

The Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter

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Deliver Us From Temptation

Is there a way of life, a manner of serving the Lord, that will deliver us from the temptations and distractions of the world? Life in a convent or monastery looks to many of us on the outside as though it would almost guarantee a degree of holiness that is far beyond the rest of us. But a letter from a friend who is a nun showed me that there is no such guarantee. For her, as for me, to walk with God is to walk by faith, to trust and obey one day at a time, recognizing our never-ending need for grace.

“Elisabeth, you know human nature well enough to understand some of the ‘occupational hazards’ that can only too easily compromise the totality of our commitment to the Lord. Because our way of life is known and recognized even by the building in which we live, those who do not know us personally can see us as a witness to the Transcendent, to the reality of faith, to the power of prayer, etc., while individually we can be failing miserably to live in the wholehearted surrender that they presume (or that we sometimes mistakenly presume ourselves).

“Every part of our ‘Rule’ has been chosen to free us for prayer. Centuries of experience have contributed to providing us with an atmosphere most conducive to freeing the mind and heart for prayer, and yet I’m afraid with all that has been given, one can settle for the shell, going through the motions only. We can compromise the spirit of freedom we have received from the Lord Jesus with the ersatz security and satisfaction of bondage to the letter of our Rule. We can still very easily get caught up in the busy-ness that makes our heart more a marketplace than a house of prayer.

“I was in high school when I began to consider giving my life to the Lord’s service. My parents are both teachers, and since my own inclinations were along the same lines, I thought naturally of joining the Sisters who had taught me for twelve years. As I learned more about the missions they staffed, especially in Africa, my attractions were kindled along mission lines.

“But my reading during those years convinced me that a life dedicated solely to prayer could reach even more people than could missions, so I applied to this order at the age of sixteen, and upon my graduation from college, I was accepted by the community.

“I’m afraid my decision was far from noble and generous. I didn’t realize it at the time, but it was pretty much pride that led me here, the desire to excel, to do the most, the best. My temperament tended to approach things ‘from the chin up,’ and this decision, as I came to see later, was much more one of my mind than of my heart. That’s where I was ‘at,’ and from that place the Lord drew me, in spite of my faults and imperfections. He was pursuing me long before I knew I needed to be pursued. I felt I was all His, not knowing that this was something I would have to learn, and keep on learning for a long time to come! It took a lot of shaking to wake me up.

“Several years later, after I had made my perpetual profession of vows, the crisis came. A series of circumstances knocked the bottom out of my life. After months of anguish, confusion, hurt, and loneliness, I had nowhere to turn but to the Lord. I suddenly realized that I had indeed been ‘squandering my heritage in a far country’ by being so preoccupied with myself, my reputation, etc. With freedom and joy, I realized that my Father did not mind being a last resort, and that He was waiting for me with open arms and a wide-open heart.

“It was only then that my heart was awakened, and I began to learn the meaning of prayer. This was the first time I asked the Lord what *He* wanted of me, and only then did I make my real commitment to Him, choosing to remain forever in the service of my Master, and begging Him to open my ears, that His Word might truly be my life.

“It is my abiding prayer that the Lord we seek will continue to refine and purify our hearts until our offering is as it should be, and the Sun of Justice shines unobstructed with its healing rays.”

God allows Himself to be found in many ways,

and the human tendency to ignore Him or resist Him crosses all cultural lines. Isn't it amazing that He cares so much that we reflect His image?

He wants us. He meets us. God takes us forward. The apostle Paul dealt with this situation in his First Letter to the Corinthians: "So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it" (1 Corinthians 10:12-13, NIV).

He chose us before we chose Him. He wants to bring us through every temptation and bring us safely home. He's our Savior!

Poem for a Dry Time

(written by this same nun, who wishes to remain anonymous)

Light of our world,
I stand before You blind,
 groping,
 self-deceived.
So often have I prayed
 that You would open my eyes
 to Your truth,
 that I might seek Your face in honesty.
"Lord, that I may see."
But now You have covered with mud
 my still-unseeing eyes.
Yes, Lord, I do believe;
 help Thou my unbelief.

Word of our God,
 before You I am deaf,
 unheeding and confused.
So often have I prayed
 that You would open my ears
 to Your call,
 to Your voice in the needs of each heart,
"Lord, that I may hear."
But now You have put Your fingers in my ears
 that I might hear only Your silence.
Yes, Lord, I do believe;
 help Thou my unbelief.

Notes on Submission

"Submission"—what does it mean? The question, asked of me by women only, never seems to refer to submission to civil law, military officers, the boss, or the schoolteacher. It's submission to a *husband* that is the sticking point.

Instead of resorting to Webster this time, I'll give you Oswald Chambers' definition: "Etymologically [looking at the basic meaning of the word], submission means surrender to another, but in the evangelical sense it means that I conduct myself actually among men as the submissive child of my Father in heaven."

Let's look first at the Son of God, perfect in His submission to His Father. His whole life on earth demonstrated an unconditional surrender to that glorious will: "Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll—I have come to do your will, O God" (Hebrews 10:7, NIV).

Do we want to follow Him in this? "Yes," we say. But then, what if the will of the Father happens to be our submission to the will of a man? Nothing could be less to our liking. We search for every loophole.

"Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord" (Ephesians 5:22, NIV). Many are the discussions I've heard on this one, almost all of them directed to what it "can't possibly mean," rather than to the plain word of the Lord. The statement is simple. Not easy for women like me, but *simple*, that is, I understand it only too well. (As Mark Twain said, "I have far more trouble with the things I *do* understand in the Bible than things I don't understand.")

Worst-case scenarios are immediately put forward. "What if my husband asks me to do something immoral?" Heads nod vigorously. Cases are described. But the question was what submission

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means. Chambers has put it well—that I conduct myself as God’s child. The spirit of God’s Son was the spirit of submission, no questions asked as to His own safety or comfort, no effort to engineer things for Himself, but rather an utter handing over of all His powers to His Father, a perfect confidence that the consequences of this obedience lay in His Father’s hands.

“But my husband is fallible,” some say. So is mine. But my submission to him is obedience to God. How far am I prepared to trust myself into my Father’s hands? That’s the real question. We must learn to submit our “what ifs” and “yeah, buts.” To the humble and honest soul who does not proudly and arrogantly assume that God’s arrangement of things will not “work” in her case, the light of grace will always be given.

“But Elisabeth, you don’t seem to realize that *my case is an exception!*” Is it? Then it’s not my business. I try to stick to what the Bible does say, not to what it doesn’t say. He didn’t give us any footnotes. Take your special case to the foot of the cross. Have a long, honest look at it there. Let the light of Christ illuminate your situation.

Why should a wife submit to a husband rather than the reverse? Are we not equal? No, not equal in the sense of interchangeable. The heart of the matter is a mystery: the mystery of Christ and the Church. Try reading Ephesians 5:22-24, reversing the nouns. It’s nonsense. God arranged husbands and wives in different positions, each representing a tremendous verity: the husband represents Christ; the wife, the Church, His Bride. This is a divine assignment, not chosen, earned, or deserved by either husband or wife, not conferred by either on the other, but designated by God Himself. I am thankful for this arrangement because I know it is a revelation of divine wisdom and love, given for our freedom and peace.

I have been thinking, talking, writing about this for years. I confess that I am not Exhibit A of the submissive woman, but in my old age the Lord in His wonderful patience and mercy is showing me how simple it is just to keep my mouth shut. That’s what it comes down to most of the time. Sometimes, of course, my responsibility as a helper for my husband requires my calling to his attention something he has overlooked. Even if he ignores my advice, do I fall in with it graciously? Most of my testings come in the little things, when I automatically want to put forward my own preferences, arguments, logic, clarifications.

Relinquishing those has meant a new freedom from stress and a new thankfulness for my husband, Lars Gren.

And what about the husbands? They’ve been given a far tougher assignment: Love your wives as Christ loved the church. Give yourselves up for her to make her holy. Love your wives as your own bodies (see Ephesians 5:25-28). Who could balk at submission to a man like that? All of us, I guess, for we balk at submission to Christ Himself, who loves us perfectly!

But surely the glad surrender of both husband and wife to our respective positions in God’s kingdom makes for the world’s happiest marriages.

Pasted on the flyleaf of one of my Bibles

Instead of the word *submission*, I should write *acceptance*, for more and more, as life goes on, that word opens doors into rooms of infinite peace, and the heart that accepts asks nothing, for it is at rest, and the pilgrim of love does not need a map or chart. “I know my road, it leadeth to His heart.”

Amy Carmichael

80/20 Vision

It is always possible to be thankful for what is given rather than to complain about what is not given. One or the other becomes a habit of life. There are, of course, complaints that are legitimate—as, for example, when services have been paid for which have not been rendered—but the gifts of God are in an altogether different category.

My second husband once said that a wife, if she is very generous, may allow that her husband lives up to eighty percent of her expectations. There is always the other twenty percent that she would like to change, and she may chip away at it for the whole of their married life without reducing it very much. She may, on the other hand, simply decide to enjoy the eighty percent, and both of them will be happy. It’s a down-to-earth illustration of a principle: *Accept, positively and actively, what is given to you.* Let thanksgiving be the habit of your life.

from my book, *Love Has a Price Tag*

“It is only disguised pride that makes us fret over what we can’t understand.”

Evelyn Underhill, *Letters*

Odds and Ends From Lars

As I write this, we are about to depart for a trip to Hungary (postponed from last year when planes were grounded after 9/11). Elisabeth’s 2002 speaking engagements were put together in a short span of time and couldn’t get into the newsletters. But I wanted you to know a bit of what we did in the early part of the year:

One of the main speaking events was at a Christian school, the dedication of a gymnasium that was being named for Jim Elliot. I suggested they call it the Jim Gym. I’m not sure they took me up on it.

Between speaking engagements in Oklahoma City, I got the opportunity to try my hand at skeet-shooting. I pulled the trigger about fifty times, wounding only about five of those little clay pigeons, some so slightly that I think in a recession they could have been reused. If they

had been real birds, they would have had more than a sporting chance to continue flying, minus only a feather or two.

Elisabeth went to see Valerie and her family for a week, prior to which I had been in Florida for five days. We had just one day together before parting, and someone said, “You weren’t together long enough to have a fuss.” Anyway, while she was gone, it was close to being oatmeal three times a day. I was happy to see her return, not only for her cooking, but just to have her back to relieve the echoing emptiness of the house.

This year, I want to thank you prior to the first of January for your generous support, which has kept this bit of (I trust) helpful screed in the black again for another year.

However, I should mention that my offer in the July newsletter—of offering autographed copies of Elisabeth’s new book, *Secure in the Everlasting Arms*—was made without enough thought. So many of you have requested books that her fingers are now worn down to the half moons. Elisabeth said, “I should have been named Sue.” If you’re wondering where your order is, I can only say that with the response we’ve had, we hope we’ll finish sending them out by Thanksgiving.

We give thanks for all of you and may you have peace and joy in the Lord.

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