

The Abundance of Obedience – Meghann Naveau

In the fall of 2018, life was good. My husband Matt had started a new job recently. He was excited, passionate and coming home happy. Our son Luke was three and asking a ton of questions, growing and bringing us so much joy. Our daughter Emma was six months old, right at that rolly, chunky baby stage. She was sleeping well, and we were getting into the swing of things as a family of four. I'd been back at work a little while after maternity leave. We were confident in our rhythm, our lifestyle, being 30 – really feeling like we were coming into our own.

And then God whispered, "Move."

Um, what?! To where? I didn't want another corporate job – and something more than my current part-time arrangement felt like too much. I really liked the job I had before my current one, but not the sacrifice and guilt that came with it. And with two little ones, it seemed like it would be harder than ever to go back to a demanding position.

And yet, I felt a nudge.

In our early marriage, Matt and I attended a presentation where the speaker included a quote from JPPII about God using restlessness to move us. When everything seems fine but we feel that little nudge, it's a Holy Spirit calling to pay attention to.

So, I was on the lookout. What is this, God? Fr. Brian's homilies, readings, my prayer time...I felt like I was listening at every turn. Looking back in my prayer journal from that time to prepare for this talk, I found the words written I heard God speak during this time, "I hear you. Be patient."

That didn't feel like a good answer, ladies! My family, friends and those here who do ministry with me know I am not a terribly patient person!

It was also during this time that I recalled a line from the homily at my nephew's baptism. "When we hear God telling someone to be not afraid, what he means is buckle up!"

Be not afraid/have no fear is one of the most frequent phrases in the Bible.

An angel – a messenger of God – tells Joseph: do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife.

When an angel of the Lord stands before unsuspecting shepherds: do not be afraid!

An angel tells Zechariah – Do not be afraid! Your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son and you will name him John.

In Luke 12:32, we hear, "Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom."

In John 14: Do not let your heart be troubled, not let it be fearful.

In Matthew 28, the angel with the women at the tomb. We hear: "For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified". And then when the women see Jesus at the tomb, he says, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

Matt and I talked about this calling a lot, usually after the kids were in bed and we were cleaning up the kitchen. I was still working, pumping, feeding a baby, packing lunches, doing laundry. It was hard to be in such a physically demanding point of life and face so much uncertainty.

I continued to pray, pleading with God: Make it clear! I WANT To be a good servant. I think. I'm scared, but show me. I trust that what you have for us is better.

God was giving me enough gentle nudges and reminders of his faithfulness, I knew this was not a time to ignore those quiet nudges or say no.

Around that time, I made note in my journal of 1 Corinthians 3:7 "So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters anything, but only God gives the growth." We do our part and God works with what we have/offer...all happens through him. I have best heard this summed up as "Showing up is our spiritual act of worship." We do our part (the waiting) and trust God will do his.

After about 2 months of this, I had an entry in my journal from Psalm 27: "I believe I shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. **Wait** for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage. Wait for the Lord!"

Around that time, I was reading about the apostles. They were called and went. They didn't guess or ask. What was their answer for what came next? They made a good and obedient yes. They went.

Finally, Matt and I discerned God was indeed calling me to leave my job, even if we – like the apostles – didn't know what came next. I put in my notice.

A few days later, Matt came home from work, looking kind of shaken up. He said we needed to talk after the kids went to bed. Something had happened at work. It was fine, but we needed to talk.

Of course, I had so many thoughts. We just made a big move! A leap of faith! What was changing? Would it impact us financially, having already given up my salary?

I waited anxiously as he finished putting the kids to bed. He came downstairs and explained he'd been called in by the company CEO – a man he greatly admires – and told he was doing a great job and was getting a raise.

I was thankful – and confused by why we had to wait until after bedtime to talk about it. Matt replied, "Meg, it's not really a normal raise. It's a big adjustment – in the same amount you were making at your job."

Wide-eyed and thankful, we believed the blessing was affirmation of the yes we had made to step out in faith without knowing what would come next. One of our understandably biggest concerns with quitting my job had just been put to rest in a big way.

We viewed this as God being present, showing us His faithful provision to our faithful yes. We stepped out in obedience, trusting He would lead us well.

As I started life with no paid occupation, I did my best to be thankful, to embrace the quieter time and discern where God was calling me next.

After two weeks of this quiet time, I saw a posting for a job in Tipp City that looked interesting. Is this it, God? Is this where you need me? I applied, never mind that it was a full-time position 45 minutes away from home. I picked up a business book at the library. I was going full speed!

But, God was quiet. Complaining to Fr. Brian about this at reconciliation, he looked straight at me and very kindly said, “Meghann, I think you need to be a little less Martha and a little more Mary.”

I was mad – and embarrassed – and knew he was right. I did my best, but continued to struggle through the weeks and especially around the retreat last year had a rough time.

In early March 2019, Matt – who had been suggesting all along that I start my own business – offered more encouragement and we talked through what that would actually look like. A friend needed help with her business, and thinking about the logistics of how I could help her was the final Holy Spirit nudge I needed to make a move and formulate what this new endeavor would look like. On March 28, I started a marketing and public relations consulting business, feeling like it would let me marry the professional skills God had given me with the kind of personal life I felt him calling me to build.

It was a scary but exciting time, and God continued to show his goodness. I met the people I needed to meet when I needed to meet them. God gave me advisors to help, a prospective client right away – and the confidence to embrace not knowing what would come but to try anyway.

Two weeks later on the Wednesday of Holy Week, I was working to set up my office when I got a call from Matt. He’d been having some testing done; a routine check with a new primary care doctor earlier in the year had indicated some abnormalities in his bloodwork, and we were trying to get some answers.

“Meg, the doctor called.”

I could tell immediately it wasn’t good news, and my heart sunk into my stomach.

“I have hairy cell leukemia. Cancer. It’s a chronic leukemia. Slow growing. The prognosis is usually pretty good. We’ll meet with the doctor again soon. I know tonight is crazy, but I still want to go.”

As you all know, Holy Week is the high time of the church year. Matt plays with the choir at St. Francis, and Wednesday was their last rehearsal before a marathon of Masses...music they had practiced and worked on for months.

Then he said, “And I don’t want to tell anyone yet. Let’s not Google anything either. We need some time to sit with this.”

Stunned, I tearfully hung up and tried to go about the rest of my day. It was one of those times that I knew my life had changed, but the world still seemed to go on around me.

The next night was Holy Thursday, and even though Luke and Emma would be hitting bedtime during Mass, I wanted to go. It’s one of my favorite times of the year, and as we crowded into Friendship Hall as Fr. Brian and Deacon Chris moved the Eucharist to the place of repose, the choir sang, “Stay here and keep watch.”

With my tired babies pressed against me, I kept thinking of Jesus in the garden, begging for this cup to pass from him. I felt the same way.

What the heck, God? We just made a big move in faith, and this feels like a lot. Matt's taken good care of his health – and this is what we get? A rare, chronic cancer? Something to deal with forever? We have small children. What if Matt dies? Emma would be too little to remember him. Will I have to do life without him? That has been my greatest fear since the time I realized I wanted him to be my husband – nearly ½ of my life ago.

Late spring and early summer were a blur at our house. We prayed and reflected. We started sharing the news with our families. I kept building my business, slowly picking up more clients and setting up my processes.

Meeting with the doctor gave us a plan. Yes, hairy cell is a chronic leukemia – but it's responsive to treatment time and again. We would do six months of chemo, monitor his counts, and then hopefully put it into remission.

Matt and I talked about how far we wanted to spread the news; it seemed like life would continue in a somewhat normal way. Maybe we could just not tell many people and try to keep things normal.

But, in talking and praying together, we realized if we don't witness to the good God is doing in our life, we're not doing our part. We're not showing up in a way that comes before God with confident expectation, asking for what we need and showing others what it means to live a life grounded in Jesus. **This** is living our faith. It's the Pascal Mystery alive in the world among us, the living, dying and resurrection. We believed God would bring good out of this struggle – and we were being called to say yes to showing the world not only the hard part, but the ways in which God, his angels and his Kingdom would be with us and care for us during the trial.

We started telling people about hairy. We told our small church community – a group of nine friends who would be some of our biggest cheerleaders and supporters in the coming months. Matt started a blog, giving him a platform to share about the God moments we experienced and the conversations we started having with coworkers, teachers at our kids' school, random people we encountered. We suddenly felt braver bringing up God in settings where we hadn't before.

The moments where God spoke to us through the other people in those conversations were overwhelming. He answered us with reassurance, tenderness and compassionate mercy with each meal someone brought over, each person who said they were praying for us, each text or call to check in.

It was not easy. I was still trying to build my business and determine what success looked like. Lots of clients? How much should I charge? We had extra doctor appointments and were trying to keep life as normal as we could for the kids.

One day as I was driving down Far Hills, struggling with a young and growing business, supporting Matt and trying to keep it all together, I heard a still, small voice say, "I made you to be a warrior."

"Me?!" It was loud and clear and no mistaking it. All my life I've leaned toward the feminine, the gentler, the "let's not make a confrontation out of this." And in that moment, I felt God reminding me that he made me to also be bold, brave, strong and courageous. With his help, I could – we could – do this. This was the life he was readying us for all along.

We all have different capacities in life and are called to different things. I once heard this likened to we all drive different cars, but get to the place where we are supposed to be. Some friends might drive a

van, while others have a little sports car. My struggle with my professional calling and then Matt's diagnosis was about learning my God-given capacity to get where He needed me to go. This time and this struggle taught me to truly lean on God when I felt like there just too much. Life was holding a lot more than what I thought we would face in this season – and because that was the case, I was only going to make it because of the ways God carried me and gently led me.

In building a business and on our journey with Matt's diagnosis and treatment, we learned to keep making a good and obedient yes to the ways God calls us – to give of ourselves freely, even when it doesn't make sense at the time. We have to trust that God uses each of those little steps of obedience to give us abundance, an overflowing fullness of life.

That push on my heart to do something else in 2018? Owning my own business has been hard, but rewarding in ways I never could have imagined. It gave me the flexibility to be the mom and wife I needed to be during Matt's treatment without asking permission of anyone else. In a year that was so hard, I felt like we were also building the life God needed us to build – involvement at church, on this retreat team, being more present for our family and friends – the good stuff that's not promotion worthy at a corporate job. I found myself having more patience with my children, especially on the long treatment weekends where it was mostly me providing all the care for them and our home.

I have always had the number of clients and the amount of work I need to be doing at any time. And on the days when I get discouraged, there are enough good moments and encouragement from friends or random people to keep me going. We are given our daily bread – what we need for the day, and we don't get to store up for tomorrow.

Remember the verse earlier from 1 Corinthians? "So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters anything, but only God gives the growth." Showing up is our spiritual act of worship. I'm doing my part and saying yes.

When we make a good and obedient yes to the call God has placed on our lives, it impacts other people, too. Even if the yes is something seemingly simple.

Last fall, I felt called to donate some baby wipes at St. Vincent de Paul's Apple Street location. God was very specific, reminding me several times that morning to take them to THAT location. I figured someone there could use them.

I loaded them into my car and went off to client meetings for the day. As I left a meeting in North Dayton, I saw the bag, drove downtown, and dropped them off. No fanfare, no big God moment. "Okay, God. I hope that was what you needed me to do."

I drove toward Centerville, stopping at Woodbourne Library to work for a bit before my next thing. As I prepared to turn in, I noticed someone crossing Far Hills right by DLM – with four lanes of traffic, it's an unusual spot for that!

As I parked, the woman who had crossed the street approached my car. She was about my age, wearing a Fusian hat and shirt. She looked tired, but clean. She was clearly on a mission to talk to me.

"I have a question for you. I'm not a weirdo. Have you heard of this place called St. Vincent de Paul?"

Ladies, I'm sure my jaw hit the parking lot. In my heart and head, I'm thinking "I HEAR YOU, GOD!" I replied to her, yes, I knew about SVdP.

She had the RTA bus schedule written down and explained that her family had recently lost everything in a fire at their apartment. She'd been walking from the Fusian restaurant down by the Dayton Mall where she worked, trying to get downtown to SVdP. She'd been in touch with a case manager there and knew she could get food, clothing and a furniture voucher there for herself and her two small boys – ages 4 and 6.

I was struck by her embarrassment; she apologized again and again for taking my time. Finally, I asked her what I could do to help.

She said, "It would be so helpful to have money for a bus fare to get downtown and back to the Mall area where we're staying."

Knowing I had no cash in my wallet but that there was an ATM nearby, I asked her name, sent her inside the library to wait and promised I would be back. I got in my car and called Matt, relaying the story and the call I felt to help her. We agreed on an amount to withdraw from the bank, and through teary eyes, I went back to the library.

Lindsey was waiting in the lobby. I talked with her, told her why I was there when she walked up: I had felt called to drop off wipes at SVdP earlier that day. If I hadn't made that stop on the way to the library, I wouldn't have been in the parking lot when she arrived. I often work tucked back far from the entrance; there's a very slim chance I would've seen her. I explained I try to listen for those God nudges.

"I'm really glad you dropped off those wipes," she said. She pulled out a small pink book from her purse. "My friend gave me this recently, and I've been trying to read it." It was a Message version of the New Testament.

We talked about the Old and New Testaments, and I explained how the New Testament is what happens after Jesus shows up. We talked about different translations of the Bible (her friend had encouraged her not to read the King James version...), and I reassured her that she was doing well as a single mom; I've had a very small glimpse of that life when Matt travels for work, and from the little I've seen, I know it must be hard, lonely work.

We parted with a hug and more tears. That night, I kept thinking of things I wish would've done differently – asked her to pray, shared more? I second guessed her story. Was she stinky enough to have walked all the way from the Dayton Mall to where I was on Far Hills? I'm not proud of it, but I did some Googling to try to find out if her story about an apartment fire was true. Did she have a pimp watching us from somewhere? Was she just trying to scam me?

Maybe. And yet, my yes to God's call – dropping off those wipes, talking with a woman he put in my path, sharing what she physically needed but also some emotional encouragement – was a chance for God to move here among us and through us.

It doesn't matter so much that I wasn't perfect in the interaction, or even what her motive or goal was. I gave my best good and obedient yes to the still, small voice – and saw a glimpse of the abundance that made in my own and in someone else's life.

It's not my job to judge how worthy she was of help. It's my job to show up, do my part, be like Christ, and make an obedient yes when I'm called to do so.

You may be sitting here thinking a couple different things:

1. God doesn't call me like that. I don't hear him the way you do.

My relationship with God is like my marriage – no one else knows what that interaction is like, and no one else can take care of it the way I do. It's mine or yours to work on, grow, nurture.

That looks different for everyone. I long for the day when it feels like I have time to sit down and read my Bible for an hour, go to daily mass, pray a daily rosary...all of these "more involved" parts of our faith. Today, if I get the daily readings done and make some notes in my prayer journal, I've seen what a better day I have, what a better businesswoman, mom and wife I am. And I'm more aware of a good and loving Father, a good and loving partner in my day whom I talk to in little bits rather than in big chunks of time.

We each have to determine what works for that relationship at this point of our lives...and know that changes as we grow and go through life. Any relationship takes maintenance and has a need to "spice it up"...and to be able to really hear the call for your life, you have to invest. If you aren't sure how to do that, you're in the right place to learn. Your small group is a great place to start. You have the prayer books and journals. The Godly women here have plenty of suggestions for you! Buckle up for an adventure. Try different things. Take time to be quiet and listen for God. Sometimes we get all wrapped up in if we have the "right" resource. Challenge yourself to just be quiet with God.

The second thing you might be thinking is: I'm saying yes and I'm not having abundance.

Sometimes we have to wait. Sometimes God is quiet.

Last year at the retreat, I was standing up in front of most of you, sobbing that God was quiet and I was mad. (Don't worry about getting mad at God sometimes. He can take it...like I can weather a toddler's tantrum.)

I was frustrated. And ladies, two weeks after that, I started to actually believe I was being called to run my own business – which set me up to help weather one of the hardest and best years of my life. I had to learn to trust God in a way that I've never had to before – and learning is hard.

The world wants us to believe that life is an either/or. Things are either good or bad. I'm either living all in abundance, or in the midst of drought. Someone is either worthy or not.

But, life with God is a both/and. It's imperfect and messy; it's hard and beautiful. You can be making what you think is your best yes and not feeling all the abundant, joyful, overflowingly good feelings – but God is taking your yes and bringing you into abundance in his time and where he needs you to be.

Maybe you're not there to a place that feels super abundant yet. But is there fruit where you are? Where do you see God moving in your life today? What people has he given you to help navigate the challenges? What quiet little reminders can you see as you move throughout your day? What moves is he asking you to make? What's holding you back?

God gives us what we need in his time, not when we think we need it.

And, abundance looks different for everyone. We each have a different capacity for our lives and the work we are called to do...and our abundance looks different, too. DO NOT compare your relationship with God and the call He has placed on your life with mine or the ladies you've met here or heard from. That's missing the point and distracting you from listening to the call He has placed on yours.

One of the biggest blessings for my family? This part of the story ends well. We found out in January Matt's leukemia is in remission. We'll monitor his bloodwork for the rest of his life, and because it's a chronic leukemia, he'll most likely have to go through chemo again. But my husband, the father of my children and my best friend is here. God used this experience to bring us closer to each other and closer to Him.

As you take some time to think about your own suffering and ways you've made an obedient yes to God, consider what we hear in John 12:27. Jesus is talking about his death, knowing what is to come. He says, "Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say? Father, save me from this hour? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name."

Sisters, we have a good, good Father/Mother/lover/friend/brother who wants to give us whatever an abundant life looks like for us at whatever phase of life we are in. We need to do our part and glorify God with a good and obedient yes.