



# Overcoming Modern-Day Challenges

*Summarized from 2008 Sermon by H.G. Bishop Youssef of Southern US*

# MODERN-DAY CHALLENGES

## Source of Material

- **H.G. Bishop Youssef of Southern US**
- Sermon given on December 19, 2008
- Recording available at **OrthodoxSermons.org**

[orthodoxsermons.org/sermons/challenges-present-era](http://orthodoxsermons.org/sermons/challenges-present-era)

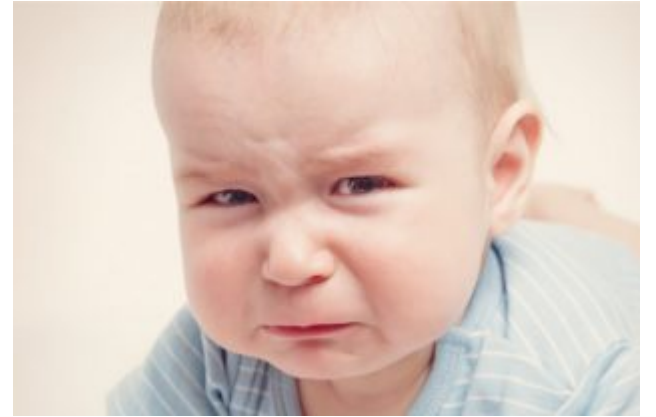
<https://s3.amazonaws.com/audio.orthodoxsermons.org/BishopYoussef-ChallengesOfthePresentEra.mp3>



## MODERN-DAY CHALLENGES

### Challenges facing us today ...

- World changed dramatically in the last few decades
  - Transition from **Industrial** Age to **Information** Age
  - Profound **consequences** resulting in new challenges
- Life is now more **complex**, more **stressful**, more **demanding**
  - New challenges not present in previous times
  - Many forces competing for our time & attention
- These challenges can be a stumbling block in our **family** life, **service**, and life of **worship**
- What are these challenges ... and how do we **overcome** them?



## MODERN-DAY CHALLENGES

# Structure of Presentation

- Present the **Challenge**
- Discuss its **Consequences**
- Propose **Strategies to Overcome the Challenge**

# Modern-Day Challenge ①

**ABUNDANCE OF SIN**



## Challenge ①

# ABUNDANCE OF SIN

- What's the difference between the past and present day?
  - Sin existed from time of Adam & Eve
  - The flood at time of Noah because of sin
  - Sodom & Gomorrah destroyed because of sin
  - But in the last days ...

***“because lawlessness will **abound**, the love of many will grow cold” says the Lord about the last days***

Sin now is more **available** & more **desirable**.

## ABUNDANCE OF SIN

### Sin is now re-marketed

- Sin used to be known as sin, but now ... it is not called “sin” anymore
  - Sin now justified, veiled under new labels
  - Our society & ourselves desensitized to sin
  - Sexual immorality & fornication veiled as “pre-marital sex” or “dating”
  - These sins are seen as the norms of society, no longer considered wrong
  - Life of purity (refusing sin) often made fun of by society
  - The use of the words “tolerance” and “acceptance” (of sin) is incorrect (we tolerate people, not sin or sinful action)
- Contemporary ideologies make sin more **desirable & available**

## ABUNDANCE OF SIN

# Sin is now easily widespread

- A sinful thought can now easily **spread** quickly
  - In the ancient time of Lot, sin was contained to Sodom & Gomorrah
  - In our age, a sinful ideology can spread quickly everywhere via technology
- Sin is now easily **available** and **accessible**
  - As an example, in previous times, to see an inappropriate movie, one had to rent it, or make an effort to sneak out to an adult movie theatre
  - In our age, inappropriate scenes are easily accessed at the fingertips



# ABUNDANCE OF SIN

## Consequences

### 1. FEAR & INSECURITY

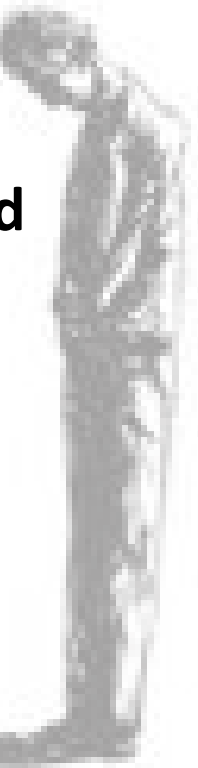
- “I heard your voice and ... and I was afraid,” said Adam after he sinned
- “There is no peace,” says the Lord, “for the wicked.” (Isaiah 48:22)

### 2. GUILT

- Remains for years & years, even if you try to suppress it!
- Joseph’s brothers felt guilt for years to come saying, **“We are truly guilty concerning our brother, for we saw the anguish of his soul when he pleaded with us, and we would not hear; therefore this distress has come upon us.”**
- The only remedy to the guilt is true repentance & confession

### 3. SHAME

- Adam & Eve hid, and covered themselves with fig leaves out of shame
- Many who live a sinful life stop coming to church, giving a list of reasons; but the real reason is shame, not wanting to stand before the Lord in shame



## ABUNDANCE OF SIN

# Leads to Fear & Anxiety, Guilt and Shame

In the last days, ***“many false prophets will rise up and deceive many, and because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold”***

- Many new ideologies are **false** prophets, full of **deception**
- Many seek **false** freedom, seeking lawlessness
- Love to God and love to one another grows **cold**
- Our **prayers** are **not effective** when our love grows cold
  - The church is at risk of being full of non-repentant servants & worshippers
  - Non-repentant heart leads to NO love or COLD love
- Some want to **mix** righteousness with **unrighteousness**
  - Example: living life of non-repentance and wanting to take communion
  - Example: going to night club and serving as a deacon the next morning

# ABUNDANCE OF SIN

## Solution: Amend your ways!



### Jeremiah 7:

*The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, “Stand in the gate of the LORD’s house, and proclaim there this word, and say, ‘Hear the word of the LORD, all you of Judah who enter in at these gates to worship the LORD!’ ” Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: “**Amend your ways** and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place. Do not trust in these lying words, saying, ‘The temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD are these.’*

**[ Don’t think that you can just come to church while insisting to live a life of sin without repenting, and still be saved ... these are lying words ]**

*“For if you thoroughly **amend your ways** and your doings, if you thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbor, if you do not oppress the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place, or walk after other gods to your hurt, then I will cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers forever and ever.*

*“Behold, you trust in lying words that cannot profit. Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, burn incense to Baal, and walk after other gods whom you do not know, and then come and stand before Me in this house which is called by My name, and say, ‘We are delivered to do all these abominations’? Has this house, which is called by My name, become a den of thieves in your eyes? Behold, I, even I, have seen it,” says the LORD.*

# ABUNDANCE OF SIN

## Return to the Lord

- To combat the Abundance of Sin, we need to Return to the Lord
- **Many family problems exist because of the abundance of sin**
  - If we want our families to be strong, we need to repent
  - St John Chrysostom speaks in his book on “Marriage & Family Life” says that *“the first step to resolve any family problem is to repent and to return to God.”*
- **Without repentance, any solution will be temporary**
  - It is impossible to be reconciled to one another without first being reconciled to God.
  - Only repentance (reconciliation with God) can lead to reconciliation with one another.

## ABUNDANCE OF SIN

# The Lord is the Only Real Solution

- In our times, sin is more available & more desirable
- Consequences reflected in our families, churches, personal lives

### Only Solution:

- Return to God
- Amend your ways
- Do not trust in lying words
- True Repentance & Confession



STUDIES SAY PEOPLE  
ARE LOSING THEIR  
ABILITY TO FOCUS  
BECAUSE OF ALL THE  
DIGITAL DISTRACTIONS.



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SORRY,  
WHAT?



HOLD  
ON...



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WHAT  
WERE YOU  
SAYING?



I DUNNO.  
PROBABLY  
WASN'T  
IMPORTANT.





# Modern-Day Challenge 2

**DISTRACTIONS**



# Challenge ②

## DISTRACTIONS

- Many things draw our attention
  - Away from **God**
  - Away from our **Families**
  - Away from our **Children**
- Life in our cell-phone society is increasingly ...  
**complex, demanding, stressful**, and absolutely **exhausting**
- One is often distracted, unable to focus
- Family time is limited; the family tie is gone
- Distractions are reflected in our homes & families





## DISTRACTIONS

# Societal Pressures

- Society is now teaching us that we need to do **more**, and to be **more**, and achieve greater efficiency (do more with less)
- We therefore are **spread thin** (responsible for many things, but never entering into the depth)
- **Spirituality, Family, Health, Integrity are secondary to our busy lives**
- Society telling us to go in earlier, work later, live with sacrifice for now
- **Balance & Peace of Mind not achieved by going in early, staying late, sacrificing, etc.**

## DISTRACTIONS

# Need for Balance

- **Balance & Peace of Mind not achieved by going in early, staying late**
- **Balance & Peace of Mind achieved by having a clear sense of highest priorities, and living with a focus & integrity towards those priorities**
- Living a Balanced Life leads to having a longer **sustained productivity**, and **avoiding burnout**
- **Our Lord Jesus Christ teaches us to have Balance**
- **Our Lord Jesus Christ warns us about the danger of “Busy-ness”**

## DISTRACTIONS

### Mary & Martha (Luke 10)



*<sup>38</sup> Now it happened as they went that He entered a certain village; and a certain woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house. <sup>39</sup> And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word. <sup>40</sup> But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me." <sup>41</sup> And Jesus answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. <sup>42</sup> But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her."*

## DISTRACTIONS

# What did Martha do wrong?

Martha wasn't praised for her service but rebuked – WHY!

- What did Martha do wrong? There is nothing wrong in her service. What was wrong is that she was busy in the **wrong time**. In the time in which she was supposed to sit at the feet of the Lord and listen to his teaching, she was busy with food preparation.
- She began to blame her sister, and even blamed the Lord.
- We also get busy at the wrong time.
- Time for prayer & time for service
- Time to be like Mary & time to be like Martha
- Don't be distracted and confuse the two times

## DISTRACTIONS

# Parable of the Great Supper (Luke 14)



*<sup>16</sup> Then He said to him, “A certain man gave a great supper [communion] and invited many, <sup>17</sup> and sent his servant at supper time to say to those who were invited, ‘Come, for all things are now ready.’ <sup>18</sup> But they all with one accord began to make excuses. The first said to him, ‘I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it. I ask you to have me excused.’ <sup>19</sup> And another said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them. I ask you to have me excused.’ <sup>20</sup> Still another said, ‘I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.’ <sup>21</sup> So that servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house, being angry, said to his servant, ‘Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in here the poor and the maimed and the lame and the blind.’ <sup>22</sup> And the servant said, ‘Master, it is done as you commanded, and still there is room.’ <sup>23</sup> Then the master said to the servant, ‘Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. <sup>24</sup> For I say to you that none of those men who were invited shall taste my supper.’ ”*

## DISTRACTIONS

# What did these people do wrong?

The first said to him, 'I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it. I ask you to have me **excused**.' And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them. I ask you to have me excused.' Still another said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.'

### What was their sin?

- Being busy at the ***wrong time***
- Being distracted away from God
- Being busy is **NOT** an **acceptable excuse** before God

## DISTRACTIONS

### In the last days (Luke 17)



*<sup>26</sup> And as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man: <sup>27</sup> They ate, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. <sup>28</sup> Likewise as it was also in the days of Lot: They ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built; <sup>29</sup> but on the day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. <sup>30</sup> Even so will it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed.*

## DISTRACTIONS

### What was their sin?

Nothing wrong with eating, drinking, marrying, but ...

- They let these things distract them from God
- They were distracted from God
- They were too busy for God

We are often too busy for God, and too busy for our families



## DISTRACTIONS

# Too busy for family, too busy for God

- We are often too busy to teach our children the ways of God, so they also become distracted
  - No time to take care of our children; leave TV & internet to baby-sit them
  - It is better to live in a lower social status & take care of our children, than to live in a mansion and lose our children; parenting takes time & effort, doesn't come by chance
- **Busy life is a real challenge!**
- Society is teaching us not to be satisfied ...
  - Want an apartment, then house, then bigger house, then water-front
  - OK, so long as it does not conflict spent with God and with family!
- For what will a man benefit if he gains all these things and lose his soul, or his family, or his children?
- What can a man give in exchange for his soul, family, children!

## DISTRACTIONS

# Root causes of our busy life

## Fear & Insecurity

- Fear = lack of faith; yet God reassures us:

*“Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ... Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these ... will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?”*

- Have **faith** ... the main reason we are wanting to work more and do more is to secure ourselves
  - We may feel vulnerable at our workplaces; but money will NOT secure or ensure your life
- Yes, we do need to work, but we also need to **trust God**

## DISTRACTIONS

# Root causes of our busy life

### Constant Competition

- At work, everyone is competitive, with constant pressure to keep current
- Pressure to continually sharpen mind, keep current & avoid being obsolete

### “I want it now” Mentality

- We want money; big house; entertainment; gadgets ... I want it all now
- Puts pressure to work harder **at expense** of **relationship** with **family**, with others and with **God**
- Credit card society, get now & pay later ... unrelenting/unforgiving interest

**Yet, sustained & increased success requires a balanced life**

## DISTRACTIONS

# Consequence – We are Choked!

- Now the ones who are among thorns are those who are **choked** by the cares, riches and pleasures of life ... Three Distractions
  1. **Cares:** what do we eat, drink, wear
  2. **Riches:** how much do I have in the bank; I want more; I want
  3. **Pleasures:** I just want to enjoy the world, relax, be entertained
- These distractions **choke** the person & choke the Word of God
- The cares of this world and deceitfulness of riches **choke** the Word

## Consequences

- the person is choked
- the Word of God is choked
- the Word of God does not take effect in transforming me to become better



## DISTRACTIONS

# Need to live a ~~(Busy)~~ Balanced Life

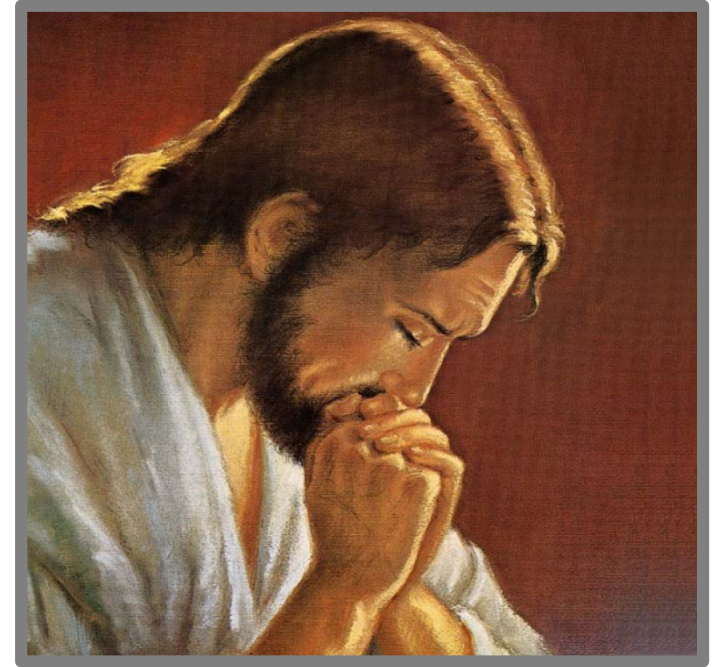
Without living a balanced life,

- relationship with **God** is affected
- relationship with **others** is affected
- relationship with your **family** is affected
- **work, future, career** is also affected

## DISTRACTIONS

### Solution: Balanced Life

- Need quiet time to pray & read
- Need to have time with the Lord
- Do not drown in the busy-ness of life
- Our Lord taught us to have a balanced life
- Jesus would wake up early to pray, away from the crowds
- In Mark 6, the Lord says to His disciples to come aside to a deserted place to rest, for they did not even have time to eat
- Balance also needed in service ... H.H. Pope Shenouda III: ***“You have served the Lord’s house; when will you serve the Lord of the house?”***



# Modern-Day Challenge ③

**BLAME  
AS OUR RESPONSE  
TO SUFFERING**



## Challenge ③

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# OUR RESPONSE TO SUFFERING

- How do we respond to suffering?
- Job says that the man born of women is of short days and suffering
- The question is NOT whether or not we will suffer; but ...  
***How do we deal with the suffering.***
- The question is NOT whether or not we will face problems in life; but  
***How do we deal with the problems.***
- What is the definition of a normal family?
  - It is NOT a family that does not have problems
  - It is a family that knows how to work out their problems; how to deal with the problems



# OUR RESPONSE TO SUFFERING

## Blame, Blame, Blame!

- Society teaches us to deal with problems by **Blaming Others** not Taking Responsibility
- Like Adam & Eve ... the woman that you gave me ... the serpent deceived me so I ate
- Society is addicted to playing the Victim
  - If only my boss was not such a controlling person
  - If only I lived in a better place
  - If only I hadn't inherited such a temper from my dad
  - If only my kids weren't so rebellious
  - If only my wife was more understanding
  - If only our church was more evangelistic
  - If only God did not allow this to happen ...
  - If only, if only
- What is "if only" ... it means, "I am NOT responsible" ... "I am blaming it on others"

# OUR RESPONSE TO SUFFERING

## Consequences

- When you **blame** others, you become hopeless!
  - Because all the power is in the hands of others, not my hands!
  - The children of blame are **cynicism** and **hopelessness**
- When we yield to believe that we are **victims** of our circumstances,
  - we **lose hope**, we **lose drive**, we settle into **resignation** & **stagnation**!
- Unfortunately, many bright & talented people fall into this trap
  - and suffer **discouragement** & **depression** because of their blaming of others

# OUR RESPONSE TO SUFFERING

## Blame leads to Chains

- When we blame others including God for our problems & suffering
  - TEMPORARY relief; YET it CHAINS me to the same problems
- If I say, “if that person had changed, my situation would be better”
  - I have put all the healing in their hands
- Meaning, “if that person does NOT change, I will continue to suffer”
  - So I have given them all the power!
- When you blame others, you chain yourself to the problem
  - Don’t think that, when you blame others, that you are free!

## OUR RESPONSE TO SUFFERING

### Solution: Needs Humility & Courage

Holy Scripture teaches us to be

1. **HUMBLE** enough to accept **responsibility** for our circumstances
2. **COURAGEOUS** enough to take **initiative** to creatively work out a way around or through these problems with God's help

Saint James says, *“my brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience, but let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. Blessed is the man who endures temptation, for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who love Him”*

**No problem without a solution, except the one you blame others for!**

# OUR RESPONSE TO SUFFERING

## Solution: Take Responsibility

- Regardless if you are at fault or not, **take responsibility**
  - Ask yourself & ask the Lord: what should I do?
  - First question to ask yourself in a problem is: what can I do?
  - You have control over yourself; you do NOT have control over others
  - I am therefore putting the solution in my hands, not in the hands of others
  - If you ask “what can others do,” you are putting all the power in their hands
- Ask yourself what **you** can do, regardless of who is at fault, and God will lead you to a solution

## OUR RESPONSE TO SUFFERING

### Solution: Needs Endurance & Perseverance

- These days, we lack perseverance
- Our endurance for the trials is almost zero
- Couples want to divorce over small matters which can be worked out
- Because our endurance & perseverance are lacking
- Scripture teaches that *“blessed is the man who **endures** temptation”*
- Perseverance required to solve problems

## OUR RESPONSE TO SUFFERING

### ~~Worldly view~~ vs Biblical Perspective

- **Society says:** lower your expectation of life to the point that you are not disappointed by anyone or anything
- **Bible says:** ... *and He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness."*  
*Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities ... for when I am weak then I am strong in Christ my Lord*
- Imitate Saint Paul, a person who **took responsibility** and yielded to God to get **support from the Lord**.
- When I am weak (through suffering or any problem), I am strong through the grace of God (made perfect in the weakness of my human being).

# Modern-Day Challenge 4

**RITUALITY  
WITHOUT  
SPIRITUALITY**





## Challenge ④

# RITUALITY WITHOUT SPIRITUALITY

- **Rituality (alone)** is **hypocritical** worship that focuses only on the rituals, neglecting completely the spirituality of worship
- Rituality is intended to be a means to reach Spirituality
- **Spirituality** is about strengthening the **Relationship** with **God**
- Given the previous challenges  
(Suffering & Blame, Distractions, Abundance of Sin)
  - our **spirituality** has **diminished**
  - we **reclined** to **rituality** instead of spirituality
- This is a disease of the modern age

## RITUALITY WITHOUT SPIRITUALITY

# Without Spirituality, Rituality is Idolatry!

- **Rituality:** to observe the fast only (what kind of food you are eating);
- **Spirituality:** use the fast to strengthen & deepen **relationship** with God
- Fasting is not a goal in itself; it is a means to strengthen my relationship with God, and to overcome the devil (fasting & prayer defeats the devil)
- Your presence in the church alone is rituality; but if your presence in the church leads you to strengthen your relationship with God, and to come closer to God and the knowledge of God, then it is spirituality.

**Rituality without Spirituality is Idolatry**

## RITUALITY WITHOUT SPIRITUALITY

### Consequence: become like the Pharisees

- Scribes & Pharisees were perfect in rituals
  - washing their hands before eating, tithing mint & anise & cumin
- The Lord rebuked the Scribes & Pharisees (*woe to you!*)
  - Perfect in observing rituals,
  - Yet neglected the spiritual weightier matters of the law (**mercy**, **truth**, and **faith**)
- Rituals-only would lead to a church full of **leaves** alone with **no fruits**
  - Like the fig tree that was full of leaves but with no fruit, and was therefore cursed by the Lord for being hypocritical

**Rituals are needed & essential but ...**  
**We shouldn't be content with Rituals alone**

## RITUALITY WITHOUT SPIRITUALITY

### Use Rituals to reach Spirituality

The Lord always focus on the **Spiritual**, the **Relationship**, the **Meaning**

- The Lord shows us how to use rituals to build a relationship with God
- In the Sermon on the Mount, the Lord says to  
***“Pray to your Father who sees in secret ...”***

Rituals are not the goals

- Rituals are a **means** to reach our Goal, which is God.
- Do not focus on the Ritual, but use the Ritual to **reach** the **Spiritual**

## MODERN-DAY CHALLENGES

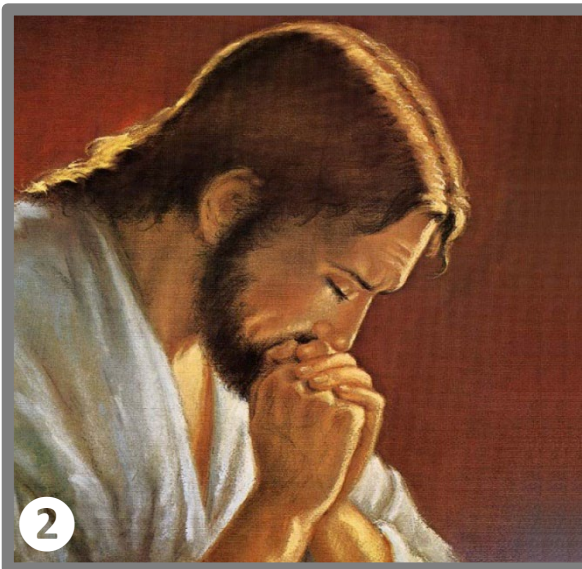
# Conclusion

### Challenges impacting our lives

1. Abundance of Sin
2. Distractions
3. Suffering & Blame
4. Rituality without Spirituality

**Without returning to God, His Word, and the teachings of the Church,  
it is impossible to overcome these modern-day challenges.**

[orthodoxsermons.org/sermons/challenges-present-era](https://orthodoxsermons.org/sermons/challenges-present-era)



## OVERCOMING

### THE ABUNDANCE OF SIN

- *Return to God*
- *Amend your ways*
- *Do not fool yourself*
- *Truly Repent & Confess*

#### Avoids:

- Fear
- Anxiety
- Insecurity
- Guilt & Shame

## OVERCOMING

### DISTRACTIONS

- *Set Priorities*
- *Balanced Life*
- *Time with the Lord*
- *Time with Family*

#### Avoids:

- Burnout
- Being Choked
- Word of God Choked
- Being Unfruitful

## DEALING WITH

### PROBLEMS & SUFFERING

- *Do not Blame*
- *Seek God's Guidance*
- *Humbly take Responsibility*
- *Courageously take Action*

#### Avoids:

- Chained to Problems
- Helpless & Hopeless
- Discouragement
- Depression

## USING RITUALITY

### TO GAIN SPIRITUALITY

- *Use Rituals as a means to become Spiritual*
- *Strengthen Relationship with the Lord & Family*

#### Avoids:

- Mechanical Worship
- Hypocritical Worship
- Shallow Relationships lacking Deep Meaning