

The Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter

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Struggling in Prayer

People who ski happen to enjoy skiing; they have time for skiing, can afford to ski, and are good at skiing. I have found that I often treat prayer as though it were a sport like skiing—something you do if you like it, something you do in your spare time, something you do if you can afford the trouble, something you do if you're good at it. Otherwise, you do without it most of the time. When you get in a pinch you try it, and then you call an expert.

But prayer isn't a sport. It's work. Prayer is work because a Christian simply can't "make a living" without it. The apostle Paul said we "wrestle" in prayer. In the wrestling of a Christian in prayer, "our fight is not against any physical enemy; it is against organizations and powers that are spiritual. We are up against the unseen powers that control this dark world, and spiritual agents from the very headquarters of evil" (Ephesians 6:12, PHILLIPS). Seldom do we consider the nature of our opponent, and that is to his advantage. When we do recognize him for what he is, however, we have an inkling as to why prayer is never easy. It's the weapon that Unseen Power dreads most, and if he can get us to treat it as casually as we treat a pair of skis or a tennis racquet, he can keep his hold.

As I grow old I find that I am more conscious than ever of my need to pray, but it seems at the same time to become more of a struggle. It is harder to concentrate, for one thing. I was greatly helped by some private notes Amy Carmichael

wrote to her "Family" (hundreds of children and their helpers, both Indian and European) in Dohnavur, South India, to help them prepare for a special day of prayer. She quoted Paul's letter to the Colossians (2:1): "I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you." He is referring at least in part to the conflict of prayer. The same verse is translated "how greatly I strive" in the Revised Version; "how deep is my anxiety" in J.B. Phillips; and, in the Jerusalem Bible, "Yes, I want you to know that I do have to struggle hard for you ... to bind you together in love and to stir your minds, so that your understanding may come to full development, until you really know God's secret in which all the jewels of wisdom and knowledge are hidden."

Here are Amy's notes:

"With what do I struggle?"

"1. I struggle with all that says to me, 'What is the use of your praying? So many others, who know more of prayer than you do, are praying. What difference does it make whether you pray or not? Are you sure that your Lord is listening? Of course He is listening to the other prayers, but yours are of such small account, are you really sure He is "bending His ear" to you?'

"2. I struggle with all that suggests that we are asked to give too much time to prayer. There is so much to do. Why set aside so much time just to pray?

"3. I struggle with all that discourages me personally—perhaps the remembrance of past

sin, perhaps spiritual or physical tiredness; with anything and everything that keeps me back from what occupied St. Paul so often—vital prayer.

“What will help me most in this wrestle?”

“1. The certain knowledge that our insignificance does not matter at all, for we do not come to the Father in our own name but in the Name of His beloved Son. His ear is always open to that Name. Of this we can be certain.

“2. The certain knowledge that this is Satan’s lie; he is much more afraid of our prayer than our work. (This is proved by the immense difficulties we always find when we set ourselves to pray. They are much greater than those we meet when we set ourselves to work.)

“3. Isaiah 44:22 and kindred words, with 1 John 1:9, meet all distress about sin. Isaiah 40:29-31 with 2 Corinthians 12:9,10 meet everything that spiritual or physical weariness can do to hinder. Psalm 27:8 with Isaiah 45:19 meets all other difficulties. And the moment we say to our God, ‘Thy face, Lord, will I seek,’ His mighty energies come to the rescue. (See Colossians 1:2, 9.) Greater, far greater, is He that is in us than he that is against us. Count on the greatness of God.

“But are we to go on wrestling to the end? No, there is a point to which we come, when, utterly trusting the promise of our Father, we rest our hearts upon Him. It is then we are given what St. Paul calls access with confidence (Ephesians 3:12). But don’t forget that this access is by faith, not by feeling, faith in Him our living Lord; He who says, ‘Come unto Me’ does not push us away when we come. As we go on, led by the Holy Spirit who so kindly helps us in our infirmities, we find ourselves in 1 John 5:14, 15 and lastly in Philippians 4:6, 7. It is good to remember that immediate answer to

prayer is not always something seen, but it is always inward peace.

“And if the day ends otherwise and we are discouraged? Then tell Him so, ‘nothing ashamed of tears upon His feet’ [here Amy is quoting from F.W.H. Meyers’ poem, ‘St. Paul’]. Lord, Thou knowest all things. Thou knowest that I love Thee. ‘Yes, my child, I know.’ But don’t settle down into an ‘it will never be different’ attitude. It *will* be different if only we earnestly follow on to know the Lord.”

Q

Power in Weakness

“Prayer that has a vital background and is a fit channel of power is always a hard and humiliating business. Its strength resides, not in its exuberance, but in its restraints. We sometimes plead that we are temperamentally unfitted for the life of prayer; and it may well be that our natural disposition and makeup are incompatible with one type of devotion or another. But prayer...is not a matter of temperament at all. What hinders us from achieving it is simply our share...in the common human fear of the cross. Once we are willing to take up the cross and follow Jesus, we have already begun to pray.”

Elizabeth Herman, *Creative Prayer*

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Favorite Hymns

We used to have hymn sings for some of the old-timers on Sunday evenings when we were at our family cottage in Franconia, New Hampshire. There was a little pump organ, and we had enough hymnbooks for everybody. We invited our neighbors, including one old lady who always declined a hymnbook with the words, "I can't sing half's good's a crow."

All my life, whether sung in solitude, in family prayers, or in mighty congregations—whether by crows or by white-throated sparrows—wonderful hymns have sustained my faith. Here are some of my favorites:

All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name
A Mighty Fortress Is Our God
And Can It Be That I Should Gain
Beneath the Cross of Jesus
Be Still My Soul
Crown Him With Many Crowns
Dear Lord and Father of Mankind
Eternal Light!
Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken
God Moves in a Mysterious Way
Great Is Thy Faithfulness
He Leadeth Me
Holy, Holy, Holy
How Firm a Foundation
How Great Thou Art
If Thou But Suffer God to Guide Thee
In Heavenly Love Abiding
It Is Well With My Soul
I Take Thy Promise, Lord
Jesus, What a Friend for Sinners
Jesus, Thou Joy of Loving Hearts
Join All the Glorious Names
Loved With Everlasting Love
Marvelous Grace of Our Loving Lord

O Love That Wilt Not Let Me Go
O Sacred Head, Now Wounded
O Worship the King
Speak, Lord, in the Stillness
Spirit of God, Descend Upon My Heart
The Day Thou Gavest, Lord, Is Ended
There's a Wideness in God's Mercy
Trust and Obey
When I Survey the Wondrous Cross
When Morning Gilds the Skies

A Dozen Ways to Make Yourself (and quite a few others) Miserable

Here we are at the beginning of another new year, and perhaps some of us made a few New Year's resolutions. Planting tongue firmly in cheek, may I suggest the following pledges for the year of our Lord 2002:

1. Count your troubles, name them one by one—at the breakfast table, if anybody will listen, or as soon as possible thereafter.
2. Worry every day about something. Don't let yourself get out of practice. It won't add a cubit to your stature, but it might burn a few calories.
3. Pity yourself. If you do enough of this, nobody else will have to do it for you.
4. Devise clever but decent ways to serve God and mammon. After all, you've got a life to live.
5. Make it your business to find out what the Joneses are buying this year and where they're going. Try to do them at least one better even if you have to take out another loan to do it.
6. Stay away from absolutes. It's what's right for *you* that matters. Be your own person,

and don't allow yourself to get hung up on what others expect of you.

7. Make sure you get your rights. Never mind other people's. You have your life to live, they have theirs.
8. Don't fall into any compassion traps—the sort of situation where people can walk all over you. If you get too involved in other people's troubles, you may neglect your own.
9. Don't let Bible reading and prayer get in the way of what's really relevant—things like TV and newspapers. Invisible things are eternal. You want to stick with the visible ones—they're where it's at *now*.
10. Be right, and be sure to let folks know it. If you catch yourself in the wrong, don't breathe it to a soul.
11. Review daily the names of people who have hurt, wronged, or insulted you. Keep those lists up-to-date, and think of ways to get even without being thought of as unreasonable, uncivilized, or unchristian.
12. Never forgive a wrong. Clutch it forever, and you'll never be unemployed. Resentment is a full-time job.

Books and Resources

Books in Spanish by Elisabeth Elliot

Portales de Esplendor
(*Through Gates of Splendor*) \$10.00 postpaid

Pasión y Pureza
(*Passion and Purity*) \$10.00 postpaid

Order from:
Lars Gren
10 Strawberry Cove
Magnolia, MA 01930

Prayer

“Not only lay Thy Commands on us, O Lord, but be pleased to enable us for the performance of every duty required of us. And so engage our hearts to Thyself that we may make it our meat and drink to do Thy will, and, with enlarged hearts, run the way of Thy commands. Be merciful to us, and bless us, and keep us this day in all our ways. Let Thy love abound in our hearts, and sweetly and powerfully constrain us to all faithful and cheerful obedience.”

Benjamin Jenks (1646-1724)

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