

The Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter

March/April 2003

ISSN 8756-1336

“Could You Not Wait?”

Olive trees are not much good for leaning against. Too knobby. I kick away a few stones and sit down on the ground, knees braced in my arms. The other two stand for a while, eyeing the one who has gone off alone.

“Might as well sit down,” I say. They don’t answer.

Long day. Tired. I look up through the trees. Ragged clouds, thin moon. Enough wind to move the olive leaves. My head’s too heavy to hold up. I stare at my old sandals, one of them with a loose thong. Then I notice my feet and remember—at supper—“altogether clean.” Dusty again now, but they were clean, all right. Never had them so clean. “Do you understand what I have done for you?” he asked. Maybe the rest understood. Not me. And what was all that about being *slaves*?

My two friends sit down a little way off. Can’t hear much of the conversation (they’re almost whispering). His body. His blood. (Strange things he said to us tonight at the table.) How he longed to eat with us, but would never do it again—until...something about a *kingdom*.

Yawn. Too tired to think now. I push away a few more stones and lie down in the grass. No pillow. Well, my arm will have to do.

What do I hear? Not my friends—they’re flat out on the ground now, like me. Some movement. Wind? An animal? No, over there, where *he* is. A sort of gasp, was it? I strain my ears. Can’t tell. Maybe they can, they’re nearer, but they don’t say anything. Silence now. Never mind. Have a little snooze.

“Asleep, Simon?” I jump. He did ask us to stay awake, now that I think of it. He’s standing over us and here we all are, snoring away. Poor show. “Pray that you may be spared the test.” Yes. Lord. (Test?)

He goes off again. We sit up, shake ourselves.

(It’s colder now, my tunic’s clammy with dew.) We pray. We can see, from the silhouette over by the rock, that something is very wrong. Wonder if we should do something? But he said stay here.

“You will all fall from you faith.” We talk about that. What could he mean? *All* of us? The other two lie down. I sit here, thinking of what he said to me—about Satan, sifting me like wheat. He said he prayed especially for me. My faith fail? I told him I’d even go to prison with him. Die, if it came to that. Judas now—that’s another story. Wonder what he’s up to? Left the table in an awful hurry. Never did trust him. Shifty-eyed. Slick.

Ah-oh. Must have fallen asleep again. I can sense his presence, standing close, but I’ll keep my eyes shut. What can I say? I wait. He says nothing, goes away.

“You awake?” I poke the others. I remember he told me I was to “lend strength to the brothers.” They pull themselves up, and again we talk. He said he was going away. Somewhere where we could not come. Peace . . . love . . . the Prince of this world . . . persecution . . . the breakdown of faith. Doesn’t sound good.

“What’s that?” (I’m the one who’s whispering now.) A soft noise—like wings. There’s somebody there, bending over him in the moonlight. We peer through the trees. Can’t tell who it is. It’s not good, his being here in this garden. Too many people know they can find him here. What! Whoever was there has—why, vanished! Just like that! He is standing now, his face lifted up.

“That’s the third time he’s prayed the same prayer,” my friend says. I didn’t hear it.

We keep talking, trying to stay awake this time. He needs me, I guess. We’d better be on our toes. Not sure what’s going on. Is he in danger? But he doesn’t seem to know fear. Has his own ways of getting out of trouble when he wants

to—remember the time he slipped through the crowd that was about to dump him over the precipice? Yes, but we told him this time he ought not to come up to the city. Bad timing.

What about what he said about our needing purse, pack, and sword now, after sending us out barefoot, without a coin or crust, the first time? Said he had a good many other things he couldn't tell us now, but would send a spirit—Spirit of Truth, that was it—who would explain things that were going to happen.

Hours go by. We lose track of how long we talk. Yawn, relax.

“Still sleeping? Up, let's go forward.” On our feet like a shot. What's happening? “My betrayer is upon us.” Mob surging through the garden. Lanterns, torches, swords, cudgels.

“Master! Here, quickly, get behind. . . .” He doesn't hear me. Walks straight up to them. “What is it you want?” I grab my sword, swing it at one of the gang, only get his ear.

“Put up your sword,” he tells me. “This is the cup the Father has given me. Don't you realize I must drink it?”

What could we do? I follow him partway, but I can see it's all over. No point getting involved.

From my book, *On Asking God Why*

Prayer as Incense

Prayer is compared in the Bible to incense. “Let my prayer be counted as incense before thee,” wrote the psalmist, and the angel who stood before the altar with the golden censer in Revelation 6 was given incense to mingle with the prayers of the saints. Incense was very expensive, blended by a perfumer according to a strict formula. It appears to serve no particularly useful purpose. Its smoke and fragrance soon dissipate. Couldn't incense be done without?

Prayer is like incense. It costs a great deal. Sometimes it seems to accomplish little (as we mortals assess things). It soon dissipates. But God likes the fragrance. It was God's idea to arrange the work of the tabernacle to include a special altar for incense. We can be pretty sure He included all that was necessary and nothing that was unnecessary.

Jesus prayed: He offered thanksgiving, He interceded for others, He made petitions. That the Son—coequal, coeternal, consubstantial with the Father—should come to the Father in prayer is a mystery. That we, God's children, should be not only permitted but commanded also to come is a mystery. How can we change things by prayer? How can we “move” a sovereign and omnipotent God? We do not understand. We simply obey because it is a law of the universe, as we obey other laws of the universe, knowing only that this is how things have been arranged: the book falls to the floor in obedience to the law of gravity if I let go of it; spiritual power is released through prayer.

I could say, “God can make my hands clean if He wants to,” or I could wash them myself. Chances are God *won't* make my hands clean. That's a job He leaves up to me. His omnipotence is not impaired by His having ordained my participation, whether it be in the washing of hands with soap or the helping of a friend with prayer. Jesus Christ redeemed the world by the laying down of His life, a perfect sacrifice, once for all. Yet He is in the business, as David Redding says, of “maintenance and repair.” He lets us participate with Him in that business by the laying down of our own lives.

One way of laying down our lives is by praying for somebody. In prayer I am saying, in effect, “my life for yours.” My time, my energy, my thought, my concern, my concentration, my faith—here they are, for you. So it is that I participate in the work of Christ. So it is that no work of faith, no labor of love, no smallest prayer is ever lost, but, like the smoke of the incense on the golden altar, rises from the hand of the angel before God.

From my “Notes on Prayer” booklet

Up to 100 copies of an article may be made for private distribution but not for resale. Please cite full credit as given below. For permission to make more than 100 copies of an article, please write to the newsletter.

© 2003 by Elisabeth Elliot Gren

The Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter is published six times a year by Servant Publications. The cost is \$7.00 per year. Tax-deductible donations make it possible for those who are unable to pay to receive the letter free. Please send donations to The Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter, P.O. Box 7711, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48107-7711. Foreign subscribers: Please send donations in U.S. dollars drawn on a U.S. bank.

For more information about resources by Elisabeth Elliot, visit her website: www.elisabethelliott.org.

Letter from a Grandmother

Six years ago, I received a letter from a lady in Wisconsin, who, if she is still alive, would be 95 years old this year. The settled spirit of her letter blessed me, so I kept it. Oh, that we all could grow old so gracefully! Here are excerpts:

“‘What do you want for your birthday, Grandma?’

“‘I’m thinking.’

What do I need? On my 89th birthday? How about a grateful heart? A heart that is thankful for the fresh air after the much-needed rain. A heart that counts blessings too numerous to list, which I’ve already mentioned to God. I’m forgetting names, and when I recall them, I forget how to spell them. But I’m alive!

“I have another day before me when I can keep cool in the face of distraction and irritation. Let it be a day when I can touch routine with the sheer happiness of serving You, Lord. Let it be a day of praise for the loving kindness You show, for the strength and power You lend to my life, for the unexpected joys that bless the hours, and for Your Spirit’s presence.

“That’s what I want for my birthday, and every day. A grateful heart.”

Grandmother’s Beatitudes

Blessed are those who understand my faltering step and palsied hand.

Blessed are those who know that my ears today must strain to catch the things they say.

Blessed are those who seem to know that my eyes are dim and my wits are slow.

Blessed are those who looked away when coffee spilled at table today.

Blessed are those with a cheery smile who stop to chat for a little while.

Blessed are those who never say, “You’ve told that story twice today.”

Blessed are those who know the ways to bring back memories of yesterdays.

Blessed are those who make it known that I’m loved, respected, and not alone.

Blessed are those who know I’m at a loss to find the strength to carry the Cross.

Blessed are those who ease the days on my journey Home in loving ways.

Esther Mary Walker

Gifts and Vocation Last a Lifetime

“I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called” (Ephesians 4:1, KJV).

Let us examine our capacities and gifts, and then put them to the best use we may. As our own view of life is of necessity partial, I do not find that we can do better than to put them absolutely in God’s hand, and look to him for the direction of our life-energy. God can do great things with our lives, if we but give them to Him in sincerity. He can make them useful, uplifting, heroic. God never wastes anything. God never forgets anything. God never loses anything. As long as we live we have a work to do. We shall never be too old for it, nor too feeble. Illness, weakness, fatigue, sorrow—none of these things can excuse us from this work of ours. That we are alive today is proof positive that God has something for us to do today.

Anna R. B. Lindsay (quoted in *Joy & Strength*, Mary Wilder Tileston, ed.)

Lars’ Ramblings From the Cove

The phone rang one noon as Elisabeth and I were in the kitchen. The call was not urgent, only an enjoyable natter. The young lady told me how much Elisabeth’s work had helped in her life. In conveying this, she said, “I have even named my cat after her.” Now this was not the usual thing; up until then we’d only known of a few babies named after Elisabeth. I had a bit of a laugh and asked, “why?” Well, she said, “it is because she is so feminine.” Had to agree at least with her good reasoning. Turned out the cat had three names: Annabelle Elisabeth Smith.

Quite aristocratic. An 18-month-old Maltese. Well, my Elisabeth did seem pleased, not responding as did Pat, a girl I was once sweet on when I lived on a farm and I had named our pretty Guernsey cow after her. Did me no good at all.

Among recent letters was one telling me that the correspondent's grandfather's name was Lars and if the last child had been a boy that would have been the name but it was not to be—a girl arrived. I jotted a note in return saying since Johnny Cash had a song titled "A Boy Named Sue," why not a girl named Lars? In the U.S. perhaps the name could be for either gender. Oh well, we're both from Norwegian ancestry. It was of no importance.

Just now I called to chat a bit with my cousin in Norway. It only took a few words to know that all was not well. Björg said, "Oh, such a sad day."

"What 's wrong?" Several things ran through my mind before she said, "Tønnes died Saturday." He was her brother-in-law. His wife had called to give the news and told how he had a moose-hunting trip planned for that day. At 6:45 she had heard him snoring, and at 7:00 the alarm went off and kept ringing. "Tønnes, shut the alarm off, you have to get up!" The alarm kept ringing. Tønnes as we knew him was no longer there. He was a big—no huge—good-natured man, ever helpful to all, historian of his community. When people in the town said "Tønnes" without a last name, all knew who they were speaking of. At 7:15 his hunting

companions called. "Where is Tønnes? We're waiting for him." "Tønnes has died." I wonder if there was something Tønnes had wanted to say to his hunting companions, his son, or Marit his wife, and had decided to wait until morning. More than once have I gone to sleep saying, "I'll do it in the morning."

Just a letter and a couple of phone calls without thoughts of the eternal significance. But as it says, "Do not boast of tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth." That's it from the Cove.

Breaking News From Lars:

"We've gotten into high cotton—a web page! You can find us at www.elisabethelliott.org."

Travel Schedule March-May 2003

March 14-15 Santa Clarita, Calif., Grace Baptist Church.

April 3 Fargo, N.D., New Life Center Auxiliary, Susan Asp, (218)236-0080.

May 9-11 Asheville, N.C., The Billy Graham Training Center. For reservations call 1-800-950-2092.

Many apologies: If you missed the Paris, Texas meeting because of the wrong date in the January/February issue, please drop me a postcard.

Lars Gren, 10 Strawberry Cove, Magnolia, MA 01930.

The Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter

Servant Ministries, Inc.
Post Office Box 7711
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48107-7711

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Non-profit
Organization
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit No. 14
Ann Arbor, MI