

The Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter

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What to Do Next

Every summer I go into the attic and clear out a few more things. Last summer I delved into the box containing all the letters I had ever written to my parents, beginning in 1941 when I went away to boarding school. Mother had carefully kept in chronological order the letters from all six of her “bairns” until 1982 when her mind lost its keen edge. It seemed rather foolish to hold on to things if one was never going to look at them again, so I pulled out the file which describes a crucial segment of my life, my first widowhood (my husband was one of five missionaries in Ecuador killed by Auca Indians on January 8, 1956). Valerie was ten months old. The only missionary on our jungle station at that time, I was strongly tempted to fear. Would I be able to make it without dishonoring my Lord? How to carry on without Jim, who had been running the station, building our house, managing the Quichua workers, teaching the new believers, working with me on Bible translation? Where to begin? What to do next?

Very likely some of you are asking yourselves this last question. An array of things you had meant to do last year were not done. Things you prayed earnestly for in 1998 did not happen as hoped. People you counted on fell by the wayside. All sorts of not-asked-for events took place. Matters that simply must be dealt with this year stare you in the face. I can't think of a better time to review that tremendous eleventh chapter of Hebrews. The word *faith* occurs twenty-eight times.

The ancients were commended for a solid faith full of hope and based on a strong certainty. As we contemplate the end of this millennium we might take an invaluable lesson from them: *obedience to God is our job. The results of that obedience are God's.*

Did Noah have private misgivings about constructing that preposterous vessel? I should think he had, but his trust outweighed his doubts. He simply

obeyed. When the Lord told Abraham to leave his country, his people, and his father's household, was he astounded? fearful? rebellious? He obeyed and went, not knowing where he was going. When called to make the supreme sacrifice of his son Isaac, did his heart leap from his chest? He reasoned that God could (and perhaps might) raise the dead. He got up early in the morning, saddled his donkey, took two servants and his son, cut enough wood for a burnt offering, and set out on a three-day journey, every step of which must have been agony. When all was prepared (including his heart, surely), he raised the knife, his trust and obedience perfected—whereupon God sent an angel with a message, “Because you have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you ...because you have obeyed me.”

Moses chose to be ill-treated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. Following the stories of more heroes in Hebrews 11 who are named, are heroes unnamed who were tortured, jeered at, flogged, chained, imprisoned, stoned, sawn in two (Think about that one!)—and on and on.

Verse 39: “These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that *only together with us* would they be made perfect.” That stuns me. Their perfection awaits *ours*. Their names are to be linked with yours and mine. Yours, Tom, Dick, and Harry! And yours, Elisabeth.

So what on earth shall we do (if we're still here on earth) before the Year Two Thousand? The answer is given:

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured

such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart” (Hebrews 12:1-3).

Are we aware that there is a race marked out for each of us? How determinedly will we run? If you are one of those who has not received what was promised, will you trust God anyway?

Help us, Lord, to get rid of whatever weighs us down, to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, “who for the joy set before him endured the cross.”

In what form shall we expect our crosses to be presented to us in the year 1999? Something heroic, perhaps? Dramatic? Spectacular? Very unlikely for most of us, I think. John Henry Newman (1801-1890) wrote, “To take up the cross of Christ is no great action done once for all; it consists in the continual practice of small duties which are distasteful to us.” Perhaps it is simply one of those small duties, gladly tackled, that will point to what to do next. If the assignment is a fearful one, take courage from that valiant and tested old Scot named Samuel Rutherford (1600-1661): “For some it is ‘Down crosses and up umbrellas!’ but I am persuaded that we must take heaven with the wind and the rain in our faces.”

Two of the Widows

Wherever I go I am asked “What ever happened to the other four widows?” People want to know how we “coped,” did we struggle, etc. I wrote to the four asking each to send a brief reply. So far I have heard from two. Marj Saint Van Der Puy wrote first:

“Nate’s three children have grown up to love the Lord. They have all married Christians and their nine children have all trusted Christ as their Savior.

“Struggles? Not that I’m aware of. Steve, when five years old, said, ‘I know why my Daddy got to go to heaven before we did. He loved the Lord more than we did.’

“I ‘coped’ by believing God makes no mistakes—that His ways are higher than ours—and trusting His promise for widows and orphans.

“Yes, I remarried after ten and a half years as a widow. I married a widower with three children—Abe Van Der Puy, president of HCJB World Radio.

“My daughter Kathy married Ross Drown and they serve with Mission Aviation. Son Steve is a business man turned missionary to the Aucas. Son Phil teaches in a Christian school.

“Books about Nate are *Through Gates of Splendor*, Elisabeth Elliot, Tyndale House; *Jungle Pilot*, Russell Hitt, Discovery House; *Tale of the Yellow Woodbee*, Dave and Neta Jackson, Bethany House; *Nate Saint*, Janet and Geoff Benge, YWAM Publishers.”

Olive Fleming Liefeld wrote, “My book, *Unfolding Destinies*, Discovery House, the story of my husband Pete, tells of God’s leading in spite of our human struggles as we tried to determine God’s will. His death was not the end of my life. At first it was very hard for me to cope with not only grief over Pete’s death but two miscarriages which left me childless. I did not know what to do. I had been in Ecuador only a short time. Because many people were praying for us and certainly because of the Lord’s grace, I was able to get through the years that followed. There were those who encouraged, comforted, and gave wise counsel. I returned to my home in Seattle. My first few years were busy with speaking engagements and working with young people. Busyness did not bring healing, it only kept the wounds open. Even time did not bring healing. It was up to me to trust God. My acceptance of His ultimate purpose in the death of the men, even though I did not understand it, finally brought peace.

“Three and a half years after Pete was killed I married Walter Liefeld, who was studying for his doctorate and pastoring a small church. Later he was asked to teach at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois. For thirty-two years he was a professor of New Testament. We have had a ministry separately and together over the years, and even in retirement there are still many opportunities. The Lord did lead and bless, and continues to bring blessing into my life. We have three grown children and five grandchildren. Walt and I were with Marj and Abe last March for a few days. In May we had board meetings to attend in Seattle so I went a few days early to spend time with Marilou. We had a great time. When will we see you?”

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Two Old Letters

An aged shut-in named Ruth Hyde of Memphis wrote to me in April 1956 with this story: An admiral in the Navy, stationed in Italy, read the *Life* edition of the martyrdom of five missionaries. Several weeks later in an accident at sea he was out on a life raft. Suddenly Jim Elliot's words came back to him: "When it comes time to die, make sure that all you have to do is die." He realized he was not at all ready to die, and he prayed that he would be saved. They were rescued, and when he got back to his home a book was waiting for him from a Christian friend of Miss Hyde. The admiral wrote him about his experience, and the friend had opportunity to bring this man to Christ.

A letter from Shandia, our Quichua station, to my parents, dated May 1, 1956, shows the lovingkindness of the Lord:

"Valerie tumbles around the lawn every afternoon for a while before her bath. I sit in the window to keep an eye on her. She walks back and forth on the trail, chases the cat, chickens, ducks, and a little species of capybara we have for a pet. She imitates the noises of all these animals, as well as anything else she hears. She is always singing.

"The path of the just is as a shining light that shineth more and more.' This has come to me so many times, in so many ways lately. Sometimes I wonder how it can shine at all without Jim, and yet the Lord said it would shine *more*, so I trust Him for the fulfillment of that word—'if He doesn't, His throne will *topple*,' as Miss Shane used to say! I believe He is fulfilling it to me already. I know peace which is even greater than during those first days (which then seemed miraculous). And each day, as I sit down to supper, the shadows of evening falling and light reflected on the river before me, I think, 'One day nearer Home, one day less to roam!' and it is thrilling to me! *What* will it be? And the hymn, 'And is it so, I shall be like Thy Son?' is so precious to me. I must go to bed. I love you so much. Betty."

Question

"If you didn't have time to do it right, when will you have time to do it over?"

(source unknown but wise)

Why Pray?

"We must not imagine that God has arranged everything, chronologically speaking, before our prayer.... Eternity may be regarded as the *meaning in depth* of our temporal decision or our prayer of petition. In this way, it is possible to see that my prayer is in reality a genuine initiative on the part of a free creature of God, directed towards the divine and all-embracing Being, whom I, at the moment of my prayer, address as 'Thou.' What is more, it is also possible to see that this Being has not arranged and decided everything before I come into contact with Him, but that He does this in an actual eternal now that brings the moment of my prayer to His immediate attention and creatively controls it. The more intimately we are united to Him, the bolder and the more efficacious our initiative in prayer will be. This intimate surrender to God has the effect of bringing our will into harmony with God's loving being."

E. Schillebeeckx

Hymn to God the Father

Wilt thou forgive that sin where I begun,
Which was my sin though it were done before?
Wilt thou forgive that sin through which I run,
And do run still, though still I do deplore?
When thou hast done, thou hast not done,
For I have more.
Wilt thou forgive that sin by which I've won
Others to sin, and made my sin their door?
Wilt thou forgive that sin which I did shun
A year or two, but wallowed in a score?
When thou hast done, thou hast not done,
For I have more.
I have a sin of fear, that when I've spun
My last thread, I shall perish on the shore;
But swear by thyself that at my death thy son
Shall shine as he shines now, and heretofore;
And having done that, thou hast done;
I fear no more.

John Donne

The Song of the Wren

Last summer a pair of dear little wrens moved into the wren house Lars had hung in a small oak tree. I can see the tree from the desk where I write. It was delightful to see them “case” the place, flying around, then going in and out, conversing with each other as to whether this would be a suitable domicile. After a day or two of consultation they began carrying in a variety of building materials. Then we saw the female no more, but beginning at five o’clock each morning we heard the proud male’s whispering, gurgling sound, rising, then falling at the end. I was astounded at the energy that tiny creature put forth with his “singing,” so I timed it—nine times per minute, 540 times per hour—virtually all day long, with hardly any intermission.

I doubt that he told his wife he’d had a long, hard day. I doubt that she complained of boredom as she warmed the tiny eggs she had produced. He worked tirelessly to feed her, and when the fledglings were ready to fly the coop what a chorus of jubilations the grateful parents put forth.

“All creatures that on earth do dwell, sing to the Lord with cheerful voice!”

They did. Shouldn’t we?

Prayer

“Almighty God, Who canst give the light that in darkness shall make us glad, the life that in gloom shall make us joy, and the peace that amidst discord shall bring us quietness! Let us live this day in that light, that life, and that peace, so that we may gain the

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ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

Travel Schedule January–March 1999

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.

March 4 Visalia, Calif., Calvary Chapel pre-crusade women’s rally, (209)687-0220.

March 6 South Hamilton, Mass., Gordon-Conwell (with Val), (978)468-7111.

victory over those things that press us down, and over the flesh that so often encumbers us, and over death that seemeth for a moment to win the victory. Thus we, being filled with inward peace, and light, and life, may walk all the days of this our mortal life, doing our work as the business of our Father, glorifying it, because it is Thy will, knowing that what Thou givest Thou givest in love. Bestow upon us the greatest and last blessing, that we, being in Thy presence, may be like unto Thee for evermore. These things we do ask, in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord—Amen.”

George Dawson (1821-1876)

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