

The Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter

November/December 1998

ISSN 8756-1336

A Dog's Thanksgiving

“I remember fixing the wounded leg of my dog. There was some struggle and a hurt crying but he kept licking my hand. The hand of the one who was hurting him and the hand of the one who was healing him were the same, and his endurance of the one rested in his trust in the other. Out of the depths have I cried unto Thee, O Lord.” From *This Cup*, by Addison Leitch (my second husband, who died in 1973).

There are many lessons for us in the mysterious animal world. Have we ears to hear, eyes to see, hearts to learn those sweet lessons?

Our Heavenly Healer often has to hurt us in order to heal us. We sometimes fail to recognize His mighty love in this, yet we are firmly held always in the Everlasting Arms. The dog's leg was hurting. Add's ministrations were as delicate as possible, yet they hurt too, and the loyal dog accepted them and thanked him with his eyes. Have we the humility to thank our Father for the gift of pain?

“No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it” (Hebrews 12:11). Let us give thanks!

The Test of my Love for God

What is the true test? We can sing about it, talk about it, preach about it, write poetry about it, pray about it. But Jesus spelled out the acid test: “If you love me, you will obey what I command. Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me” (John 14:15 and 21). Obedience is the valid proof.

If my reaction to one who has done me wrong is less than a loving forgiveness, I simply cannot claim to love God. When we pray “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us” we are telling God that we will receive from Him exactly the mea-

sure of forgiveness which we have willingly offered to the trespasser. Will that be enough? Will that cover our trespasses against our Savior? No, it won't, for Jesus said, “If you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.” This is the only petition in the Lord's prayer with a condition added. We must be careful to honor that condition. Forgive me, Lord, as I have forgiven that person who has not asked for forgiveness, that person who has ruined my marriage or my business or my chance to succeed, that person who goes on blithely as though he had done nothing wrong and couldn't care less. Will I erect a wall between him and me? Then I do the same to God. It's the same wall. Therefore I cannot obtain forgiveness. We must admit guilt—rather than hide in “an aristocracy of self-righteousness.” To be a Christian means rising out of our guilt, and being transformed by God's forgiveness.

Watchman Nee told the story of a Chinese farmer who, as soon as he became a believer, underwent a severe test to the validity of his faith. A daily task was to pump water by hand up the steep hillside. A neighbor breached the retaining bank and ran the farmer's water onto his own garden. “It is not righteous!” said the farmer to the elders in the church. “What does a Christian do in such a case?” The elders knelt with him in prayer, then thought of Jesus' words, “If someone takes your coat, give him your cloak also.” “If we do only the ‘right’ thing,” said the elders, “we are unprofitable servants. We must go beyond what is merely right.”

The next day the farmer went to work at his treadmill, pumping water for his neighbor's two strips of wet land below. He then spent the afternoon laboriously pumping water for his own garden. The neighbor, of course, was dumfounded. He questioned the Christian, and it was not long before he too was drinking the Water of Life.

A lady who had heard this story said to me, “I know why God had me come here today. I've had years of

contention with a neighbor who has been gradually encroaching on my property. I've been furious with him, and no amount of reason has helped the situation. Today I learned that I do not have to expect reason! I am going to deed to him the property he has appropriated. How simple! And what a relief!"

"We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death" (1 John 3:14). No need to remain in death—just let go of the bitterness.

"Oh, how many times we can most of us remember when we would gladly have made any compromise with our consciences, would gladly have made the most costly sacrifices to God, if He would only have excused us from this duty of loving, of which our nature seemed utterly incapable. It is far easier to feel kindly, to act kindly, toward those with whom we are seldom brought into contact, whose tempers and prejudices do not rub against ours, whose interests do not clash with ours, than to keep up an habitual, steady, self-sacrificing love towards those whose weaknesses and faults are always forcing themselves upon us, and are stirring up our own. A man may pass good muster as a philanthropist who makes but a poor master to his servants, or father to his children" (F.D. Maurice, 1805-1872, from Mary Wilder Tileston's lovely devotional, *Daily Strength for Daily Needs*).

Count Your Blessings

When I first talked to Debbie Rettew of Greer, South Carolina, she and her husband Bill had nineteen adopted children, ten of whom were seriously handicapped. When I last talked to her, she told me that the whole family had recently traveled by van to Iowa for a convention, and upon arriving home found three more little boys who hoped to stay with them. Having lost count, I asked how many people there are in the family now. Twenty-eight, she said, counting the mother and father. "And how many bedrooms have you?" Five. A cozy place, simple, cheerful, well-ordered, peaceful, and spilling over with love—sacrificial love, filled (of course) with joys and sorrows.

Many other parents need prayer too. A four-year-old boy named Nathan, the sixth of eight children, has been having several hundred seizures per day. His mother Judy asks that we pray for the seizures to stop, for development to continue so he may walk, talk, and

be able to chew food. "He is a great joy and has been used by the Lord numerous times during his four years," says Judy. And there's Juana, whose little Mary was born without eyeballs. And so many, many others, all over the world.

Think about those children of yours who can be so rambunctious and irritating. Can they walk? Talk? Chew? See? A trustful psalmist wrote, "Lord, you have assigned me my portion and my cup; you have made my lot secure" (Psalm 16:5).

A Quieter Christmas

Advent is the four weeks preceding Christmas. It means the coming of Christ. Do we pause first to ponder that marvel, that incomprehensibly holy event, or are we more likely to forget it in the race to the mall?

"How silently, how silently the wondrous gift is given.

So God imparts to human hearts the blessings of His heaven."

Phillips Brooks,
"O Little Town of Bethlehem"

For many folks Christmastime means a great deal of hard work (or a load of guilt because they didn't do much about it!). Must we insist on giving people more things they neither want nor need? How much "stuff" is too much? "Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions" (Luke 12:15).

Does gift giving have to be frantic? Consider the time and energy it takes to get to the mall, perhaps taking children along and (of course) feeling duty-bound to make sure they join the long line to sit on Santa's lap (and if you allow them to "believe in Santa Claus" what do the poor little tykes make of the one in the mall and the three others on the street corner?). Confronted with the stupefying array of junk calculated to subdue the courage of any loving soul, where does one

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begin? Desperation sets in. Purchases are reluctantly made. You hope the recipients will be thrilled, but there's a strong chance they'll be trekking it back to the store on December 26.

I'm really not a Scrooge. Gift-giving is a lovely thing of which I have countless times been the recipient. There are those who seem to have "an educated heart"—the ability to know just what will bring delight. If you haven't that ability, you can be pretty sure that a gift certificate, a check, or comestibles will be happily received.

May I make a timid suggestion for those who feel it a moral obligation to *buy* things? Dump the fliers and catalogues that lure you to the stores. Surely it is not necessary for *everyone* to elbow his way into the pushing, shoving throng. I would hope that some, perhaps for the first time, will try staying home. A man in the nineteenth century said, "The fretfulness of our spirits is more hurtful than the heaviness of our burden." You may be among the least frantic and harried if you simply stay home. Put on some gentle music, get out the recipe file, and bake something—a few loaves of bread, a batch of fudge sauce, some brownies. Anyone can bake brownies, and who doesn't enjoy receiving them? It's work, of course, but nowhere nearly as exhausting as shopping. One can be quiet. One can think. One might even sing some carols and pray.

Now hear this—a great suggestion. A friend told me that her family avoids all the delirium and desperation by keeping Christmas only for its spiritual significance, contemplating the wondrous story at home and worshipping at church. Then on January 6 they have a celebration with gift-giving, as the tradition of the Wise Men's arrival indicates. Think about it. Perhaps you'll try it.

The Origin of the Christmas Tree

It began in Germany more than 500 years ago. It is said that Martin Luther was walking through a forest one snowy night at Christmastime. The trees shining in the moonlight and starlight were so lovely that he chopped one down, took it home and put small candles on it to imitate what he saw in nature.

Christmas Breakfast

Try something really simple—a cup of coffee and a nice bowl of yogurt with nuts, diced fresh fruit and honey. My daughter's family tradition is a delicious baked Rome apple for each, as the *pièce de résistance*, along with the usual toast, etc.

Prayer

"O God, who makest cheerfulness the companion of strength, but apt to take wings in time of sorrow, we humbly beseech Thee that if, in Thy sovereign wisdom, Thou sendest weakness, yet for Thy mercy's sake deny us not the comfort of patience. Lay not more upon us, O heavenly Father, than Thou wilt enable us to bear; and, since the fretfulness of our spirits is more hurtful than the heaviness of our burden, grant us that heavenly calmness which comes of owning Thy hand in all things, and patience in the trust that Thou doest all things well. Amen"

Rowland Williams, 1818-1870

Postscript

I was touched but not surprised by John Jauchen's letter (in my September/October Newsletter). He had visited Bert Elliot (Jim Elliot's older brother) and his wife Colleen in Peru, and wrote of the impact their lives had had on him. "I returned home deeply grateful for God's careful leading in my life, and with a prayer that the joy so real after fifty years of serving Christ would daily be as obvious in me as it was in the Elliot home during my unforgettable days of ministry with them."

I too visited them in (I think) 1957 with my daughter Valerie, and watched with awe their cheerful self-sacrifice and genuine love for the people, a love which was clearly returned. They traveled by launch the rivers of the eastern rain forest for half of each year, taking the gospel to remote Indians, and the other half of the year by camper in the high Andes to reach mountain Quichuas with the gospel. They now live a bit more "normally" in a house in Trujillo on the coast, seldom by themselves, always hospitable to whoever turns up at the door. They teach and preach, do dental work and deliver babies, care for sick folks in

their home, travel far and wide to encourage the believers and seek for new ones. They have established several Christian schools. Never do they ask for money. Both have cancer and have been urged to move back to the states. "Why should we?" they ask. "They don't cure cancer in the states. As long as the Lord lets us, we plan to stay." I couldn't help thinking of old C.T. Studd, missionary to China and Africa. He said, "What God wants is hot hearts. Any old turnip will do for a head!"

A fellow missionary said to me, "I'm going to tell you something about your brother-in-law that you will never learn from him. He has established forty-five churches in Peru." When I repeated that to Bert and Colleen they laughed. "If you could see some of those little struggling groups ...!" God sees them.

A Note from Lars

It's that time of the year again. At times I believe the year has been shortened to 8 months. Guess some of you are in stores these days trying to find a gift for Aunt Susie, hoping that you're not giving her the same as a year or two ago or worse—sending an unused trinket back to her. She'll recognize it. Whatever, you'll be thanked for it after the 25th. I, on the other hand, can thank you prior to the 25th. Why? Because you have been so generous with your support to this newsletter. We still send to all who request it, with or without donation. For your interest, it is sent to 74 countries. May the Joy of Christmas be yours, even if you're a harried shopper—and the Peace of the Lord for the New Year.

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ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

Travel Schedule December 1998–February 1999

December 29 Washington, D.C., Chinese Mission, David Chow, (717)687-8564.

December 30-31 Orlando, Fla., Campus Outreach Conference, (706)823-2460.

January 8, 9 Phoenix, Ariz., Calvary Community Church, Leslie Martin, (602)973-4768.

January 16-20 St. Petersburg, Fla., Family Life Speaker Retreat, John Kriz, (501)223-8663.

January 29, 30 New Haven Conn., Yale University, Campus Crusade for Christ, Charmain Yun, (203) 785-1734.

February 6 Dallas, Tex., Omnipotence of Love Conference, (800) 361-0210.

February 20 Wheat Ridge, Colo., Applewood Baptist Church, Bev Green, (303) 232-9575.

February 21 Wheat Ridge, Colo., Applewood Baptist Church, Sunday school.

I was asked if I would care to be a published poet. All I needed to do was to send in a sample plus \$50 or so and I would be on my way. This honor almost went beyond my having received, on another occasion, a 1997 Certificate of Leadership from a political party. They did not tell me my area of expertise, but did let me know that they would appreciate a gift for the honor bestowed. We are not qualified to bestow honors. We try to keep a sane estimate of our own capabilities and in that we send our greetings and heartfelt thanks for 1998.

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