

The Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter

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Whatever Happened to Courtship?

Two of my books, *Passion and Purity* and *Quest For Love*, have generated a gratifying response from readers. The first is our story—Jim Elliot's and mine—written with the hope of convincing young people that with God's help it is entirely possible to guard that priceless gift which can only be given away *once*: the gift of virginity. I have received piles of "Oh, if only somebody had told us!" letters, and much smaller piles of "So glad we found the book in time" letters.

How thankful I am that our parents were crystal-clear in teaching my sister and me to be ladies and my four brothers to be gentlemen. They loved each other—there was no doubt about that. It was obvious. We understood the hierarchy: the husband is the head of the wife, the wife submits to the husband, as Ephesians 5:22-25 clearly states.

Mother told me, when I was about thirteen, "Never chase boys! And always keep them at arm's length!" She assured me I would never find myself in a compromising position if I kept those simple rules. I kept them. Our father told my brothers, "Never tell a woman you love her until you are prepared to follow that statement immediately with 'Will you marry me?'" I believe all of them took his wise advice. All have stable marriages.

My grandfather, Philip E. Howard, wrote a beautiful book called *Father and Son* (in print again—1-800-292-2113). "In no realm of human mystery," he wrote, "is the growing boy more curious and sensitive than in all that pertains to sex. In nothing, I think it may be safely said, is the average father more reluctant, more remiss, more helpless and blind, than in dealing with his son's rightful desire to know the foundation sex facts, yet there is no subject touching our human relationships and God's plan for our lives, save the one supreme question of a boy's primary relation to Christ, that brings father and son into such an intimacy as that in which the father takes his son into his confidence on the sex problems that every boy must face."

If our parents had lived a few decades later they would certainly have told us to *keep our hands off, keep our clothes on, and stay out of bed!* I am spending a good deal of time in my old age saying just that to thousands of young people who, thank God, are beginning to listen. Amy A. Kass and Leon R. Kass of the University of Chicago wrote in the magazine *First Things* an article, "Proposing Courtship." What a breath of fresh air it was when I found it!

"It is no accident that the meaning of being a man or being a woman has been radically transformed in a society that celebrates freedom and equality, encourages individualism and autonomy, rejects tradition, practices contraception and abortion, sees marriage as a lifestyle, provides the same education and promotes the same careers for men and women, homogenizes fathers and mothers in the neutered work of 'parenting,' denies vulnerability and dependence, keeps mortality out of sight, and raises its children without any sense of duty or obligation to future generations. The roots of these cultural ideas and practices lie deeper than the sexual revolution, feminism, and the sixties. ... Even conservatives are looking for reform on the cheap, revival of good sense and decency in the relations between the sexes without sacrificing any of the privileges and luxuries of modern life. *We strongly suspect this is impossible...* [italics mine]."

"To explore the now lost practices of courtship, and to encourage the relevant sensibilities, we several years ago offered a seminar on the subject at the University of Chicago. We were moved to do so after two decades of observing, with growing sadness, the frustrations and disappointments of our students and former students as they passed through the decade of their twenties failing to find the life-partner they longed for or the private happiness that is based on lasting intimacy...."

"The process of courting provides the opportunity to enact the kind of attentiveness, dependability, care, exclusiveness, and fidelity that the couple will subsequently promise each other when they finally wed.... Courtship, a wisely instituted practice, is meant to substitute for any lack of personal wisdom...."

"The miraculous gift of new life, the astonishing

power of parental love for children, the humility one painfully learns in trying to rear them, and (especially) the desire to give them not just life but a good way of life, open a husband and wife to our most serious concern for the true, the good, and the holy. Parental love for children leads once wayward sheep back into the fold of church and synagogue. It holds out the possibility for the sanctification of everyday life, even in modern times....

“Our critics would like to believe that female chastity, or at least marked sexual self-restraint, is not necessary for sensible manners and mores regarding sex, marriage, and family. We suggest that the burden of proof lies with them to show how the important functions that courtship and modesty once performed can be accomplished in their absence.

“Classical courtship was, in fact, a manifestation of the true power of women as women, residing in their modesty. Men were the visible actors, but the serious woman was in command. This implies that the possibility of restoring sensible sexual mores, pointing toward marriage, lies mainly with women—to be sure, only if a majority of women reassert the powerful virtue of self-restraint. Their willingness to exercise their power of reform depends, of course, on whether they think that a fulfilling marriage and motherhood are of primary importance in their life. Everything depends on whether modern young women—including modern conservative women—will see things this way.” (Permission granted.)

Secret of Contentment

All of us, I suppose, have at times felt strangely displaced, wondering how on earth we landed in a situation so far removed from that of our choosing. In 1958 I was living with Auca Indians in the Ecuadorian jungle. They had provided Valerie and me with a house—“a gift of place,” bless their dear hearts! It was identical to their own houses—without walls, floor, or furniture. My hammock was swung, as theirs were, between two of the six poles that held up the roof. Valerie, who was three, slept happily in a blanket on split bamboo. Often in the intervals between sleeping and fanning the fire I found myself musing in the wee hours—what am I doing here? How am I to glorify the Lord in such a place?

Remember Psalm 16:5, “Lord, you have assigned me my portion and my cup; you have made my lot secure.” I realized that He was preparing *me* for what He was preparing *for me*. “I go to prepare a place for you,” He told His disciples.

Our heavenly Father knows how to place us to learn where we may learn lessons impossible anywhere else. He has neither misplaced nor displaced us. He assigns and designs according to His inscrutable wisdom—always for our blessing and conformity to the image of Christ.

The apostle Paul learned “to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength” (Philippians 4:11-13, NIV).

I believe that in every time and place it is within our power to acquiesce in the will of God—and what peace it brings to do so.

A Disaster Aborted

A subscriber to the newsletter found herself pregnant. Devastated, she felt she could not possibly handle more than her three children. Her husband agreed. She had had difficult pregnancies and had needed hospitalization. “I knew that pregnancy would be a huge disruption and had many horrible thoughts about aborting the baby, and although I had been strongly pro-life I now felt that an exception had to be made. I called the clinic, scheduled an appointment, thinking I could keep it a secret and would have to keep it for the rest of my life. I knew I would have to answer for my sin, but felt so angry and desperate—I would be the only one to pay the price and I would be willing to live with it.

“On one of the dark days that followed I read your

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newsletter—an article called “Don’t Do It.” One line stabbed me to the heart. A woman had chosen to give away her virginity before she was married and now her daughter had done the same. I realized in an instant that that was a price I was not willing to pay—I would not have my children pay for my sin. I talked to my husband and we cried many tears but determined in our hearts to do what is right. I called the clinic, canceled the appointment. Sickness came as expected but I survived! My baby arrived and we put the verse from Jeremiah on her birth announcement, ‘You are loved with an everlasting love.’

“I hold her now and she looks at me with her little blue eyes and I love her in a way that I never thought I could. I have cried oceans of tears thinking about what I could have done in a rash moment and the unbearable pain I would have had to live with for the rest of my life. I have a new empathy for women who feel that they are in a ‘crisis’ pregnancy, but I also am more firmly convinced that if a person feels that pregnancy is a mistake, *killing the baby won’t fix it*. The pain and repercussions from that decision would go on forever—beyond my lifetime, to my children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. I am so thankful to the Lord for His mercy in searing my heart with the truth and for keeping me from doing something I would have regretted forever. I thought you would want to know.”

Yes, dear lady, I am so glad. May the Lord make you an Instrument of His Peace to other fearful prospective mothers.

The Shepard Family

Readers have asked for an update. The Shepards live on thirteen acres in Greer, South Carolina—a far cry from crowded southern California. Walt is the pastor of Harrison Bridge Road Presbyterian Church in Simpsonville. Walter III, 22, is in his second year at St. John’s College in Annapolis. Elisabeth, 20, is a first-year student at Wheaton College in Illinois, studying voice in the conservatory. Christiana, 18, and Jim, 16, are for the first time in public school. Colleen, 14, is homeschooled (and has a horse named Joe). Evangeline, 11, Theo, 8, and Sarah, 6, are also homeschooled. Valerie receives invitations to speak but is very conscientious in deciding which to accept. Home and family

take priority. For all who feel inadequate to accomplish everything assigned, it will help to remember a word from a correspondent: “The only person who ever got everything done by Friday was Robinson Crusoe!”

Recommended Reading

Pathway to the Heart of God (published by Harvest House in Eugene Oregon) was written by Terry W. Glaspey, who was inspired to pray by the great Christian writers. I was convicted on every page, so aware of my own inadequacies and strongly tempted to despair. When I came to this one I realized that if even Donne experienced great difficulty in concentration it cannot be uncommon:

“I throw myself down in my Chamber, and I call in, and invite God, and His Angels thither. And when they are there, I neglect God and His Angels, for the noise of a fly, for the rattling of a Coach, for the whining of a door; I talk on, in the same posture of praying: eyes lifted up, knees bowed down; as though I prayed to God; and if God or His Angels should ask me when I last thought of God in that prayer, I cannot tell.... A memory of yesterday’s pleasures, a fear of tomorrow’s dangers, a straw under my knee, a noise in mine ear, a light in mine eye, an any thing, a nothing, a fancy, a chimera in my brain, troubles me in my prayer. So there is nothing, nothing in spiritual things, perfect in this world. I turn to hearty and earnest prayer to God, and I fix my thoughts strongly—as I think upon Him, and before I have perfected one petition ... the spirit of slumber closes mine eyes and I pray drowsily” (John Donne, 1573-1631).

Psalms 103:13-14 has brought me great comfort—“As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust.”

A Letter to a Prospective Missionary

It cheers me to have a letter from one who is earnest about following the will of God. It is good to know you have a God-inspired hunger in your heart for missions, and are aware that He has been preparing you. His guidance involves making choices. He does not

give us pillars of fire, stars of Bethlehem, or hand-writing on the wall to guide us, but has ordained that we seek His will and also exercise our intelligence as well as our wills (see Psalm 32:9).

Jim Elliot corresponded with one missionary in India and one in Ecuador, seeking to determine which field he should go to. In view of the information he received, he simply made a choice: Ecuador. It was not "a shot in the dark." It was an act of faith in a God who promises to guide.

Must you have a "specific call"? A call is a combination of desire, concern, and commitment. "You can't steer a parked car," Jim used to say. It makes sense to move in the direction you believe God is leading, trusting Him as a faithful Shepherd to lead you in paths of righteousness for *His* (not your) name's sake. Will He make it hard for His obedient sheep? Of course not. And if you are "steering your car" in the wrong direction, you can count on Isaiah 30:21.

Yes, both moving and waiting are required. But you have waited. It's time to move. There may be more waiting, but God knows how to slow you down, quiet your heart, cause delays in order to accomplish His purposes. See Isaiah 41:10.

Great Things?

When I want to do only great things for You
Make me willing to do small, unnoticed things too.
When I want to do what the world will acclaim
Make me willing to do what will lift up Your name.

B.J. Hoff

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ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

Travel Schedule March–May 2000

March 21, 22 Dallas, Tex., Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, Timothy Bayly, (812)332-1334.

March 23, 24 Greenville, S.C., Miracle Hill Ministries, Carol Masters, (864)268-4357.

April 1 Durham, N.C., First Baptist Church, Alicia Baucom, (919)688-7308.

April 13 Boston, Mass., Baptist Bible College East, Sandra J. Wyllie, (617)364-3510.

April 15 Ipswich, Mass., First Presbyterian Church men's breakfast, Dan Oh, (978)927-9249.

May 6 Duluth, Minn., KDNW, Tina Korte, (218)772-6700.

May 17 Liberty Corner, N.J., Fellowship Deaconry, Inc., Sr. Rita Krohn, (908)647-1777.

May 18 New York, Walter Hoving Home, Beth Zielinski, (914)424-3674.

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