about what you read, what you're going to pray about, how you want your day to progress, what happened the last day and how to improve it, etc. And then stand for prayer.

As the Saint, HH Pope Kyrillos VI says, ***"there aren't good or bad days - there are days with prayer and days without prayer."***

## Root Cause 2: Improper Concept of Satisfaction/Success

Some people have their whole lives mapped out based on salary.

- I was visiting one of my 8th Grade Boys one year and I asked him what he wants to be when he grows up... he said "I wanna have passive income" - and I'm like "okay.... What's the plan for that" - "well I wanna make my first million by 25 and then buy a bunch of real estate, hire someone to manage it all, and basically let it be passive income." I was so surprised...
- Another common one that I hear from Middle and High School Youth nowadays- they want to make YouTube videos and TikToks. Or they want to play Video Games on Twitch. And

there's no backup plan.

Sometimes we have an improper concept of satisfaction and success. We think that Success means having the most money or having fame – TikTok fame or YouTube fame. How many followers I have. But these things have no end. This is what the Lord says to Jeremiah about the Israelites.

“For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, And hewn themselves cisterns – broken cisterns that can hold no water” (Jeremiah 2:13)

- The Lord is the fountain of living water. He is the satisfaction and the quenching of our thirst.
- And we forsake Him, and then build for ourselves cisterns that cannot hold water. Standards that cannot be satisfied.

Goals that cannot be met.

- I want to make my first million by 25 and my second million by 27, etc. It doesn't end. There's no upper limit to money.
- We can get the most impressive car, and six months later there's a more impressive one.
- We have the best iPhone but the next year there's a better iPhone.
- Newest fashion, best shoes, most incredible handbag... and two weeks later it all needs to change.
- We are concerned about our self-image – what do other people think of how I dress or what I drive or what phone or watch I have.
- Or what headphones I have! Part of the reason Apple changes the designs of things so often is because now people can tell which version of AirPods you have in your ear. And you don't want to be caught using the old ones.

All of these behaviors stem from an improper concept of satisfaction and success, and lead directly to burning out. In this case we burn out because we can't keep up – and more than that, no matter how hard we try to keep up and if we do actually keep up, it doesn't give us the Satisfaction that the Lord gives us.

People miss out on the most important parts of their life simple because they're “grinding”

- Husbands and wives miss out on the best parts of their marriage, because they want to work extra hours in the beginning and save up.
- Parents miss the best parts of their kids' upbringing, so they can work extra hours
- Youth miss the best parts of their parents' lives – the time when they live with their parents and can sit with them and talk to them and actually communicate and learn from their wisdom and teach them new things and establish a real relationship – just to take extra classes and finish a semester or a year early. Or to take a job on the side and have expendable income.

You won't get these days back. It's good to be goal-oriented and to have goals and to strive for them, but they should be reasonable, and you have to weight them against what you'll be missing out on.

So what do you think is the Treatment for this one?

## Treatment 2: Set your eyes above

The treatment here is to focus on Eternal Life. We read throughout the Scripture

- “Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.” (Colossians 3:2)
- “Let your eyes look straight ahead, and your eyelids look right before you.” (Proverbs 4:25)
- “For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.” (Romans 8:5)
- “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.” (Matthew 6:33)

Set your eyes on the final goal. Look past this life that we are in, and into the next life that is to come and realize that THAT is your target to be achieved. The land of the living.

So what’s a practical exercise here? If you’re sitting here and you’re relating to this root cause and you want to change, what is your next step? In reality, whether you relate to this or not, we should all be taking this step which is to ask ourselves this question – “Is this for God’s glory?”

When I make a big purchase, when I decide on my major, when I choose what to wear, when I decide where to celebrate my birthday party, when I am picking places to go with my friends, let me live with this question: “Is this for God’s glory?” By doing this, wearing this, buying this, going there, will I be glorifying God? I wish we had bracelets that instead of “What would Jesus do” they said “Will this Glorify God?”

Set your eyes above the things of the earth.

## Root Cause 3: Comparing Myself to Others

Another thing that I may be doing that is causing me to burnout is comparing myself to others. And this one is very dangerous. Just like the last one, comparing myself to others has no end.

We read in the Scripture that "A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones." (Proverbs 14:30). Envy rots the bones.

When I compare myself to others, I can never find peace.

- I want to be a manager because so-and-so is a manager, and I won’t rest until I’m a manager like so-and-so.  
Well I work myself to the bone and I finally become manager, but guess what? There’s a district manager! Now I wanna be district manager, no matter what it takes... And if I’m really unlucky, so-and-so is the one who got promoted to district manager.
- I want to switch my major to Biomedical Sciences because so-and-so is doing it. So-and-so got an internship, so I need to look for one. So-and-so is volunteering at the hospital, so I need to do that too. Our goal becomes to match or beat so-and-so and we lose sight of

what is important.

We see this in the service as well

- I want to serve in Sunday School because so-and-so is serving Sunday School. I want to be better than him or her!
- I want to be ordained as a reader or a subdeacon because so-and-so is, and I know more hymns than him.
- I can't believe I got placed to serve in Kindergarten when so-and-so is serving in Middle School. I know more Bible than her

We also see the opposite where comparing myself to others gives me lower self-esteem

- She's serving in Middle School but I'm serving in Kindergarten. Maybe Abouna doesn't think I can handle it. Maybe he thinks I'm not strong in the Bible.
- All my friends my age got ordained Oghnostos except me... maybe it's because I have a bad voice.
- And all of these non-existent things live rent-free in my mind and this leads to Burnout

There is no peace and no end to envy. Envy rots the bones.

Of course envy itself can be its own discussion or series and can be studied very deeply, but here we are looking at Envy that leads to burnout.

So what is the treatment for that?

## Treatment 3: Share the Burden

St Paul tells us to "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2)

- You can share your burden with someone you trust - choose someone who is spiritually wise. This can mean your Father of Confession or another Spiritual father, another servant in the Church, your parents, your spouse, your sibling or your friend.
- When you share your burden you are ADMITTING your limitations and your problem - and thus, you are looking at YOURSELF instead of at someone else. It's the opposite of comparing yourself with others. It's an opportunity for Circumspection
- You are also getting someone else to lift with you.
- This could be in the form of emotional support - Someone else knowing what you're going through sometimes is enough Emotionally to lift away some of the pressure

## Root Cause 4: Giving from what I don't have

- Don't have time but still try to give it - Burnout
- Don't have physical strength but still try to give it - Burnout
- Don't have knowledge but still try to give it - Burnout

It ends up being a grind. Just excessive work. Basically trying to live a life that God has not given us - trying to do something that God didn't give us. Everyone is given something. Gifts, passions, capacities, etc. If we try to give outside of those capacities it leads to burnout.

Sometimes it's because others place expectations on us that are not in our capacity.

- I was riding with HG Bishop Youssef in the car once and he was on a phone call with someone and HG sounded very frustrated. And after he hung up, he started to tell me "the people are expecting too much... the man has a legal problem. So I told him to consult a lawyer. I'm not a lawyer I'm a bishop. So he says I cannot afford a lawyer. So I told him to find a paralegal. He said 'I don't know any paralegals. Can you send me the phone number for one?' Again... I'm a bishop!!' So I told him 'go on the internet and search paralegal in your area' And he said 'I don't have internet' - can you believe this? I told him take your computer and go to starbucks and search for a paralegal in your area."
- Can you believe the expectation this person was laying on HGBY - HGBY who is managing the geographically largest diocese in the world, with almost 100 priests and 50 churches and even more communities? Who is shepherding thousands and thousands of people.
- HG also told me another story about a man who called his priest and said "Abouna my wife kicked me out of the house can you go over there and get my suitcase with clothes in it" or a man who called his priest and said "Abouna can you take my wife to the airport"
- Sometimes people place expectations on us that are outside our capacity.
  - Is HGBY capable of looking up paralegals? Of course! But it would mean that something else that's more important falls through the cracks.
  - Is Abouna capable of taking someone to the airport? Definitely! But it will mean something else doesn't get done.

Sometimes it's because we want to please others.

- We want to satisfy others or make other people happy. It's coming from a good place - maybe from Empathy or just a desire to see others happy. We look at others' needs and say "I have to fulfill them" and it leads to us burning out.

See what Solomon writes to us in the Proverbs - "it is a trap to dedicate something rashly and only later consider one's vows" (Proverbs 20:25)

So what do you think the treatment is for this one?

## Treatment 4: Learn to say no

It's much easier to get INTO a situation than to get out of it.

- trouble
- debt
- relationship
- weight problems
- bad grades
- fill up schedule as opposed to emptying a full schedule

Before making any decision or taking on anything new, I need to carefully consider it as Solomon wrote. I need to pray about it and let the Lord guide my decision. I need to see if it's the right thing to do. I need to recognize that I have limits. I have bandwidth

Something that I do all the time:

- I walk into the grocery store and I know EXACTLY what I'm getting. I'm getting milk for my kids, and a couple steaks for my wife and I.
- So I walk into the store and I know I'm getting a gallon of milk and two steaks. I can carry that in my hands... I don't need a cart. I don't even need a basket. I walk right by them.
- And I'm heading for the steaks when I see the specials right there at the front of the store... pasta is buy one get one free. Let me grab a few of those. Honeycrisp apples are on sale maybe a bag of those. I know the milk is coming so I'm saving room in my arms. But then I see the chicken is on sale - would be good to get it now instead of next week when it's more expensive. Let me pick that up.
- And I'm balancing all this stuff and it's too much for me to carry. I finally get to the steaks and grab two. I go to the milk aisle and I don't know how I'm gonna carry this milk.
- Why didn't I grab a basket? I didn't want to admit that I have limitations.
- If I grab a basket, I will know when it's full. But if I don't have a basket, I could theoretically keep stacking things on top of each other infinitely. No limits!
- And we do the same thing with our time and our capacities. We don't want to recognize that we have limits. That our bandwidth is limited.

So we need to recognize that. If I agree to something that is one hour... I need to also drop something else that's one hour. Always ask yourself "what is this going to cost me? What am I going to have to say no to by saying yes to this?" If we don't ask ourselves this question, what do you think will be most impacted? What is always the first to be impacted? My spiritual life. My bible time. My prayer time. My quiet time. And then my sleep and my physical health. So it's important to ask this question - if I take on this thing that will take an hour, then I'll lose an hour of studying today. Then maybe tomorrow to make up that hour, I'll have to buy a lunch instead of making my lunch.

With this also means learning to say no. If you can't say no... you're gonna have a bad time. It's much better to say "I'm sorry I can't" than to say yes and not do it. Remember the parable Christ told about the servant who did the will of his master.

Don't say no to everything! But carefully and prayerfully consider something before saying yes to it.

Actually, if you keep your Spirit Nourished, then God the Holy Spirit will guide you to say no, and give you the strength to say no. Or guide you to say yes and give you the strength to complete what you obliged to yourself.

## Conclusion

## Review

So let's go back to the Root Causes. What is the Treatment for each one?

Fast-Paced Busy Life – Rest and Retreat

Improper Concept of Satisfaction/Success – Set your eyes above – “Is this for God's glory?”

Comparing ourselves to others – Share the Burden

Trying to give from what we don't have – Learn to say no

## What if I can't?

What if...

- I don't have time for rest...
- I don't have time to share the burden...
- I don't have time to consider every little decision...

“The thing that you do is not good.” (Exodus 18:17)

The Lord has an escape plan! Stop and assess!!

“Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.” (1 Peter 5:6)

If you can't do these things, then you're too busy and that's unacceptable. As Jethro told Moses - "What you are doing is wrong." A change is needed.

Something has to give. God always has an escape plan so place your trust in Him.

## Concluding Prayer

We pray that God, the Holy Spirit, Who abides in us would give us comfort when we are burned out, guidance to say no when we should, strength to humble ourselves and share our burdens with others, and wisdom to nourish our Spirit through rest and daily retreat, continually delighting in the Lord so that our inner man may be renewed day by day.

# 2025-01-02: Discipleship

## Sources:

- [HE Metropolitan Youssef: Effective Discipleship](#)
- [HE Metropolitan Youssef: Discipleship Requirements](#)
- HH Pope Shenouda III: Discipleship

## 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.

## **Into the Same Image**

### **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.

## Principles of Discipleship

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)

We will take these two verses as our guide. 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)
- <sup>5</sup> Therefore, when He came into the world, He said:  
"Sacrifice and offering You did not desire,  
But a body You have prepared for Me.  
<sup>6</sup> In burnt offerings and *sacrifices* for sin  
You had no pleasure.  
<sup>7</sup> 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)

## **Life of Discipleship**

So far, we have been talking about discipleship in a vague sense. One should be a disciple of:

*From HH Pope Shenouda III Book Discipleship*

- Learn from the Scripture
- Learn from the Lives of the Saints
- Learn from the Writings of the Early Church Fathers
- Learn from the Faults of Others
- Learn from silence
- Learn from books
- Learn from nature
- Learn from the rites of the Church
- Learn from the events and happenings of our life
- Learn from a Spiritual Father

HH Pope Shenouda goes into far greater detail and many examples in his book, and I recommend for you to read those chapters.

Now let's shift our focus to the discipleship of a spiritual father. Learn from a Spiritual Father.

## **Discipleship of a Spiritual Father**

Firstly, our discipleship is to the Lord Jesus Christ. And we are called Christians meaning "Disciples of Christ." So how can I be discipled to another person as a spiritual father?

The answer to this is in 2 Timothy 2:2 "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." - How many generations of discipleship do we see here?

1. The Lord Jesus
2. St Paul
3. St Timothy
4. "faithful men"
5. "others also"

St Paul writes: "Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ."

We are talking here about how you can be a disciple to your father of confession, or another spiritual father, or your father the bishop, or your parents, or your servants

## How did Christ Disciple the Twelve?

The Lord Jesus used five methods to teach the disciples and prepare them for their ministry:

1. Active learning
  - He would take them on the side and teach them in private, or he would give a sermon publicly and they would be present to hear it.
2. Passive learning
  - They lived with Him and watched Him
  - When He forgave
  - When He prayed
  - From His faith
  - From His care for others
3. Direct Supervision
  - He let them participate with Him in the service (e.g. shadowing)
  - Feeding the multitude, He took their opinion, then had them split the people, then had them distribute, collect the fragments, etc.
4. Indirect Supervision
  - He sent them to serve by themselves, gave them all that they needed, and when they came back, they told Him all that they had done; He corrected the part that they missed
5. Retreat
  - He took time with them to be away from the crowd
  - He had time for prayer and reflection and meditation with them

Why am I mentioning these points?

To see the seriousness of the Twelve in their discipleship.

- Imagine if the Lord wanted to take them to give them a sermon or a lesson and someone said "I don't feel like it right now." This happens today when our spiritual father is giving a sermon and I am sleeping, or I am on my phone. Or my Youth Meeting servant is giving a topic and I'm coming late, after the topic.
- Imagine if a disciple only showed up when there was a sermon; or he skipped all the meetings and got the "notes" from someone else, but he didn't have any relationship with the Lord. He didn't spend time with the Lord, He didn't see the miracles, He didn't see how the Lord interacted with people, etc. He would be missing an integral part of the discipleship.
- Imagine if every time the Lord told them "I need your help with a service" one said "sorry, I can't today" or just didn't respond
- Imagine if one disciple went on his missionary trip and when he came back and the Lord asked him "give me a report" he said "oh sorry it's confidential"
- Or if a disciple attended all of those events, but when the Lord did a spiritual retreat or a time for prayer, the disciple skipped it. He would be missing a big part of his discipleship... but how many times do we skip prayer in Youth Meeting or Servants Meeting, or miss Matins, or during the Agpeya prayers of the Liturgy, we don't even recite a single psalm?

When being a disciple to a spiritual father, all of those aspects are necessary. The Life of Discipleship requires all of those things

## Characteristics of Spiritual Fatherhood

1. Secure in his faith, experienced; reflects the Lord Jesus
  - "If the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch" (Matthew 15:14)
  - Remember the copy machine - you can expect to become like the spiritual father you are following
  - You want a spiritual father who has experience - personal experience, in that he has gone through the spiritual life, and also experience from other people he has mentored over many years. Many people when a new priest is ordained flock to him to be their father of confession, but it's better to wait and to give him time in his service first. And NEVER change spiritual fathers or father of confession without first asking your original father of confession for his guidance and blessing in doing so.
2. Gives sound guidance and advice supported and reinforced by the Scripture and the lives and sayings of the saints
  - You want to have a spiritual father who gives you sound guidance and advice
  - A good spiritual father will give you good advice, and this advice will be backed by the Scripture and the lives of the saints
3. Accessible
  - You want a spiritual father that you have access to on a regular basis. You see him weekly, you have several opportunities during the week to meet with him or to ask him for 5min of his time. You don't want a priest who lives in a different state or Timezone than you. You don't want a priest or a bishop who is responsible for a thousand other things and may take a few days to get back to you. Of course, you can have more than one spiritual father, but the main father of confession should be someone who is accessible

- There is a story about Fr Mikhail Ibrahim when his wife departed and that evening he was taking confessions and meetings and consoling a man whose wife had departed six months prior
- 4. Open to questions and asking for explanation
  - A good spiritual father will always be open to questions and asking for explanations
  - This is different from one who entertains debates and arguments and controversy
- 5. Gives principles to apply according to the character of the disciple, knowing that (s)he will not be the exact copy
  - A good spiritual father knows your strengths and weaknesses, your character, your personality. He does not want to erase your personality. He knows you are your own person.
  - He also knows that he is his own person with his own personality, psychology, etc.
  - He knows you will never be an exact copy of him or of some ideal
- 6. A person can have more than one spiritual guide
  - Take the example of St Antony who was said about him that he was like a bee going from flower to flower

## What do I need Guidance In?

- Spiritual Life
  - Confession and spiritual guidance
    - Do not use the spiritual father as a means of implementing spiritual desires (i.e. with your mind made up). Some people use the time of confession to “inform” the Father Confessor about their plan – “during the fast I am going to eat this and this, I’m going to pray this and that” - “I have started to pray seven times a day and it’s working out good for me”
    - Maybe these things all seem like the right thing to do. But it is for your Father of Confession to try and assess your motivation, your intentions, your spiritual level, your readiness. The Scripture says: “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death” (Proverbs 14:12)
  - Cultivating virtue
    - It is not good to travel rapidly along the spiritual road. A virtue acquired easily can be lost just as easily... and then it is harder to reacquire.
  - Books to Read
    - You should take the guidance of your Spiritual Father before starting to read a new book. Maybe he gives you general guidance like “read any Pope Shenouda book” or maybe he tells you “for now stay away from books written by Eastern Orthodox or Catholics” – this kind of advice is for your own good! He may tell you not to read a Book of Scripture like Song of Songs, or Revelation because you are not well equipped for them; obey him.
  - Prayers to Pray
  - Service Opportunities
    - Not everyone is ready for every service
    - Or maybe accepting a new service would interfere with your current service; and maybe you don't see how
- Education and Career Choices



- Imagine someone who goes to Abouna and says “By the way, I’m moving to such and such state for school starting next week” – and it’s the first time Abouna is hearing of it. Did you seek his advice? Maybe you are not ready to move out from your parents house. Maybe you are not ready to live in a place that does not have a church. Maybe you are not ready to leave the life of service that you are just starting. Everyone is different. Or someone all of a sudden says “I can’t serve anymore because I’m gonna start working overnight” – maybe you are not yet at the spiritual level to work overnight...
- Events to Attend; Places to Go
- Friends, Courtship, Relationships
- Mental Health

# 2025-01-21: My Role in Liturgy (OCCM)

## Visual Aid

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/r2zej2ljh8y5c778a8dn9/My-Role-in-the-Liturgy.pptx?rlkey=1cws6xytdbtbhvac5464m8ikz&dl=0>

## Introduction

Every Sunday, we come to the liturgy, we attend, we take communion, we go home. Same prayers, same time, same routine, say "Lord have mercy" 100 times, metanoia here, bow down here, sign of the cross here, etc. And it's easy for that to get boring. We might think of the Liturgy as being unchanging or static. Show of hands, who here has gotten bored in liturgy?

I had the idea for this topic because I was standing in liturgy the other day and I was standing with the young children in the deacons' section. And Abouna was praying the Thanksgiving Prayer, and I looked down to the kids and saw that many of them were just looking out at nothing. Some of them are looking at their friends. Some of them are fidgeting. And I thought to myself, as Abouna is saying "Let us give thanks to God the Pantocrator" - how many of us are actually giving thanks? And I looked over to the section with HS and College and saw the same blank expressions, some people on their phones, some people yawning, some people on their watches.

We don't understand the purpose of liturgy. Is the purpose of liturgy just to take communion? If that's the case, why does it have to be so long? Why does it need so many words? Are the words needed to transform the bread and wine into Body and Blood of Christ? Is the Liturgy some magical incantation that can change bread and wine into Body and Blood? Why do I have to be there for that? Why don't we have the priest say the words, make it into Body and Blood, and then we come for the Distribution part? People when they are sick receive Communion without attending the Liturgy - Abouna just brings it to them. Why do we need to attend liturgy to receive Communion?

On top of that, if we're gonna be there for so long, why not make it more exciting? Why don't we borrow from the Protestant Churches with their guitars and drum sets and worship teams? Why don't we sing the songs that we like instead of those old Coptic Hymns that don't "match the times"? Maybe I hear those other songs and I can feel them moving my spirit, sometimes even bringing me to tears. Wouldn't those songs be more effective?

Today we will discuss and explore these questions.

Agenda:

- What is Liturgy
  - Liturgy is the work of the people
  - Liturgy is given by God through the Church
  - Liturgy is holy
    - Set apart from time
    - Set apart from space
    - Set apart from self
- What is my role in Liturgy
  - Participation of the Mind
  - Participation of the Body
  - Participation of the Spirit

## What is Liturgy?

Some characteristics of Liturgy:

- Liturgy is the work of the people
- Liturgy is given by God
- Liturgy is Holy ("Set Apart")

## Liturgy is the Work of the People...

The word "Liturgy" comes from the Greek λειτουργία meaning "work of the people." λαός means "people" and ἔργο means "work" (like the word ergonomics which is the study of work or specifically the study of work efficiency).

As with many Greek words, this word was used with a specific meaning prior to Christianity. Ancient Greeks used the word to describe a "public service" which was done for the people, by the people. When the Old Testament was being translated to Greek in the early centuries Before Christ, the term was adopted to refer to the ministry of the tabernacle, the temple, God and the name of God.

Some people treat the Liturgy as a show that they watch... they come to the Liturgy, stand in their place and become silent observers. If we treat the Liturgy like a show, not only will we miss out on the actual experience, but we're more likely to just get completely distracted. The Liturgy is not a very entertaining show to watch! So if it starts to get boring, I start to divert my attention elsewhere and get distracted with my social media, or a game on my phone, or reading the news, or trying to "multi-task" during the Liturgy.

But we are not meant to be watchers or observers of liturgy, but rather active participants. When you go to a show, the entertainer is facing you and he's trying to make you laugh or invoke an emotional response - but when you come to the liturgy, the priest is not facing you, but he's facing east WITH you, because he, LIKE you, is a participant. He, like you, needs repentance. He, like you, needs to eat of the Eucharist. He, like you, needs salvation. So I, like him, need to participate in the Liturgy.

This is why the word "Liturgy" is used - because it means "work of the people." And actually we can expand the definition to be "work of the people FOR the people"

## Liturgy is Given by God

Liturgy is how God wants to be worshipped.

The concepts of liturgy, sacrifice and ritual were not invented by man, but have been the expression of worship that is acceptable to God since the beginning. As early as Cain and Abel, we see that God distinguishes between what is acceptable worship, and what is unacceptable worship. In Noah, we see that he is to distinguish between clean and unclean animals, take 7 each of clean animals and 2 each of unclean animals, and the purpose was because only clean animals were to be used for worship and sacrifice. It was God who laid out in Exodus how the tabernacle should be constructed - what materials, how much of each material, how they were arranged, etc. It was God who in Leviticus ordained specific instructions for each of the burnt offerings, gave them feasts, detailed the rituals for the day of atonement, gave them a daily raising of incense morning and evening, the showbread and the lighting of the candles, the vestments of the priests. It was God who told Moses how to anoint Aaron for the priesthood, and Samuel how to anoint Saul and David for the kingship. It was God incarnate, the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ, who instituted the Sacrament of the Eucharist and the New Covenant and the Liturgy with the twelve disciples and told them "do this in remembrance of Me." It was the Lord Jesus who then taught the apostles HOW to do it during the 40 days after the Resurrection. In turn, those disciples and their disciples would be the ones who authored the Liturgies that we still use today.

"Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle" (2 Thessalonians 2:15)

- Greek word for traditions here is παραδόσεις which is different from διδάχ which means "teachings" (in this verse ἐδιδάχθητε is the Greek for "you were taught")

The Lord is particular about:

1. Who is doing the worship
2. Where they are doing the worship
3. How they are doing the worship

How did God respond to those who wanted to worship in other ways?

1. Their sacrifice was not accepted by Him - such as is the case with Cain who was not intentional about his offering to the Lord. Such is also the case with King Saul who offered a specific sacrifice that it was not his role to offer. These, who did not intend to profane God but did it out of ignorance or even out of haste, were offered many chances for repentance but unfortunately, they did not until the end of their lives.
2. They profaned God - such is the case with Nadab and Abihu the sons of Aaron, who were deliberate in offering profane fire, or the sons of Eli who the Scripture says "were corrupt and did not know the Lord". Or Korah, Dathan and Abiram who rebelled against God's

choosing of Moses. These, when they profaned God by intention, and from a position of leadership, were killed. Nadab and Abihu were consumed by fire, the sons of Eli were killed in war, and Korah Dathan and Abiram were swallowed by the ground.

What we have in our hands with Liturgy is something that is given to us by God. It is not for us to change to adapt to our desires.

## Liturgy is Holy

What does the word "holy" mean? Set Apart

If I have towels that are used for the drying of the liturgical vessels, they are set apart for that use. Or if I have towels set apart for the Korban, they are set apart for that use. I cannot take those towels and use them to dry my body after a shower. I cannot take the Paten or the Mysteer or the Chalice and use them for my lunch. These things are holy. They are set apart for God.

- The Sabbath was set apart for rest and worship
- The Tabernacle and its furnishings and utensils were set apart for God's worship
- Israel as a nation was set apart to serve and obey God

Liturgy is set apart from the rest of the world in almost every aspect

### **Set Apart From Time**

The world is fast-paced - we have Instagram Reels, and YouTube shorts. We have fast-food and we have drive-thru. We have classes scheduled back-to-back and they have a start time and an end time. We are almost always in a hurry. If you drove to Seattle, it would take 45 hours. If you walked there it would take 45 days. We have planes that can take us there in 6 hours but God forbid it's even 1 hour late. And if it's 3 hours late, I'm complaining and writing an email and demanding my money-back. This is the world we live in.

But the Liturgy transcends all of that. We step out of the world's clock and enter God's time.

For example, when Abouna prays: "Therefore, as we also commemorate His holy Passion, His Resurrection from the dead, His ascension into the heavens, and His sitting at Your right hand O Father" - we are commemorating events that happened in the past. We are remembering them and keeping them as a memorial... but then Abouna continues "and His Second Coming which shall be from the heavens awesome and full of glory." - this is an event that hasn't happened yet! So how can we commemorate it?

It is because in that moment, we are not in the world's time. If you check your watch or look at a clock or look at your phone, yes you will see that time is progressing. But in the Liturgical Ritual we are seeing past, present and future converge to one point.

God, Who is timeless and eternal, Who is not bound by time as we are, Who is the creator of time itself, is inviting us to be present with Him. If I understand my role in the liturgy, then I will find myself in His presence, and His presence is outside of time.

## **Set Apart From Space**

When I look around my campus, I'll see flyers for events, I see people tabling for random clubs and hear them calling out, I see people playing games like frisbee or hackie sack at the mall, I see advertisements for restaurants or products, I hear music of the world playing. When I look at my phone, there are notifications to watch a YouTube video or to go back and scroll Instagram, or of news in the world that I might be interested in, or a text from a friend about nothing, or a reminder to do my homework. Again, this is the world we live in.

But the Liturgy transcends all of that. We step out of the world and enter the heavens.

You have heard the term "Liturgy is heaven on earth" - everything in Liturgy is meant to transport you to the heaven. You are surrounded by the icons of the saints and angels - these are not just pictures or decoration, but they are windows into heaven, showing us the saints and angels who are worshipping with us even in that moment. The sound of the hymns and the aroma of the incense are glimpses of the heavenly worship. The architecture, icons and layout of the church are designed to lift you up from your earthly concerns to the heavenly reality.

God, Who is outside of space and matter, Who is not bound by space as we are, Who is the creator of the universe and all that is in it, is inviting us to be present with Him. If I understand my role in the liturgy, then I will find myself taken out of this world and dropped in His world. I leave behind the distractions and I can focus on Him.

The church is not just a physical building, but it is a spiritual space that unites us with the Divine.

## **Set Apart From The Self**

We talked about the external distractions and noise that are related to our space in the world. But what about the internal distractions, noise and chaos?

In the world, I am overwhelmed by my responsibilities - juggling school, work, personal goals, family expectations, friendships, relationships, church service, extracurriculars, etc. I feel like I am spread too thin. I don't have the mental space to focus or even to breathe. I am worried and anxious - about the future (career, health, success, getting into grad school, etc.) and about the past (did I say the right thing, did I make a mistake). I feel regret and guilt from wronging someone, or saying the wrong thing, or falling into sin. I am restless - doom scrolling, keeping up with trends, etc. I have doubts about my faith or my purpose or my identity. I have emotions. I have perfectionism. And on top of all that, I have FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) so even if I had more time, I would fill it with something else, lest I miss out. Even if I am quiet on the outside, the inside is raging with all of this chaos!

The Liturgy transcends all of that. In the Liturgy I can find peace - and specifically, inner peace. The Lord Jesus Christ, who is the King of Peace, will abide in me and I in him. Liturgy gives me a chance to have silence. To have calmness. To have reflection. To surrender all of my stresses and anxieties and the noise of my life into the hand of the Lord. When I am still, I can open my heart to hear God's voice instead of my own.

If I know my role in the liturgy, then I can leave behind the stress of this world - of work, home, school, and even the stress of entertaining myself. And I can find peace.

## What is my Role in Liturgy?

"And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength." (Mark 12:30)

We are going to discuss four points here:

- Participation of the Mind
- Participation of the Body
- Participation of the Spirit
- Go in Peace

### Participation of the Mind

An imperfect analogy: If I know nothing about Soccer, and you ask me to sit down and watch a 2 hour soccer game, I'm going to get bored. But once I learn about Soccer, and I learn the game, then I will be able to follow what's happening in the game, and I am less likely to get bored. What does it mean to learn the game?

- Experience it
- Be taught about it
- Read about it
- Play it

The same goes for the Liturgy. If you know nothing about the Liturgy or about the Scripture or about the Church History, or about the Gospel - then you will come to the Liturgy and you will be bored.

So our first point here actually starts BEFORE the Liturgy. What is my role BEFORE liturgy.

Learn the Liturgy, Read books. Watch videos. Be observant. Ask questions. There are many ways that we can engage with the Liturgy and with the worship of God intellectually.

If you learn about the Liturgy and its structure and flow, the more you will follow it and be able to follow the story and the rhythm of worship. The more you learn about the different rituals and motions, you will have a better understanding of what is happening. The more you learn of the Scripture, the better you will understand the readings of the day. The more you learn about iconography, the more you will see how the stories of the saints relate to the themes of the Liturgy. The more you immerse yourself in the teaching of the Church - whether it is theology, apologetics, biblical studies, patristics, etc. - the more you will be able to see the coherence of the line between what the Lord Jesus taught, the disciples preached and the Fathers kept.

Worship is not an action that is void of intellect. Many atheists make this accusation against Christians - that we have foregone intellect and science in favor of faith. No, but rather we

recognize that God is the source of all intellect and of all wisdom.

Everything in the Liturgy has a purpose, has a meaning, has a symbol - but it is only with our intellect and our mind, can we recognize these symbols and meanings and purposes.

Be careful of the danger of focusing only on your mind and intellect, without giving any attention to your spirit: "If you are a theologian, you will pray truly. And if you pray truly, you are a theologian."  
- Evagrius Ponticus

## Participation of the Body

The Body is an instrument of worship

"But I discipline my body and bring *it* into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified." (1 Cor 9:27)

My body begins to participate even from the night before, when I start my Eucharistic Fast, and when I make sure I get good sleep before Liturgy. If I deprive myself of a healthy amount of sleep before the Liturgy, I will do myself a disservice - my body and my mind will be tired.

**Fasting:** The Eucharistic Fast serves as a way of reminding us that our physical needs should not overshadow our spiritual needs. By fasting, we are bringing the body to the same level and desire of the spirit, which desires for communion with God. We deny ourselves physical nourishment for a time, to recognize the spiritual nourishment of the Liturgy and the Eucharist

**Prostration, Bowing Head:** When we prostrate or bow our heads, we perform an act of humility, we lower ourselves before God as a putting off of our ego.

**Standing:** St Basil, when talking about the traditions we have received, talks about standing as being a sign and recognition of the Resurrection.

**Look Towards the East:** Looking toward the East is about looking back to our old home which was the Paradise of Eden "in the East" (Genesis 2) and looking towards the Second Coming of Christ who will come from the East.

**Sign of the Cross:** Making the sign of the cross engages us in the sacrifice of the Cross. As we say in the Doxology for the Feast of the Cross: "The cross is our weapon, the cross is our protection"

**Participation of the Senses:** The Liturgy intentionally engages all of our senses:

- Seeing the iconography, iconostasis, crosses, vestments, ritual actions
- Hearing the hymns, prayers and readings
- Smelling the incense
- Tasting the Eucharist
- Touching the icons, the crosses, doing the sign of the Cross



**Singing:** The biggest role that I have in the Liturgy is to sing the hymns and chant the responses. Do you know that a Liturgy cannot be prayed if there isn't a congregant? Abouna cannot pray the liturgy by himself. Abouna and a deacon cannot pray a liturgy by themselves, but they need at least a third person to be the congregation.

Let me sing every "Lord have mercy" and every "Amen" and every response.

## Participation of the Spirit

What did the Lord Jesus Christ say to the Samaritan woman? God is Spirit, and those who worship God must worship in... SPIRIT AND TRUTH. If I am worshipping in Spirit and Truth, then each Lord have mercy will be different. In the first one I will be pleading with God for the peace of the one holy Catholic and Apostolic Orthodox Church; in the second one for Pope Tawadros, Anba Youssef, Anba Basil and Anba Gregory; in the third one for Abouna Aaron and Abouna Jerome and the my hegumens and priests and deacons BY NAME; etc.

Because if I say the same Lord have mercy time after time then not only am I not worshipping God in Spirit and Truth, but I am falling into one of the traps the Lord mentioned in the sermon on the mount: "And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words." (Matthew 6:7)

Another important aspect of "Worship God in Spirit and Truth" is to take it personally. Imagine that in church I say "pray for the peace of the Church..." and then I go outside and I complain a lot, make problems, argue with the servants or Abouna, disagree about everything, talk about people behind their back, etc.

Or I say in the liturgy "pray for our archpriest Pope Tawadros and Anba Youssef" and "pray for the heguments, priests and deacons..." and then I leave and go on Instagram to say things against HH The Pope or HE the Metropolitan or the priests

Or I stand in liturgy and say "pray for the air of the heaven" and I walk outside and smoke a cigarette.

How would the Lord Jesus Christ respond? Am I really worshipping in Spirit and Truth?

Participating in the Spirit means to close my eyes and pray.

I mentioned in the beginning the reason that I thought of this topic to give to you all today - ask yourself in every liturgy. While Abouna is praying the Thanksgiving Prayer, what am I thankful for? How can I express my Thanksgiving to the Lord? And pray those words.

When you find yourself in the litanies and the deacon tells you "pray for the peace of the Church" - pray for the internal peace of the Church. Pray for the external peace of the Church. Pray for the unity of the Only Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church. Pray for those who have separated themselves from the Orthodox Faith.

When you hear the deacon telling you "pray for the holy gospel" - pray for the spread of the gospel message to those who haven't heard it; pray for the hearts of those listening to be opened to the gospel message (starting with your own heart);

When you hear the deacon telling you "pray for the Pope and Bishops" - pray for them by name. "Remember O Lord Your Servant HH Pope Tawadros II. Protect him, guide him, give him Your wisdom, let him do your will, keep him for many years on his throne, extend his life. Remember O Lord Your Servant HE Metropolitan Youssef. Protect him, guide him, give him Your wisdom, let him do your will. Give him more time in the day. Calm the hearts of our diocese. Give him a time for rest. Take care of his health.

When you hear the deacon telling you "pray for the salvation of the world"

When you hear the deacon telling you "pray for our kings and leaders, our government and our military"

When Abouna says "He will appear to judge the world in righteousness and give each one according to his deeds" the congregation cries out "According to YOUR Mercy O Lord not according to my sins." Because this sentence is dealing with MY salvation. It's a prayer - Lord I don't agree with this judging according to deeds because if you judged me according to my deeds alone I would not have eternal life. But judge me with YOUR MERCY. - I am saying this out loud and I am pleading with God. I am not just singing a hymn

This is my main role in the Liturgy. The participation of my spirit. This is why the liturgy starts with: "Lift up your hearts"

## Go in Peace

At the end of Liturgy, Abouna says "Go in peace"

Communal prayer enhances personal prayer; personal prayer enhances communal.

Sometimes I make the excuse not to pray at home because "I don't know what to say" or I pray but I find that my words are few and they just feel like empty words. Let me influence my private prayer with communal prayer - I can remember the Litanies and pray based on them. I can also just pray Psalms and hymns from the liturgy or the praises!

At the same time, this will enhance my time in liturgy because I become conditioned to prayer and to the words of prayer.

Embody the peace you received and go out and carry it in your life and interaction. I can't leave the liturgy and go argue with my brother. I can't leave the liturgy and go and curse and watch inappropriate movies or listen to music unbecoming of me as a Christian. My mom used to say "omal betroot El kenesa leh" (well in that case, why are you even going to church).

Sunday being the day of the Lord, it's good for us not to have work and that isn't just so we can attend liturgy, but so that we can go in peace after. To visit our brethren and visit the sick and serve the poor. To go and help our parents and our friends. This is how we take the peace that we

received, double it and give it to the next person!