

Holy Harmony - Part 2

by Elisabeth Elliot

Living in holy harmony with God means accepting and trusting His will, even when it's difficult or doesn't make sense to us.

Duration: 41:00

Scripture: 1 Samuel 3:18, Psalm 139:12, Jeremiah 29:11, Matthew 6:33, Romans 8:28, 2 Corinthians 5:7, 1 Peter 5:7

Topics: "Unity"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the idea that everything in our lives is handed to us by God, who is loving, sovereign, omnipotent, and omniscient. The speaker encourages the audience to accept and embrace the circumstances of life as part of God's plan for their good. The sermon also highlights the obedience of early Christians who went into the world to preach the gospel, even at the cost of their lives. The speaker reminds the audience that as Christians, our lives may not make sense to the world, but we live in faith, drawing on supernatural power and being transformed into the image of Christ.

Transcript

The title of the second talk is A Holy Harmony, emphasizing the second word. You can underline that if you want to. I want us to think about specifically what that harmony means in practical terms.

And I want to tell you a story about a friend of mine who's married to a foreigner. It has been a very difficult marriage, as very often mixed marriages can be. And her husband has recently decided that he wants to go back and live in his own country, which happens to be one of the most dangerous countries, I suppose, in the world.

And his wife wrote me a long letter, many pages filled with descriptions of what she anticipated if she were to go with him. Her fears for herself, her fears for her children, fears because her husband is relatively irresponsible with money and what his relatives would do to them and all sorts of things. And she just told me, as much as said, that she could not bring herself to go, but she said he hasn't made this decision yet, so I'm just praying that he won't.

And of course I began to pray that the Lord would give her peace and show her what she should do if he did make the decision. And she called me to say, my husband has decided that he's going back and I've told him that I will not go. What do you think, Elizabeth? Well, I said, if you understand anything I say about what the scriptures say about a wife's responsibility to her husband, I said, I think you're making a very

dangerous decision.

Because the scripture clearly says that a wife is to submit to her husband. It doesn't have footnotes saying unless he's mistaken, unless you disagree with him, unless he's not as spiritual as you are, there are no footnotes. It just says the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is head of the church, not that he ought to try to be or that she ought to make him, but that he is.

And so I said, I realize your fears. I understand, I think, all your reasons and they're very sane and sensible from a purely human standpoint, but we're not talking about the human standpoint here. We're talking about the supernatural life that we as Christians are to live if we're gonna live in a holy harmony with God.

And I said to her, do you think you would be safer in disobedience to God? There is no safe place in the universe except the will of God. Are you safe in this country? And that is the answer that I've always given to people who ask me, how could you ever go back into the jungle with your three-year-old daughter to live with the people who killed your husband? I realize that some of you, probably many of you don't know my story, but my first husband was killed by a tribe of Indians in South America and ultimately God opened the door for me to go in there and live with them. And I had to make the decision.

Was I gonna go in there and live with a bunch of naked slaves and savages who killed my husband and take my three-year-old daughter? Or was I not? Well, obviously it was a simple issue. What does God want me to do? Now, it's not always easy to find out what God wants you to do, but if you are pretty sure you know what God wants you to do, it's already decided, isn't it? That that is what you're gonna do. So I knew that if that's what God wanted me to do it would be the only safe place in the universe.

That did not mean that I might not get myself speared to death just exactly the way my husband did. I don't think he got speared to death because he was being disobedient. So safety to the Christian has a very different definition than the world has, doesn't it? When five men got themselves killed, there was not very much criticism from the world, oddly enough.

I think people were awed by the fact that the claim that we wives had to make, which journalists asked us again and again, why did they go in there? What were they doing? What is this missionary business? And we did our very best to explain it, but I always would say to the journalists, look, the answer is a very simple one, but it's not one that's going to make any sense to you. They didn't go in there as anthropologists or adventurers or photographers or looking for heroics or a stunt. They went in there in simple obedience to a master, Jesus Christ, who said, go into all the world and preach the gospel.

So it was in obedience that they went and it was in obedience that they got killed just as John the Baptist got his head chopped off, not because he wasn't a faithful servant. Stephen was stoned to death, not because he was not doing the will of God. And of course, the son of man, the perfect spotless son of man was nailed to a cross.

That's the one that we follow. So this, of course, is behind everything that I was saying to my friend on the phone. Do you think you will be safe anywhere outside of the will of God? And there was a long silence on the end of the phone.

And then she said, I knew that's what you'd say, Elizabeth. That's why I called. She said, I have a lot of friends I could have called and they would have all told me that I was right and that I would be a fool to

submit to my husband in something which is so obviously stupid.

But she said, I didn't call them. I called you. Well, I had a one page letter from her about a week later.

And she said, I have told my husband that I will go with him and I have great peace. Now that fits what I find in this book. Great peace have they who love thy law and nothing shall offend them.

That's what I'm talking about here. The only way that you and I can live in a holy harmony with God is by acceptance of his will. A glad surrender.

That's what my book on discipline is about. I discipline my mind, my body, my emotions, my time, my work and my possessions for Jesus sake because he's my master. I do it not with white knuckles and gritted teeth as an odious burden, but as the only route to freedom.

If you continue in my words, then you are my disciples and you will know the truth and the truth shall make you free. And don't ever forget that that last phrase which is quoted by everybody in the world and it doesn't mean a single thing if it's divorced from the condition. What is the primary condition? The truth is not gonna make anybody free without that primary condition.

If you continue in my words, then you're my disciples, then you will know the truth and then the truth will make you free. That's the secret of tranquility, acceptance of the will of God. And so for you people without lines, number one, do you want the rule of God in your life? If you do, would you expect to be able to understand all his dealings with you in terms that make sense to your friends? I know that my dear friend, if her husband does decide to go back and incidentally the PS to the story is that the minute she went to him and said, I'm going back, I will go with you.

He was so disarmed that he might change his mind. I haven't heard yet whether he's going to but if she had dug in her heels and said, I'm not going with you, then he would have had to win, you know? And he would have said, well, I'm going anyway and either you come along or you can stay here, but I'm going. Well, who knows? Maybe he'll change his mind and not go at all.

We never know what God has up his sleeve. You never know what might happen. You only know what you have to do now.

So when we disobey God because of fear and we think, well, if I do this, I know what's going to happen and then this and this and this is going to happen. You really don't know that at all. You could be dead tomorrow.

None of the things that you anticipate might come to pass, but that is not her business. Her business is this one thing. Will you obey the clear, unequivocal, eternal word of God, wives submit to your husbands and leave the responsibility with God as to what that husband does? So the question is, do you expect to understand all his dealings with you in terms that make sense to the world? Her friends aren't going to understand that.

She's going to be subject to criticism, but a Christian's life doesn't make any sense to the world, does it? Christians are people who live in a way that makes no sense whatsoever to the world because we see him who is invisible. We live here in a visible world, in a natural world, but we live in terms of invisible things and we draw on supernatural power. And of course, this is the constant tension of our lives because we still are physical beings.

We still do live in a visible world. We still deal with material things. We deal with human longings, with human sins.

But God's not finished with us yet, is he? Thank God he's not finished with us yet. He's in the process of conforming us into the image of his son. And my Bible gives me that glorious promise.

Everything that happens fits into a pattern for good to them who love God. What is the proof of love? Obedience. To them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose.

What is his purpose? Purpose. Fulfillment. Bliss.

Perfection. Wholeness. If you love God, you are called according to his purpose.

And his purpose, as defined in the next verse, is that we might be shaped to the image of his son. That will be perfection, won't it? We shall be like him. And to me, that is the most thrilling thing in the world.

I'm at the stage now where I get a shock every time I look in the mirror. I mean, it is just, it can be devastating. I was with a group of women considerably younger than I am just the other day.

They were in their 50s, and several of them were saying that they have had the experience recently of literally not recognizing themselves when they suddenly see themselves in an unexpected mirror. For example, they're walking down the street and they suddenly see themselves in a store window or something, or in a department store, you suddenly see yourself in a mirror. And you think, who's that old lady over there? She's got the same dress on that I have.

I mean, literally, I've had this happen. But when I look at the ravages of age and the color of my hair and the wrinkles that were not there last Wednesday, I'm sure, I think, but what a thrilling thing it is to be 64 years old, I will be 64 next month, and to be headed for heaven and to realize that I am going to be like him. That is what God is working at.

Everything in my life that happens, absolutely everything that happens, fits into a pattern for good to them that love God, to them that are called according to his purpose, that we might be conformed to the image of his son. Now see, I do not know your stories, but whatever your story is, if you want the rule of God in your life, all that sordid past, God knows how to make into something beautiful. Do you know that simple little chorus, something beautiful, something good? All my confusions he understood.

All I had to offer him was what? Brokenness and strife. Anybody here that's got that to offer to God? But you offer it to him, and what does he do? He makes something beautiful of my life. God is in the business of repair and maintenance.

Thank God for that. But the question every day is, do you want the rule of God in your life? In Daniel, the second chapter, verse 22, when Eli has just gotten the worst news from the young Samuel, to whom God has given him, has given a special message for the old prophet. It's not good news.

Sorry, I'm giving you the wrong reference. That's in First Samuel. We'll come to that one later.

Daniel 2, 22 says, he reveals deep mysteries. He knows what lies in darkness. And a fussy, petulant insistence on asking God why he's doing something or what he is going to do or what will happen if I do so-and-so is childish.

It springs from immaturity. A mature Christian is one who can carry within himself the unanswered question, one who is willing to trust him. My first husband, Jim Elliott, and you can relax, Lars Grin has heard many stories about Jim Elliott and about Ad Leitch, and he doesn't mind them at all, and it doesn't bother his self-image.

He'll tell you that himself. But Jim Elliott was a fairly good carpenter. He made very functional, very practical furniture in the house that he built for us in the jungle.

And he had some power tools and stuff. And he could not stand to have me coming around when he was in the midst of making a piece of furniture because I'm the kind of person that always wants to know exactly what's going on. What's this for? What's this going to look like? Why are you doing it this way? Why do you put this little thing here? What's that for? Why don't you do so-and-so? And he would say, would you get lost? I know what I'm doing.

When it's finished, you'll see. We walk by faith, not by sight. Don't ask him why.

It's none of our business. He reveals deep mysteries when he wants to. But he knows what lies in darkness.

Leave it with him. Another one of these choice bits that fits so beautifully here. From somebody named Henry Perry Liddon, L-I-D-D-O-N, I never heard of him.

God is too wise not to know all about us and what is really best for us to be and to have. And he's too good not to desire our highest good. And too powerful desiring not to affect it.

If then what he has appointed for us does not seem to us the best or even to be good, our true course is to remember that he sees further than we do. And that we shall understand him in time when his plans have unfolded themselves. Meanwhile, casting all our care upon him since he careth for us.

Second thing I want you to think about, acceptance. And I want to read you a letter that I had from one of the subscribers to my newsletter, I think. That's where this came from.

Yeah, she said, I have read and reread your March, April newsletter and feel constrained to comment positively upon the article on virginity. In 1982, at the age of 30, the Lord, as I was studying his word through the Bible Study Fellowship, impressed upon my heart the gift of singleness as his personal gift to me. We were studying 1 Samuel at the time.

That's where this verse comes in. When I came to 1 Samuel 3, 18, it was as if the Lord spoke those words to me. It is the Lord, let him do what seems good to him.

This was when Eli had received the bad news from the boy Samuel. That was his response. It is the Lord, let him do what seems good to him.

And I would suppose that to this 30-year-old woman, the knowledge that God had given her the gift of singleness, and I suppose she took it to mean for the rest of her life, although I don't know that and I don't think we often do know that God means it for the rest of our lives, her response was, it is the Lord, let him do what seems good. Here's a woman that wants the rule of God in her life. The emphasis for me then, as well as since that day, has been upon the word let.

This coincides exactly with several principles you laid forth in your article. Quote, a woman must answer to God by her acceptance of singleness, seeking to know him in it, and converting it unto God by a peaceful yes, Lord. I think she means committing it unto God.

I don't think I said converting it. By a peaceful yes, Lord, rather than by a no. This principle has come to life in practical daily terms in my life, Mrs. Elliott.

There is absolutely no substitute for in acceptance, lieth peace. And those are words that I've quoted many, many times. They come from a poem by Amy Carmichael.

In acceptance, lieth peace, a poem that meant very much to me when my first husband died and then again when my second husband died. You also said, to follow him is to lose nothing in the long run and to gain much. I have, yes, at times struggled with the long rangeness of the single life, especially as I see friends marry and babies born and others' children raised.

There is that part of me that would like to experience those womanly aspects of life, but, and this is the positive, I have come to the peace, I have come to the place where I am willing to have what God wants for my life. If it weren't for the gift of singleness, I wouldn't be able to be actively involved in teaching God's word to other women, I wouldn't be able to spend long hours in studying God's word in preparation, I wouldn't have the freedom to work long and varied hours as an ICU nurse, and I wouldn't have had the opportunity to go out myself this summer as a short-term medical missionary in West Africa in obedience to God's call. To follow him is to indeed lose nothing and to gain much.

There's a woman who understands that word acceptance. Whatever God wants to give you, will you lift up both hands and say, Lord, I'll take it? Now you're looking at a woman who has been single most of her life, believe it or not. All you have to do is the arithmetic.

I was married to Jim Elliott 27 months. I was married to my second husband about four and a half years. Lars and I will have been married 13 years in December.

So I have been single most of my life, and I'm sure that many of you here have been married too. The point is, God is the one who's in charge. I've been asked a number of times, well, how did you ever get three husbands? Well, the truth is, I never got any of them.

My mother told me two things about sex, about how to behave with men when I was maybe 12 years old or so. She said, never chase a man. And don't, don't let them get within arm's length.

Well, I followed those rules. And God gave me three husbands. God gave them to me.

That's the only answer I have to give. I didn't deserve any of them. And I could not imagine it.

When Lars was closing in for the kill, I could not get my mind in harmony with what was turned out to be the will of God, because I just thought it was a miracle I got married the first time. I was always a wallflower in high school and college. It was an unimagined miracle that I got married the second time, 13 years after Jim died, and certainly couldn't be the will of God to give me a third husband.

But apparently it was. I hope that he's the last. That's so to say.

And I'm sure some of you might have some questions about God's distribution of gifts. But I know, I know from my own experience, from the testimony of hundreds of others, that the secret of tranquility is

acceptance. Give us this day our daily bread.

Now, are you single on this particular Friday night? If the answer is yes, this is the will of God for you right now. There's no question about that. Now, tomorrow he might have something else in mind, but that's none of your business.

Not right now. This is what God has handed to you on a platter. Our daily bread is handed to us.

All the circumstances of this life are handed to us by a loving, sovereign, omnipotent, omniscient God who works everything into a pattern for good, if we love him. So will you accept it? Will you say, yes, Lord, I'll take it? The story is told of a Scottish preacher to whom a young woman came in great distress because it appeared to her that one of her deepest desires was not in accord with the will of God. And she could not accept that fact.

And what should she do? And so this wise man took from his pocket a little slip of paper and he said, I'm going to write two words on this and I want you to go to the back of the church and sit down and study these two words and cross one of them out and come back and talk to me. She took the slip of paper, she sat down and she saw that he had written no, Lord. Now, which word was she to cross out? If she said no, then she'd have to cross out Lord because you can't say no and call him Lord.

Jesus said, why do you call me Lord? And do not the things that I say. But if she wanted to say Lord, she had to cross out the no. And it's simple, isn't it? That's what it comes down to.

And so often I hear young people talk about, well, you know, I'm really struggling with this. Struggling with what? Well, how far to go with my boyfriend, you know, or is it all right to sleep with him just on weekends? I mean, that's not too bad. And I couldn't tell you how many times young people ask me, well, I don't know what the will of God is.

Now, I really want to know what the will of God is, but how do I find it? My first question to them is what I've just asked you. Do you want the will of God in your life? Do you really want it? Do you want to be a holy person? And that, from honest young people, often draws a blank. They don't really want to.

What they'd like to see is a smorgasbord of the will of God, and they just pick whatever they like, as long as it fits in with their tastes and their preferences. But a holy harmony means that two have to be agreed. So do you expect God to agree with your will, or are you going to submit to his? Are you going to say, Lord, if it's singleness that you want to give me, I'll take it? Now, I did not want to be single as long as I was the first time.

I was married the first time when I was 26, and all my friends had been married about five years by that time. Back in those days, men were getting married in their 20s. Nowadays, they don't seem to get married in their 30s or even their 40s, but I don't know what's happening.

But 26 was kind of old, but God, when I was 26, gave me, exchanged the gift of singleness for the gift of marriage, and I thanked him for that, and now I was to glorify God as a wife. And also, eventually, my greatest dream of all was fulfilled when I was to glorify God as a mother. And when my baby was 10 months old, my husband died.

And that news was a new set of marching orders. I was now to glorify God as a widow, a choice that no woman would ever want to have to make. It was not my idea of how I was going to glorify God in my life,

but this was my daily bread.

From now on, I was to glorify God by being a widow. And in Amy Carmichael's poem, In Acceptance Flyeth Peace, she talks about the attempt to forget, or to evade, or to get so busy that you pay no attention to whatever the thing is that's troubling you. But peace will not be found in any of those evasions or denials.

Peace lies in acceptance. Now think again about those holy people that you know. What characterizes them? They are people of tranquility because they want the rule of God in their lives.

And they've said, yes Lord, I'll take it. Now it is not natural for us to accept what cuts across our human will. But God help us all, we are not limited to the natural anymore, are we? If any man is in Christ, he is a new act of creation.

Old things are passed away, all things have become new, and my old will has got to go, and today it's going to be, thy will be done, Lord. And every time the will of God cuts across my will, it's a cross. And I come and I say, Lord, I'll take it.

If you want to be my disciple, you give up your right to yourself, and you take up your cross, and you follow. Three simple principles. Not by any means easy.

And we know that this is the way that Jesus himself had to go. If there had been another way, don't you think his father, who loved him, would have found it? But the conflict of Jesus' human will with the will of his father led to that agony in the garden and the sweat, which was like great drops of blood. And he said, if it is possible, let this cup pass.

This cup that the father was giving him. And he had said to his disciples, shall I not drink of the cup that my father gives me? But when it came right down to his actually having to receive it, there was that torment and anguish. But his second prayer was, if it is not possible, nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done.

And he went to the cross. And somehow or other, we imagine that we can follow him and evade that cross. It can't be done.

The acid test came for me as a young woman in my falling madly in love with the young man named Jim Elliott, who was going to the mission field single. And he said, as far as I know, God wants me to remain single, maybe for the rest of my life. I don't know that.

But for right now, I'm not asking you to marry me. I'm not even asking you to wait for me. We didn't even have what you call a relationship nowadays.

He said, you go ahead and go to Africa. I'm going to South America. And if God wants to bring us together, he knows how to do it.

But for right now, you are on the altar. And he wrote to me in one of his love letters years later. It was five and a half years later that God brought us together finally.

But he wrote to me, reminding me, he said, if we are the sheep of his pasture, remember that sheep are headed for an altar. Tranquility is the fruit of surrender and acceptance. And the last thing, point three, we are to live in company with Christ.

Now this fits in perfectly with the theme, a holy harmony, but these are the exact words of the New English Bible translation of First Thessalonians 5.10. He died for us so that we, awake or asleep, might live in company with him. We all want company, don't we? Some of us love solitude, but we don't want solitude 100% of the time. I'm one of those people that likes solitude.

I like to have my little study to shut the door, and I don't even want Lars coming in there all the time. But isn't it incredible to think that he died for us so that we could live in company with him? He who is totally self-sufficient, original, self-eternal, co-equal, co-eternal, consubstantial with the father, as the old fathers of the church put it in the creed. He died, he went to a cross so that we could live in company with him.

So that awake or asleep, now if that doesn't tell you that he means 24 hours a day, I don't know what would. He doesn't just mean that we live in company with him when we're on our knees praying, or when we've got our Bibles wide open. I'm sure he loves that time, and as we should certainly love it in a special way.

But as Paul said, whether I'm eating or drinking, I do all to the glory of God. Eating and drinking isn't virtuous, it doesn't have any merit in it. It's just one of the necessities of our human bodies.

It reminds us of how humble, and daily, and recurring our needs are. So even when we're doing those humble, daily, recurring human things which we have to do because we are human, breathing, eating, sleeping, we are to glorify God. We can live in company with him.

I don't think God is particularly impressed when I'm standing in front of an audience speaking about him, or when I'm sitting at my computer trying to write a book that I hope is gonna be a spiritual prophet to people. God is not particularly impressed by anything, I don't suppose, but what I mean to say is, I'm speaking in anthropomorphic terms here, do you think it makes a whole lot of difference to God whether I'm standing here in front of this audience, or whether I'm peeling an onion, if peeling an onion is a job that I'm supposed to be doing, then I presume, I trust, I believe that I'm supposed to be here right now. But the whole point is, I wanna live in company with him.

Ironing the shirt, peeling the onion, traveling on the airplane, speaking to a group, writing a book, or whatever. Unbroken harmony. It could not happen without his supernatural, magnificent, amazing grace.

But that's God's part, and my part is cooperation. Isn't it wonderful that God has given us something we can do about it? Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now I'm found, was blind, but now I see.

His grace that taught my heart to fear. You ever thought about that stanza, and grace my fears relieved. He taught me to fear, he relieved my fears, how precious did that grace appear the hour I first believed.

So the supernatural grace of God goes to work on my nature, which is anything but supernatural. But in my very God-given nature, there is the choice, the privilege, the freedom to choose to love him, to choose to obey him, to choose to trust him. And so that is what makes that holy harmony.

And my friend who decided that she would follow her husband into what looked to her like disaster, said, I have great peace. Because she was walking in harmony with God. That is holy harmony.

And I think of my friend who was plagued with horrible jealousy. Irrational jealousy of her husband, whenever she would see him talking to another woman in the most innocent, unthreatening kind of a

situation. And she said, you know, I was so tormented by that, I could not sleep at night sometimes.

And there was one particular night they'd been with a group and she saw her husband on the other side of a room talking to another woman and she was just in a stew when she went to bed that night. And she said, I got out of bed and I surrendered my feelings of jealousy to God. She said, I got down on my knees, I lifted up my hands and I said, Lord, I can't handle this.

But you can, I surrender it to you. And she said, God took it. God can do that with our uncontrollable feelings.

I've had that happen myself. Many times with emotions that are about to get me down. You want to live in harmony, in company with him.

Maybe it's anger in your life, resentment. Bitterness against somebody who has done something, humanly speaking, unforgivable. And those of you who are divorced certainly must feel that way.

I can't even, I can only try to imagine what it's like. There's no bitterness in death, but the terrible rejection and resentment and temptation to unforgiveness, not to mention the temptation of unforgiveness and bitterness against whoever it is that your husband or your wife went off with. I think of all that.

Is it possible to deal with this humanly? Well, you can go to a psychiatrist and pay a fancy price and maybe work through your feelings for the next 20 years or so. But I think there's a shortcut. I do believe that at the cross, the burdens of your heart can roll away.

You remember when Pilgrim and Pilgrim's Progress got to the cross, this huge load that he was carrying was left. And you can just leave it there. You can just submit it in a simple physical act of faith.

Get down on your knees, lift up your two hands. Say, Lord, here it is. In the name of Jesus Christ, I reject this.

I release it. I leave it at the foot of the cross. Oh, the old rugged cross, so despised by the world has a wondrous attraction for me.

What was on that old cross, Jesus suffered and died to pardon and sanctify me. Why did he die? So that you and I might live, say it with me, in company with him. Is that what you want? That's what I mean by a holy harmony.

God bless you.

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