



SCIVIAS

KNOW THE WAYS OF THE LORD

with Fr. Michael Zimmerman

PART II: WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FOR?

Ep. 10-18



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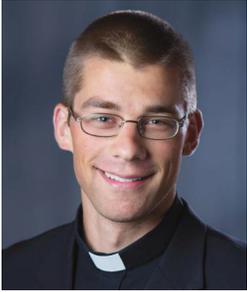
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WELCOME & HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE



Welcome to Part II of *Scivias: Know the ways of the Lord*. Again, my name is Fr. Michael Zimmerman, assistant director at Vocations Boston and I'll be guiding you through this series. In Part I, we sought to grow in self-knowledge and to trust the Lord and place all our fears in His

hands. In Part II of the series, we will explore the deepest desires that God has placed in our hearts and there begin to discover an invitation from the Lord to follow Him on this adventure that is our vocation. Since our desires are often conflicting and appear to be mutually exclusive, we'll suggest ways of reconciling and prioritizing them in order to realize what is deepest and most fundamental. While we may only see this with clarity in hindsight, by faith we discover that the Lord will provide for all the needs of our hearts through the specific vocation He has in store for us.

This part of the series gives a lot of attention to celibacy as this tends to be of great concern for men discerning the priesthood, which makes sense as we're made for relationship, and so we seek to find someone to relate to and be intimate with. But other later episodes will explore how humanly speaking, this by itself is not enough to satisfy us, it must be drawn up into a greater relationship with God and living an adventure and entering a mystery, something all men called to do.

Like in Part I, here is my advice on how to make the most of the *Scivias* series:

1. **Watch the videos.** The videos are an important visual aid, and will help you appreciate the joy, beauty, and wonder of pursuing God's will in a way that my words cannot convey by themselves. They're only 5 minutes each, so there's no reason not to watch them.
2. **Use this guidebook.** You can binge watch the videos if you want, but they're not meant just to be consumed, but rather pondered. This guidebook contains a summary of each episode to remind you of what was discussed, but then also includes reflection questions and scripture passages for your prayer. In case you

want to go deeper in a given area, there are additional resources provided for each episode.

3. **Pray.** I encourage you to spend 30-60 minutes praying with each episode's questions found in the episodes and in this guidebook, ideally in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. A relationship can't be rushed. BE REAL with God. Don't just say the pious answer you think God wants to hear. Be real. Tell God the truth, reveal your heart to him. Tell God what's going on in your life and what you think and feel. God wants to meet you where you're at, so you've got to be honest with Him and yourself.

A consistent prayer life is important for real discernment. Regardless of how long you spend with the reflection questions and Scripture that I suggest, if you really want to seriously discern God's will and your Vocation, you should spend about at least 30 minutes of mental/conversational/silent prayer with God. A daily rosary for the intention of your vocation and daily Mass at least once a week in addition to Sundays is also highly recommended. As you grow in prayer and perhaps desire religious life, you may decide to introduce one of the Liturgy of the Hours to your prayer. If this would be a major jump for you, start slow and small — consistency is more important than intensity.

4. **Outside help.** Don't get stuck inside your own head. Talk to your local priest, a trusted spiritual mentor, or Vocations Director. Discuss what comes up from this series with them, it'll help you clarify your thoughts and feelings and God's voice. Conversation will help make it all the more real for you so that you don't think you're going crazy and to help keep you accountable to God's voice.

I hope this resource will aid you in coming to know and to do what the Father asks of you. In this we let His blessings come into our lives and the world. So thank you for your generosity and courage in taking God's will seriously. Be assured of my prayers for you.

For access to the videos:

[Scivias Playlist](#)

[Scivias Email List Sign Up](#)

DESIRES

EPISODE X



Summary

“It would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.” - CS Lewis

A key way God reveals His Will to us is through desires. These are not just any desires, but the deepest desires of our heart – the one’s that correspond to what we’re made for. Many people don’t want to explore a religious vocation, because they’re afraid they might actually enjoy it. But it’s important to become aware

of the longings within our hearts, and not be afraid to bring them before the Lord, because otherwise we cannot be happy and we cannot do His will. God has placed them there, and He’s the one who will fulfill them.

In this episode, I share how I had many desires that my high school and college girlfriend didn’t share. She sometimes wasn’t happy I always wanted to be hanging out with my youth group or the Catholic campus ministry, always wanting to read and discuss scripture and do service projects. After experiencing and loving religious community, I couldn’t understand why she wasn’t interested in getting a bunch of Catholic families to live together.

With a lot of prayer and reflection, I began to realize that I felt the most peace in times of prayer, and I felt the most joy in service and community in the Church. I desired and was called to give my life totally to these and to God himself such in a way that I couldn’t give myself to a wife in the way she would deserve, since a wife and children have legitimate rights to a husband and father.

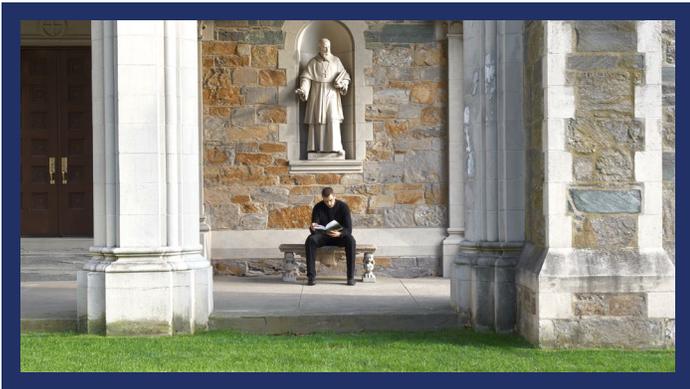
Take some time to pray and reflect on the desires of your heart and ask God to reveal His will through them.

Reflection Questions

1. What do you want? Where do you find happiness? Make a list of what matters most to you.
2. Can you prioritize these desires? Which are the most important to you, which are the least?
3. Which desires seem to be competing or mutually exclusive? Do any desires need to be purified for any from attachment or evil intention?
4. Do any good desires scare you? Why?

CELIBATE LOVE

EPISODE XI



Summary

The biggest obstacle for many young men considering the priesthood is the call to celibacy (remaining unmarried and abstaining for sexual relationships). But as I share in this video, I first discerned a call to be celibate before I heard the call to the priesthood.

In *Love and Responsibility*, Karol Wojtyla (the future Pope St. John Paul II) argues that marriage is a harder vocation than celibacy. Why's that? In part, it's because we unreasonably expect our spouses to make us happy, which is not in their power to do. We all have a God-sized hole in our hearts, and only God can fill it. We all yearn to be known and we desire infinite love and never-ending happiness, and only God can provide that. To expect another human being to make you happy is an unrealistic expectation, it's un-

fair, it places undue pressure on the other person, and I think a large factor contributing to divorce.

As I relate in the episode, the desire for the greatest of loves has always been the surest sign of my vocation. I greatly thirst for an unconditional, infinite love, a divine intimacy, that only God can give, and no other human being can. On the other hand, the desire for love is also the greatest temptation in my vocation as well. I hunger for love, and perhaps I meet a nice woman and think, maybe this one can give me the love that I'm looking for. But I've realized through dating when I was younger and reflection later on, that everyone falls short of the love that I'm looking for. Only God can give me it to me and I won't settle for anything less.

This isn't the case for my married friends who experience and grow in God's love largely through and with their spouse. For me, a spouse would feel like an obstacle, a distraction from what God wants for me. I feel a fire for Him alone and want to give myself entirely to Him, holding nothing back. I hear Him say to me, You are mine, you belong to me. You're not to give yourself to anyone else. As the Old Testament prophets tell us, The Lord can be a jealous God, he wants undivided hearts in his service.

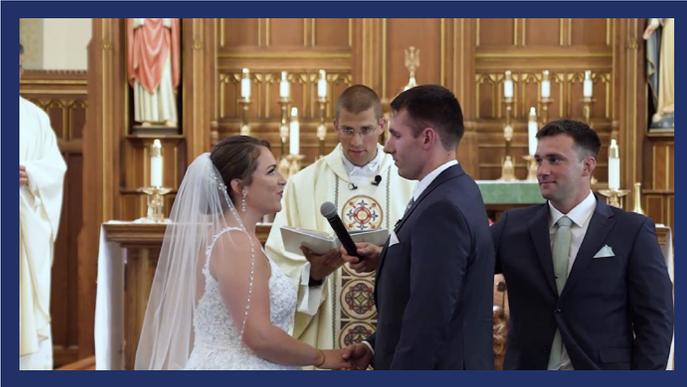
While discerning this was a very troublesome time, I now feel happy and blessed to be a celibate priest, to have a heart fully open to Him and ministry to His Church, and I experience great peace and joy in that.

Reflection Questions

1. Do you desire marriage and family? Why or why not? Do you think a wife and children will make you happy? Why or why not?
2. Do you think you could live celibately? Why or why not?

DATING ADVICE

EPISODE XII



Summary

In this episode we discuss the how to “not date” in order to discern celibacy. I share how I initially tried to discern the priesthood in the midst of a dating relationship because I didn’t want to break up without knowing for sure I was called to religious life. I didn’t arrive at that certainty, but eventually my prayer and reflection made me realize that the relationship wasn’t going to work out. We mutually decided to break up, but because we had dated for several years this was the hardest decision of my 20-year-old life. Finally, after we had broken up, I began to see more clearly that God was calling me to celibacy.

If you want to know if you’re called to a religious vocation, you will not be able to know that with

certainty while dating. You may need to consider asking God about ending your relationship and not dating for a couple months (at least 3-6 months, potentially longer), as a sort of dating fast, to give yourself the time and space to grow in self-knowledge and a relationship with God through prayer.

A dating fast means no unofficial dating either. Don’t hang out one-on-one with members of the opposite sex. Don’t have long chats on the phone. Limit time (10 minutes) and frequency (2-3 times a week) and depth of sharing (don’t talk about your discernment, how you’re feeling, or about “us”). Don’t do dating stuff if you’re on a dating fast.

A dating fast can be painful, but let that drive you grow deeper, because in a dating fast you cannot hide in a relationship with another person. A dating fast is essential because you have to make space for God to fill you, which means you will feel empty at first.

Very likely you’ll be tempted to get back together with your old girlfriend, or little miss perfect will come along, and we’ll want to end the fast. Just like when you fast from food, it’s normal to get hungry, but that doesn’t mean you break the fast; it’s the same with dating. Let the hunger fuel your prayer, let it drive you to your knees before the Lord in the Eucharist and give Him the chance to reveal His love for you.

Reflection Questions

1. Would a dating fast help you discern your vocation? Why or why not?
2. What scares you about the thought of breaking up with your girlfriend? Or about taking a break from dating? Can you trust these fears to God’s providence?

CONFLICTING DESIRES

EPISODE XIII



Summary

In this episode I relate how I picked St. Joseph as my confirmation saint because he is both a worker and a father in the Holy Family. It seems as if God had other reasons though, considering St. Joseph was a celibate spouse and a spiritual father, much like I am today. So, what if you, like I was, feel attractions both to the priesthood and to marriage?

In psychology, Maslow's hierarchy of needs posits that some things are more fundamental than others that may be of higher value. For example, food and water are essential, but obviously they're not as excellent as friendship. I need food to live, but I shouldn't give up my friends for a meal. This principle can help us understand our desires in terms of vocational discernment.

A priest is first of all a human and a man, with all the human needs and desires of all men. It's normal and

healthy for a man to experience a desire for marriage and children. In fact, if a man didn't have the love and capacity and some desire to be a husband and father, that might be problematic. But not every man desires to be a priest, or to live a life given to prayer and service. If a man does have those types of desires, even if he has a desire to marriage, he should take discerning the priesthood very seriously, as he likely has a call to the priesthood or religious life.

St. Paul advises, in [1 Corinthians 7](#), that anyone even capable of living celibately should do so, in order to more fully be concerned with the things of the Lord, which he believes will make them happy. Hearing this passage of scripture and realizing I could live that way, convinced me to seriously discern and ask God if he was calling me to the celibate life.

During my discernment, everything felt so conflicted and all my desires competing and contradictory, but in retrospect, I now see that all my desires and all that I am point in one direction, because this is who I am and who God has made me to be.

God will fulfill and satisfy the deepest desires of your heart, he wants to be happy, he is the one who has made you and planted those desires in your heart and he will fulfill them. My desire for loving intimacy and for true fatherhood, which I thought was to be in marriage, is fulfilled in my priestly life and ministry.

Reflection Questions

1. What do you desire about married and family life? What do you desire about religious life? Which of these do you desire most? Which of these desires is a higher calling?
2. Have you been able to live chastely in your recent past? (*Before a man is accepted to seminary, he*

WHY NOT DEACON?

EPISODE XIV



Summary

From the earliest days of the Church, deacons have performed essential ministry, revealing Christ's love especially through service, and preaching, baptizing, and presiding at weddings. Maybe you want to serve the Church, but you also want to get married and have kids. Is God calling you to be a married deacon?

Maybe, but you're not married yet and God is speaking to your heart now. You can't become a married deacon if you're not married first. If God is calling you to marriage, go be a holy husband and father and discern the diaconate later down the road. Because the life of a deacon is demanding, so his wife and family should be involved in his discernment and decision. And while married men can become deacons, already ordained deacons cannot marry, nor remarry as a widower. So, would you want to be a deacon even if you're not married?

If you're feeling some sort of call now, and you don't feel called to be a celibate deacon, you probably aren't called to the diaconate, and you might just be avoiding what God is actually calling you to.

Or maybe like, me you've thought, "Well, why can't I marry and have lots of kids who will become priests and religious?". Maybe. But don't pass the buck and try to live vicariously through your children. Don't ignore the desire that God has placed within your heart. Because your hypothetical children cannot live out your vocation. Only you can do that. God has a plan for you in this place, in this time, with all the unique experiences and situations and relationships of your life. Nobody else can do it for you.

I've heard many confessions that begin, "Forgive me father for I have sinned. It's been 50 years since my last confession." They haven't been to confession since before I was born. I was created for that moment. If that were the only priestly thing I did in my whole life, it would be worth it.

In God's providence, you are destined to save souls and be his instrument. As a priest, you would have the authority to act in the person of Jesus and change the world, bringing his Body and Blood to our world, and washing away our sins in Confession. Deacons provide a great service to our Church, but if God has placed a desire in your heart for ministry now, he's probably calling you to something else.

Reflection Questions

1. What does a deacon do? What attracts you about the life of a deacon? Do you really want to become a deacon? Do you just want to avoid celibacy?
2. In the Archdiocese of Boston, men can only be ordained after the age of 35. Regardless of your age, what is God calling you to right now?

NOT THE HERO WE DESERVE..

EPISODE XV



Summary

In the Gospels, Jesus asked the crowds about John Little boys often pretend to be superheroes, or soldiers, or firefighters, or pirates. There's something deep in our souls that desires to go on a great adventure, to be the hero in a battle, to make a difference, to save the world. Perhaps that's why all the great stories of literature and movies tell this same tale; but as we grow up, our mundane lives suggest that these desires are simply myths and empty dreams, and we begin to forget.

GK Chesterton once wrote that fairy tales "say that apples were golden only to refresh the forgotten moment when we found that they were green. They make rivers run with wine only to make us remember, for one wild moment, that they run with water." He's arguing that fairy tales point to the deepest truth

about things, the sense of wonder and adventure and joy that life should provoke in us, but we have so easily forgotten.

When I was in middle school, I used to read countless fantasy and science-fiction books, and I experienced a longing for places and people and stories which never existed and weren't true. Or were they?

In high school, I encountered Jesus' love in the Sacraments in a powerful way, and I've never been the same. The desires, which I thought were fiction, have been fulfilled in faith, an adventure Peter Kreeft describes as follows: "This is the Catholic faith. It is the 'greatest story ever told' - either the greatest lie or the greatest truth. It is the incredible story of the Creator's proposal of spiritual marriage to the creature. You can accept or reject this proposal. You can believe it or not, as you choose. But if you do believe, you should be prepared; you should know that this is no ordinary thing. You are embarking on life's greatest adventure, and you will never be the same again" (*Catholic Christianity*).

In future episodes, I'll share more stories about how these deepest desires for glory and greatness, for adventure, to be a hero, and to save the world, aren't just abstract but have been fulfilled in pursuing my vocation as a priest. What are the dreams you have forgotten? How will God fulfill them?

Reflection Questions

1. What games did you play as a boy?
2. What is your favorite movie? Why are you drawn to it?
3. Who do you admire as a hero?
4. Have you ever wanted to save the world? How would you do it now?

AM I MAKING A DIFFERENCE?

EPISODE XVI



Summary

In this episode, I talk about my various jobs, studies, and extracurriculars growing up, but discovering that ultimately, I wasn't going to be satisfied with anything other than bringing many souls to heaven. This desire was solidified during a summer in college spent volunteering with the Salesians down in Panama. My heart would break for the needs of the poor children, and I'd pray at night, "What can I do for them?". I realized that fundamentally they need what everyone else needs, which is the love of Jesus Christ. I felt Jesus telling me to be his hands, to be his voice, and his heart in a very concrete way in the world. I felt called to bring his Sacraments and be a spiritual father.

Have I changed the world? I'm sure mostly in ways I'm unaware of. But what has touched me are the bonds

of love formed between a priest and his people. In a matter of minutes, I go from being a complete stranger to everyone's best friend and confidant. I've only been in parishes for brief stints, but after announcing I've been reassigned, grown men have come up to me crying.

I see how my heart is changed as well. Being with parishioners is my joy, I carry their concerns in my prayers. When I leave assignments, I cry for my people too. God isn't just using my vocation to sanctify the world, he is using it to sanctify me and I don't think I could get to heaven any other way.

My life following God's will has been an adventure more outrageous than I could've ever dreamed up. I've traveled the world on missions, I've learned foreign languages and studied in distant lands and made friends all over. But what's really amazing is where I've gone spiritually. Jesus has delivered me from sins and set me free to love. God has blessed me with good, lasting friendships. Death is not fearsome, there is deep sense of joy and love of life. I experience a sense of completeness and peace in my life as a priest. I want you to have that same joy and peace in your life.

If you have it made, but still have these deep hungers and desires in your life, it might be because God has made you for something else, for something more.

Reflection Questions

1. Are you satisfied? Or what are you looking for?
2. What makes you feel alive? If you could do anything or be anyone what would that be?
3. How have you changed the world? What changes/touches your heart?
4. Do you have a sense that God is calling you to something greater? Where is that coming from and what is it? Have you talked to Him about it?

THE EVANGELICAL COUNSELS

EPISODE XVII



Summary

Our desire for excellence and greatness corresponds with Jesus' command "to be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect". This perfection is based on a dependence on God and a freedom to love and is pursued primarily through what are called the Evangelical counsels – Poverty, chastity, and obedience. Poverty gives us freedom from material things and money. Chastity keeps us free in our relationships. Obedience means freedom from a disordered attachment to myself and my pride.

God has created the things of this world as good, and they're goods meant to point us to God – the highest

good – but we often get caught up along the way. Every Christian is called to live the three counsels in some way. For the single person this might mean works of charity or financial generosity, healthy friendships and moral living, and pursuing humility. The married person is faithful to their promises to their spouse, obedient to familial, workplace, and community responsibilities, etc.

Religious brothers and sisters are those who publicly profess to live their lives according to the evangelical counsels. Distinct from promises, such as those made at a wedding or priestly ordination, they VOW to God to live this way. This means they consecrate themselves to God, which is why it's called consecrated or religious life. Breaking these vows is an act of sacrilege before God, because they now belong to Him in a special way.

A diocesan priest does not make these vows, but he still lives out the evangelical counsels through his priestly promises and ministry. He makes a modest salary but is called to a life of simplicity. He promises to the church to live celibacy to never marry; for like Jesus, the Church is his bride. He lives out a promise of obedience to his bishop and the Church. Lastly, the priest promises the Church to be a man of prayer for her.

Reflection Questions

1. Poverty, Chastity, Obedience. Which is the most appealing to you? Which is the most difficult? Which do you need the most?
2. How do you live them out now? If you knew that God would care for you, how would you desire to live them out?
3. Do you desire to consecrate yourself to God?

COMPLEMENTARITY OF VOCATIONS

EPISODE XVIII



Summary

If the priesthood and religious life is so great, shouldn't everyone do it? When I first entered the seminary, I was so passionate about my vocation that I couldn't imagine why anyone wouldn't want to become a priest or religious.

Over time, I grew in appreciation for the vocation to marriage as I experienced the beauty of my friends' family life. Couples and their kids have taught me the importance of humanity and the little things, discovering the world or the joy of learning to ride a bike, playing games and singing songs and bedtime stories.

In seminary, I learned how marriage is the sacrament that best mirrors God's love to His people. Like a marriage bond, God makes a covenant of love with his Church. I'm amazed by my grandparents' faithful

marriage of 67 years. This bond of love brings new life into the world and nourishes it. God is a loving Father. Parents' love for their children surpasses everything else; for whom else does one change diapers, feed, house, clothe, care for when sick, teach, correct, and forgive? Parents basically do all the corporal and spiritual works of mercy on a daily basis.

I'm also inspired by religious brothers and sisters. Shortly after I was ordained, I was walking around Boston Harbor with a friend whose religious habit caught a woman's attention. He struck up a conversation with her and learned that she was undergoing cancer treatment. We all prayed together, and I was able to bring her the sacraments of healing right in the middle of the city.

A religious sister that I know is constantly asking me for prayers and sacraments on behalf of people who wouldn't have asked me on their own, because they're intimidated or afraid they're not worth my time. She draws them in, makes their problems her own, and makes them part of the family. If the priest is a shepherd of souls, then the religious is the sheepdog in the midst of the flock, rounding up souls and preparing them to come home.

Discerning a vocation is challenging because you're trying to figure out the one path God is calling you on among many good and beautiful options. But rather than dwell on what you're missing out on, be grateful for the goodness in each and simply ask the Lord what is the good that He has in store for you.

Reflection Questions

1. Nobody is perfect, but how have your parents (biological or otherwise) provided for you and blessed you?
2. What is your favorite childhood memory or tradition?

CONCLUSION

END OF PART II - SEE YOU IN PART III!

We hope the videos and this discernment guidebook of part II of Scivias have been helpful in exploring the desires of your heart and how God is calling you to make a complete gift of yourself, potentially through the vocation to celibacy as a priest or religious. I encourage you to live from a place of love and desire rather than fear, as that is where we will hear God's voice and live life to the fullest, according to His Will. Hopefully this part of the series has awakened some longing within your soul for God and to live the adventure that He is calling you on. In part III of Scivias, we'll look more closely at the vocation to the priesthood, how our desires might be fulfilled in that, and also a few principles of discernment that are helpful for making a concrete decision. Let's pray for each other to live from a place of love and the desires of the heart and so bring the Kingdom of God into the world.

"Be who God meant you to be and you will set the world on fire." - St. Catherine of Siena

