

Holy Harmony - Part 1

by Elisabeth Elliot

The sermon emphasizes the importance of seeking holy harmony, which is achieved by surrendering to God's purpose and will, and finding fulfillment in the cross of Jesus Christ.

Duration: 42:19

Scripture: Exodus 20:14, Psalm 40:8, Proverbs 3:5-6, Proverbs 3:11-12, Matthew 16:24, Hebrews 10:7, Revelation 3:19

Topics: "Unity"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of a holy harmony in our lives. He reflects on the difference that Jesus Christ has made in his own life and challenges the audience to consider the impact of Christ in their own lives. The speaker shares his personal journey of realizing the emptiness of a life focused on his own will and the need for a supernatural explanation in the face of natural phenomena. He highlights the need to believe in God's ultimate purpose for our fulfillment and the importance of choosing to cooperate with Him.

Transcript

The theme for this entire weekend is a holy harmony. I think you know that. And in this first talk, what I'd like to emphasize is that word holy.

My second talk will be a holy harmony, but this time let's think about a holy harmony. One of the things that I'm always asking myself and other people is what kind of a difference we expect Jesus Christ to make in our lives. What kind of a difference has he made in those of you who can remember not being a Christian? Now, I can't remember any such time myself.

I grew up in a very strong Christian home and probably accepted the Lord Jesus in some very simple way. When I was four or five years old, I have no recollection of a date. But when I was 10 years old, I did make a public profession of faith.

But I can't remember any before and after kind of thing, which I'm sure many of you can. And you would probably be able to give me a fairly clear answer as to some of the differences that Jesus has made in your life. But that may be a once in a lifetime decision and there may be a real watershed there where you can point to some very pronounced distinctions between the before and after.

But then for every one of us, there are those daily choices and the situations in which we find ourselves where a new kind of faith is called for. It's a new summons. Any real trouble or suffering or disaster brings us face-to-face with reality, with a capital R. The disaster itself, as we all know, is not going to make a saint out of anybody.

The question is, how do we respond to that thing? So I'm always looking for the supernatural. For the supernatural explanation of all the natural phenomena, and that's not difficult at all to me because I was another one of the great gifts of my life was having been raised in a home where both my parents were lovers of the outdoors, lovers of beautiful scenery. And my father was a birdwatcher long before the phrase was coined.

And he taught us to listen to things. Most people don't hear birds at all. And he taught us to listen for birds.

He taught us to see them. And my father only had one eye. He had lost one eye through an accident when he was 12 years old.

And he could see more with that one eye than most of us could see with two, but he trained us. And he taught us to appreciate God's creation. And so I can look at the visible things and I see in them visible signs of an invisible reality.

It's not difficult in a beautiful place like Colorado Springs to do that. But I'm always looking for the supernatural in the events of my life and in the stories of other people's lives. And it's a wonderful thing to see the way in which God works together a concatenation of events.

It's particularly wonderful when you keep a spiritual journal as I do. I've kept one for about 50 years. And that doesn't mean every day, but the high points of my life, I can go back and see how God has led me.

We hear a lot of talk about being in harmony with nature or in harmony with each other. There are many kinds of harmonies that are not holy harmonies. But I want us to focus on this holy harmony.

And I take the phrase from an anonymous poem that I have framed on the wall of our house back there in Massachusetts. It says, thou shalt know him when he comes, not by any din of drums, nor by anything he wears. Wait a minute.

Thou shalt know him when he comes, not by any din of drums, nor the vantage of his airs, nor by anything he wears, neither by his crown nor his gown. For his presence known shall be by the holy harmony that his coming makes in thee. How many of you know some really holy people? I would hope that everybody knows somebody in your life.

I see a few blank looks and a few heads nodding, but we are poor indeed if we don't know any holy people, but I've known many and I thank God for them. My parents were certainly two holy people. And there are certain characteristics about those holy people that they have in common.

And one of them is a harmony. And I would hope that during these few days that we have together that not one of us will go away from this quiet place without a new sense of that holy harmony within your own life. When I think of the people that have greatly influenced my life, not only people that I've known in the flesh, but people who have blessed me through their books, Amy Carmichael is a shining, outstanding example of that.

I was introduced to the writings of Amy Carmichael when I was 14 years old, and I have been reading her books ever since and have written her biography with the hope that I would be able to introduce this woman who's not nearly so well known to younger people as she was to my generation. But in her, I found an example of a truly godly woman. And she showed me in her writings the way of the cross.

So she is one of many, but when I look at the holy people in my life, without exception, they are people who have suffered. Now suffering can cause anything but harmony in one's life. On the other hand, those who respond to suffering in faith are those in whose lives we see that holy harmony.

Now I can see that some of you are taking notes and you're probably having a dreadful time figuring out where is she going with all this and where is point one? I haven't come to that yet. I'll tell you when I do. Aristotle said that all men seek happiness.

There are no exceptions. Aristotle was a wise man and I would not presume to take issue with him. I agree that all of us seek happiness, but the great difference between people is where they expect to find it.

Where do they look for it? And for us Christians, we should know where to find it. I hope that we'll be a little clearer on that if we're not too clear at this point. But who are the happiest people that you know? Think about those holy people or the people in whose lives you see a holy harmony.

What is it about them that makes them happy? Well, probably the truly happy people are simple people. They're peaceful, they're joyful, they're holy. And my question to you tonight, to each of you as an individual, do you want to be holy? Do you want to be a holy man? Do you want to be a holy woman? You may not be able to answer that question with a resounding yes.

In the back of your mind, there's that first question, well, what does she mean by that? Do I want to be pious and long-faced? Well, none of us would say yes to that one. If by pious, we think of just the popular word of piocity and hypocrisy. We don't want to be long-faced and all of that, but the word holy means whole, W-H-O-L-E.

It comes from the same word as the word whole or the word hail, as in Hail and Hardy, H-A-L-E. It means wholeness. Another question that might hinder you from giving a resounding answer to my question, do you want to be holy, is what's it going to cost me? And if you ask that question, that's a very reasonable question because holiness is going to cost you, not just something, but in a sense, everything.

I once had a long conversation with a journalist who wanted to do a story on faith. And he was grilling me with questions for hours and days by tape recorder. And this was a man who claimed no faith at all.

And toward the end of our many conversations, he said to me, you know, sometimes I feel as if I'd give everything I possessed to have your kind of faith. But he said, I have a sneaking suspicion that that is exactly what it would cost me. And I don't want to pay that price.

So I want you to ask yourself in your heart of hearts before God, you don't need to answer to me or anyone else, but ask yourself on this opening night, do you want to be holy? Now, I would certainly not assume that your primary reason for coming to the Glenn on this particular Friday in November of 1990 was because you wanted to be holy. Surely it's the reason that some of you came. You want to be a little bit holier than you were.

You want to learn something more about God, but I'm sure that many of you came for very, very different reasons. Other reasons, some of them we might guess at, but I'm not going to presume to do that. I won't ask for a show of hands.

How many of you came for such and such a reason? But I do want you to face that question before God. So now point one is God's ultimate purpose. To be holy is to fulfill God's ultimate purpose.

Or we could put it the other way around. If I in my life, as an ordinary 20th century woman, I'm going to fulfill the purpose of almighty God in my life. There isn't going to be any way to do that.

Unless I'm holy. Now, what exactly is God's ultimate purpose for us? Well, I want to read to you from Ephesians, the first chapter. And if you don't have Phillips translation, I would suggest that you listen while I read this, because it is a bit too difficult to do the severe mental scampering of trying to figure out, well, how in the world did Phillips get that out of this if you're looking at another translation? But this is what it says, Ephesians one, three through 12.

Praise be to the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ for giving us through Christ every possible spiritual benefit as citizens of heaven. For consider what he has done before the foundation of the world. He chose us to become in Christ his holy and blameless children.

Living within his constant care. He planned in his purpose of love that we should be adopted as his own children through Jesus Christ. That we might learn to praise that glorious generosity of his, which has made us welcome in the everlasting love he bears toward the beloved.

It is through him at the cost of his own blood that we are redeemed, freely forgiven through that full and generous grace which has overflowed into our lives and opened our eyes to the truth. For God has allowed us to know the secret of his plan. And it is this, he purposes in his sovereign will that all human history shall be consummated in Christ.

That everything that exists in heaven or earth and I presume that means us along with everything else shall find its perfection and fulfillment in him. That's God's purpose in his sovereign will that all human history shall be consummated in Christ and that everything that exists in heaven or earth shall find its perfection and fulfillment in him. The world is desperately searching for fulfillment.

I am up to here with that word, especially from women. They're looking everywhere except where it is for fulfillment. And several years ago, Jane Polly had a very interesting TV special on women who had been in very high paying jobs in the corporate world.

And these were all women who had chosen to leave and to go back home and have babies and start being wives and mothers or do something more domestic than they'd been doing. And their testimony one and all was I didn't find fulfillment where I thought I was going to. It was not in the money.

It was not in the power. It was not in the position. It was not in the competition with men.

And some of them were realistic enough to say, and maybe I'm not going to find fulfillment in being a wife and a mother, but that's what I'm choosing to try next. Well, I'm convinced that there is no fulfillment except where we find it in this passage. In Christ, all human history is to be consummated in Christ.

And the only place where I'm going to find wholeness as a woman, only place where you men are going to find wholeness as men is in Christ. And he wants us to find our perfection as men and women and fulfillment in him, nowhere else. Thou shalt know him when he comes, not by any din of drums, nor the vantage of his heirs, nor by anything he wears, neither by his crown nor his gown.

For his presence known shall be by the holy harmony, which his coming makes in thee. Now, if you want, and here we're back to the crucial question again, if you want God's ultimate purpose to be fulfilled in you, which is perfection and fulfillment, then where do we look for that? Well, 1 Corinthians 2, verses seven and eight. 1 Corinthians 2, seven and eight.

The wisdom that we speak of is that mysterious secret wisdom of God, which he planned for our glory today. None of the powers of this world have known this wisdom. Paul is talking now about a particular wisdom in this context.

If they had, they would never have crucified the Lord of glory. And in the previous chapter, he has said that the cross of Christ or Christ nailed to a cross is the power of God and the wisdom of God. Now, could anything be more diametrically opposed to this world's notions of wisdom and power than the Lord of the universe, the creator of the worlds, the ineffable majesty put into the hands of wicked men, flogged, stripped, mocked, and nailed to a cross? What does that look like? Well, just what Paul calls it, he says to the world, it's foolishness.

It's nothing but weakness and defeat and foolishness. But the wisdom, the foolishness of God is wiser than the wisdom of men. And so we have to go to the cross.

And that ultimate purpose of God is always linked to the cross of Jesus Christ. In the cross of Christ, I glory, towering o'er the wrecks of time, all the light of sacred story gathers round its head, sublime. And maybe you've sung those words.

Unfortunately, many of you have not been reared in backgrounds where you learned the great hymns. I thank God for that. In my background, we sang these hymns at home, not just in church, but we sang them around the piano every morning.

We had hymn singing before we had the reading of the scriptures and family prayers. But that's one of the old hymns, one of the many, many hymns that mentions the cross. In the cross of Christ, I glory.

And Paul says in his passage in 2 Corinthians, that the wisdom we speak of is that mysterious secret wisdom of God, which he planned before the creation for our glory today. And we know that the Lamb was slain before the foundation of the world. He knew that the cross was going to be the price that he himself, he was God, was going to have to pay if he created a world in which it was possible to defy him.

And God in his incredible grace chose to create us creatures who can shake our fists in his face and say no to him. Can you imagine? I mean, he didn't have to do that. He created the winds and the tides and the mountains and the goats and the deer and all the rest to do his will perfectly all the time.

A mountain goat or a mountain sheep does the will of God by being a mountain sheep. And the tides come up in front of our house every day and they go down every day at exactly the minute. It's on the little tide chart that I keep on my desk.

There is never the slightest variation. Perfect obedience. But he created two orders of being, spirits and men, as far as we know, only two, that were capable of defying him.

And he knew that he would have to pay the price before the foundation of the world, that lamb was slain. What a strange wisdom, this secret wisdom of God, which he planned before the creation of the world for what? For our glory, that's his purpose. For our glory, for our fulfillment, for our consummation, for our wholeness, that's his purpose.

None of the powers of this world have known this wisdom. If they had, they would never have crucified the Lord of glory, but as it is written, things which I saw not and ear heard not, which entered not into the heart of man, whatsoever things God prepared for them that love him, but God has through his spirit, let us share his secret. Now I could spend the whole evening talking just about that or the whole weekend, but that's where I wanted to begin.

Point one, God's ultimate purpose is our fulfillment, our wholeness, our holiness. Now, second thing, there is something that you and I have to do about it. God is not going to invade the citadel of our freedom with which he created us.

He created us with the freedom to choose to love him or to choose to deny him. And we all know the choice that Adam and Eve made and the choices that we have made ourselves to disobey, but we have the choice to cooperate with him, to believe or to reject. So point two is you have to believe.

If you're going to find that holy harmony, then first of all, you are going to have to believe that God's purpose for you is fulfillment. Now, some of you are having a hard time believing that. I don't know who you are.

I don't know a soul in this room. I don't know anything about your stories, but I would be willing to lay a bet if I were a better that there are quite a few of you that have had a very tough time believing that the will of God does mean fulfillment. You have your own blueprint of the way you would like to see your life work out, and you've been hammering away on God's door for certain things which God has not so far granted to you.

And if you're really honest, you might have to say, I'm not sure that I do believe that. I'm just not sure. Maybe if God would give me my way, I'd be happier.

It's amazing to me how whatever subject I'm going to be talking about, the book that I happen to be reading will have something that has a bearing on that. And I don't choose the book because of the subject I'm going to be talking about, because obviously I'm talking to many different groups. In the time it takes me to read a book, about the only time I have to read a book is when I'm on a plane going somewhere to speak.

And I'm a very slow reader, so it may take me a month to read the book. But anyway, right now I happen to be reading Seven Story Mountain by Thomas Merton, which I've had in my shelves for years and years, and finally just got around to reading. But here's a passage that illustrates a choice that one man made.

He's speaking about when he was just a young man in his late teens, his father died. The death of my father left me sad and depressed for a couple of months, but that eventually wore away. And when it did, I found myself completely stripped of everything that impeded the movement of my own will to do as it pleased.

I imagined that I was free, and it would take me five or six years to discover what a frightful captivity I had gotten myself into. It was in this year too, that the hard crust of my dry soul finally squeezed out all the last traces of religion that had ever been in it. There was no room for any God in that empty temple full of dust and rubbish, which I was now so jealously to guard against all intruders in order to devote it to the worship of my own stupid will.

And so I became the complete 20th century man. I now belong to the world in which I lived. I became a true citizen of my own disgusting century, the century of poison gas and atomic bombs.

A man living on the door sill of the apocalypse, a man with veins full of poison, living in death. If you don't know Thomas Merton's story, he was reared as a Protestant. He became aware of God as a very young child and had a religious period.

He's here describing when he discarded that religious period upon the death of his father. And then eventually he came back to God and ended up as a Trappist monk. But what a description.

We all have this inborn rebellion, don't we? We have this notion that to be free is to do what we want to do and not to do what we don't want to do. And he refers to this as a frightful captivity. And I've written a little book called *The Liberty of Obedience* because I'm convinced that there is no real freedom without obedience.

So, you have to believe. When I look back over my 64 years, whatever portion of them I can remember, at least when I read back over my 50 years worth of journals, it's very obvious to me there that wherever I have trusted and obeyed, I've found peace and happiness. And wherever I have mistrusted or disbelieved, and disobeyed, I have not found peace.

And when I go all the way back to my small childhood, I would say exactly the same thing about my relationship to my parents. My parents were disciplined people and they disciplined us children. And it's useless for parents to try to discipline their children if they've never disciplined themselves, isn't it? We see that all around us all the time.

Undisciplined parents trying to make civilized little people out of these little savages. And it can't be done without discipline. But anyway, I think of how we were taught to trust our parents' word.

What they said they meant and they meant it the first time. Not the fifth time or the 10th time or when they started to scream. But the first time in a quiet, normal tone of voice, if they said, come, they meant come.

This light is so bright, Lars. Are you giving me a signal yet? No, okay. It's gonna give me time signals.

When they said come, they meant come and that's exactly what they meant. And if we didn't come, then there was a small switch which was the Board of Education. And we didn't have to feel that too many times on our little bare legs because we knew that our parents were serious.

And so just the mere raising of my mother's eyes to the top of the door in every room where she kept it, there wasn't a room in the house that didn't have a switch on top of the door. When she raised her eyes, we were galvanized into obedience. But the point is very obvious, isn't it? When I trusted and obeyed my parents, I was happy.

When I disobeyed my parents, I was miserable. And exactly the same thing obtains with us. And the book of Hebrews says, when your father, your heavenly father disciplines you, remember that it is because you're his son.

It's because he loves you. It's the proof of your sonship. If he didn't discipline you, you could assume that you were a bastard.

But because he loves you, he's going to discipline you. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. So you simply have to trust him.

Now this makes life very simple, trusting God. Now that's not synonymous with easy. Please do not confuse the word simple and the word easy.

Simple means that you can understand it. Easy means that you can do it easily. That's the distinction I'm making here anyway.

It's not always easy to do the will of God, but it's simple. It simplifies your life enormously when you don't have to weigh your will and somebody else's will, and maybe God's will when you get around to it, and figure out what you're going to do. If you have made it the purpose of your life that you will do whatever God tells you to do, about 90% of your decisions are already made for you.

And I'll give you an illustration of that. My son-in-law is a pastor in California and he had a phone call from a man saying that he had a tremendous problem that he had to come and talk to him about. And my son-in-law said, fine, come over.

So he came and after the first five minutes, Walt, my son-in-law certainly knew what the man's story was going to end up being. He was in love with somebody else's wife and he had a wife of his own and she had a husband and the whole sorted thing. It took him an hour and a half to pour out all the details about how all this happened.

And so my son-in-law listened patiently. And when the man got all finished, Walt said, is that all? And he said, well, yeah. And he said, well, but didn't you tell me you had a problem? And he said, well, yeah.

And he said, well, what's the problem? Well, the guy was speechless. He said, what's the problem? He said, don't you see what the problem is? And he said, no. He said, I don't see what the problem is.

You know what God wants you to do. You didn't have to come and ask me. Cut it out.

Just cut it out. Confess your sins, repent and turn away from them. That's what I mean by simple.

Thou shalt not commit adultery. Thou shalt not commit fornication. Thou shalt not commit any kind of sexual sin, period.

Case closed. Sexual activity outside of marriage is against God's law. So that simplifies things, doesn't it? You don't have to decide whether you're gonna go to bed with this person or that person if they don't happen to be your spouse.

The answer is simple. When I have sought God's purpose, he has drawn me closer to himself. When I have sought my purpose, there has been a distance.

So the second point is, I have to believe that God means what he says. I have to trust him enough to obey him. Which brings us to the third thing.

There will be no holiness without the cross. None of us can follow him who was crucified and somehow evade a cross. Jesus said, if you want to be my disciple, and I can almost imagine him looking over his shoulder as if to say, is there anybody who is going to want to follow me when I give out these three humanly impossible conditions? And what we're talking about this whole week is humanly impossible, isn't it? I'm not talking about anything natural here.

I'm talking about something supernatural when I talk about holy harmony. And so Jesus said, if you want to be my disciple, there are a lot of other rabbis you can follow. Go with them if you want to, but if you want to come with me, three things.

First, give up your right to yourself. Can you imagine selling that idea in the 20th century? Can you imagine selling it in the 15th? How about the first? Was there a stampede to follow Jesus? Not because of the words he spoke, only because of the loaves and fishes, he said. But you give up your right to yourself.

That's one translation of the old King James version, deny yourself. Oh, but that's so negative, that's so morbid. I mean, I just don't really think I feel comfortable with that.

I mean, what about my self-image? What about my self-esteem? What does that do to me? All the troubles of the world, according to the 20th century American, is low self-esteem. Everything we've ever done wrong is because of low self-esteem. What did Jesus say? If you want to be my disciple, this is where you start, with the negative.

Give up your right to yourself because you cannot serve two masters. It's either my will be done or thy will be done. My will be done is the rule of hell.

Thy will be done is the rule of heaven. Which do you want? There isn't any middle ground. Second condition, take up your cross.

Third condition, follow me. Back to Aristotle's dictum. There, all men seek happiness.

There are no exceptions. And here's Jesus issuing a clarion call, which is a recipe for happiness that makes absolutely no sense to the world. And Christians are people whose lives don't make any sense except in terms of an invisible world, except in terms of the supernatural.

We are not talking about the natural. Now, here's a room full of natural men and women. We are flesh and blood.

We are seething with emotions and feelings and temperaments. We are personalities. We are fallible.

We're sinners. There's nothing else in this room but sinners. Let's get that perfectly straight.

Everybody that ever gets married marries a sinner. I've married number three over here. There isn't anything else.

But he's giving us the recipe for true wholeness, haleness, heartiness, fulfillment, bliss, satisfaction, happiness. But the rules are foolishness. The preaching of the cross is foolishness.

And to my great dismay and sorrow, it's becoming foolishness in too many Christian churches. I don't hear this. I hear a lot about self-esteem.

I hear a lot about self-image, self-actualization, self-realization, self-expression. And Jesus says, give up your rights, all your rights to yourself, and take up your cross and follow me. Was Jesus a man in whose life we can see a holy harmony perfectly holy, perfectly harmonious? What was the secret? I delight to do thy will, oh my God.

Thy law is within my heart. Lo, I come in the volume of the book it is written of me to do thy will. Nothing else.

The will of God. Taking up that cross is impossible without God's help. There are two wills in us.

I want to read from a little booklet that I came across. Another one of these instances where just what I wanted to give to you, I came across in my reading. Sufferings arising from anxiety in which the soul adds to the cross imposed by the hand of God an agitated resistance and a sort of unwillingness to suffer.

Such troubles arise only because we live to ourselves. A cross wholly inflicted by God and fully accepted without any uneasy hesitation is full of peace as well as of pain. On the contrary, a cross not fully and simply accepted but resisted by the love of self even slightly is a double cross.

It is even more a cross owing to this useless resistance than through the pain it necessarily entails. The only basis of peace is the cessation of the conflict of two wills. My will versus God's.

And so I come to him believing that his purpose for me is joy, fulfillment. Trusting him enough to obey him and the proof of faith is obedience. The only valid proof of faith is obedience and the only valid proof of love is obedience.

Faith is not a feeling. Love is not a feeling. According to scripture, love is obedience.

Jesus said, if you love me, sing about it. That's not what he said. If you love me, do what I say.

This is love that you obey me. The man who loves me is the one who obeys me. So my holiness is never going to be effected.

The holiness of God is never going to be effected in me and produce that holy harmony, which is so characteristic of all the holy people that we know, until we come to the cross and surrender there our wills. We can't do it anywhere else. We come in simple faith, just as the old gospel song says that Billy Graham uses at the end of every campaign, just as I am without one plea, but that thy blood was shed for me.

And that thou bidst me come to thee. Oh, Lamb of God, I come. And that's where we are.

All of us, a bunch of miserable offenders, helpless, hopeless, selfish, depraved, useless sinners. And we come to the foot of the cross and we lay down our wills and we say, Lord, here it is. I can't handle it.

I'll take yours. And the cross is a place of transformation. He takes all our sins and our sorrows and our losses and he gives us his righteousness and his joy and his gain.

Out of my bondage, sorrow and night, Jesus, I come. Into thy freedom, gladness and light, Jesus, I come. But our minds are so infected by the thinking of the world, it's very difficult for us to think that freedom

simply means obedience to Jesus Christ in his service, his perfect freedom.

So that's what I mean by a holy harmony. A harmony which is in complete agreement with the will of God. A harmony which unites myself, all that I am, all that I have, all that I do with the person of Jesus Christ.

A transaction that has to take place at the cross. And then he is my savior. He becomes that holy harmony.

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