

The Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter

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The Future Is Not Our Province

While a new year offers us a fresh start, it can also bring anxiety. Questions crowd into our minds. Will my job become redundant? Is God going to keep me single for another whole year? Where is that mate He's supposed to be bringing me? Where will the money come from for college, rent, clothes, food? Must I continue to suffer this person, this church, this handicap, this pain, this loneliness? We have a calming word in Psalm 138:8, "The Lord will fulfill his purpose for me; your love, O Lord, endures forever—do not abandon the works of your hands." That word stands. He will fulfill. His love endures. He will not abandon.

We are meddling with God's business when we let all manner of imaginings loose, predicting disaster, contemplating possibilities instead of following, one day at a time, God's plain and simple pathway. When we try to meet difficulties prematurely we have neither the light nor the strength for them yet. "As thy days so shall thy strength be" was Moses' blessing for Asher—in other words, your strength will equal your days. God knows how to apportion each one's strength according to that day's need, however great or small. The psalmist understood this when he wrote, "Lord, you have assigned me my portion and my cup; you have made my lot secure" (16:5).

"What may be tomorrow's cross I never seek to find.

My Father says, 'Leave that to Me, and keep a quiet mind.'"

Anonymous

To lug into this new year all the baggage of last year would greatly impair our ability to concentrate on what our heavenly Father wants us to do. If there is someone we should forgive and learn to love, if there are debts which we have not paid, dishonesty we need to confess, an apology we must not postpone—or even a garage or closet that needs to be ransacked!—let us do what we ought to do *now*. Then we can say with Paul, "Not that

I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:12-14). The Lord says, "Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing!" (Isaiah 43:18-19).

Oswald Chambers wrote, "Our yesterdays present irreparable things to us; it is true that we have lost opportunities which will never return, but God can transform this destructive anxiety into a constructive thoughtfulness for the future. Let the past sleep, but let it sleep on the bosom of Christ. Leave the Irreparable Past in His hands, and step out into the Irresistible Future with Him" (*My Utmost for His Highest*, Dec. 31).

Students often ask me how to find out what God's will is. I tell them that the will of God for them today is to study! That's not what they want to hear, but that is surely an important part of God's will for students. They must not cut classes, plagiarize on their papers, cheat on exams, treat the professor disrespectfully, or shirk their duty to their roommate. Faithfulness today is the best preparation for the demands of tomorrow. If my job is to wash the car or fire an employee (I'm thankful I've never had to do that!) or fish for lobsters *today*, the faithful performance of that humble task will enable me to accept tomorrow's assignment. When the young virgin Mary received an unexpected visitor she was greatly troubled and wondered what his greeting meant. The angel said, "Do not be afraid, Mary," and gave her the staggering piece of news that she was to give birth to Jesus, the Son of the Most High, whose kingdom would never end. What thoughts must have flashed through her mind as to the future—how explain this, for example, to her fiance Joseph? She did not give way to that fear. She said "Behold"—a word that means look upon, regard, consider—"the handmaid of the Lord," putting herself instantly at His disposal, an act of unreserved self-donation and perfect surrender. She was attentive,

willing, ready to receive the Lord's word.

When Mary's story is told in Latin the word is *Fiat*, a loaded word meaning "So be it," "Let it happen as You wish," or "May it be to me as You have said." And what of us? Will we welcome the new year, assured that we are safe in the hands that hold the stars? Can we wholeheartedly surrender to God, leaving quietly with Him all the "what if's" and "but what about's"? Will we truthfully say to Him, "Anything You choose for me, Lord—to have, to be, to do, or to suffer. I am at Your orders. I have no agenda of my own"? It comes down to *Trust* and *Obey*, "for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus," as the old gospel song goes. Our future may look fearfully intimidating, yet we can look up to the Engineer of the Universe, confident that nothing escapes His attention or slips out of the control of those strong hands. Remember the assurance of St. Julian of Norwich: *All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well.*

In the story of my growing up, *The Shaping of a Christian Family*, I have told of our ritual of hymn singing every morning after breakfast. Usually we went straight through a hymn book, one hymn per day, no stanzas omitted. But on April 5, 1952, I was to sail from New York for Ecuador, where I hoped to be a missionary. My father made an exception on that early morning and allowed me to choose the hymn we would sing. This is the one I chose, little imagining how powerfully and literally it would describe the following years:

I Take Thy Promise, Lord

1. I take Thy prom - ise, Lord, in all its length,
2. There may be days of dark - ness and dis - tress,
3. Days there may be of joy, and deep de - light,
4. And all the oth - er days that make my life,
5. Spend Thou these days with me, all shall be Thine

And breadth and ful - ness, as my dai - ly strength,
When sin has pow'r to tempt, and care to press,
When earth seems fair - est, and her skies most bright;
Mark'd by no spe - cial joy or grief or strife,
So shall the dark - est hour with glo - ry shine.

In - to life's fu - ture fear - less I may gaze,
Yet in the dark - est day I will not fear,
Then draw me clos - er to Thee, lest I rest
Days fill'd with qui - et du - ties, triv - ial care,
Then when these earth - ly years have pass'd a - way,

For, Je - sus, Thou art with me all the days.
For, 'mid the shad - ows, Thou wilt still be near.
Else - where, my Sav - iour, than up - on Thy breast.
Bur - dens too small for oth - er hearts to share.
Let me be with Thee in the per - fect day. A - men.

Whatever Happened to Hymns?

Dr. James Montgomery Boice, pastor of Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, feels as I do about one of the saddest features of contemporary worship: "The great hymns of the church are on the way out. They are not gone entirely, but they are going. And in their place have come trite jingles that have more in common with contemporary advertising ditties than the psalms. The problem here is not so much the style of the music, though trite words fit best with trite tunes and harmonies. Rather it is with the content of the songs. The old hymns expressed the theology of the Bible in profound and perceptive ways and with winsome memorable language. Today's songs are focused on ourselves. They reflect our shallow or nonexistent

theology and do almost nothing to elevate our thoughts about God.

"Worst of all are songs that merely repeat a trite idea, word, or phrase over and over again. Songs like this are not worship, though they may give the churchgoer a religious feeling. They are mantras, which belong more in a gathering of New Agers than among the worshiping people of God."

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The Shepard Family

Yes, more than one person has told me it was time to include a picture of my daughter's family. Back from left: Walter III 20, Elisabeth 18, Christiana 15, Jim 13, Colleen 11, Valerie and her pastor-husband Walt Jr.; front row: Evangeline 8, Theo 5, Sarah 4.

Quiet Time

"It is impossible for us to make the duties of our lot minister to our sanctification without a habit of devout fellowship with God. This is the spring of all our life, and the strength of it."

H.E. Manning, 1808-1892

Meekness Is Not Inherited

A reader of the book *Keep a Quiet Heart* wrote that this sentence had on her a profound impact: "Meekness is an explicitly spiritual quality, a fruit of the Spirit, *learned*, not inherited."

"Oh how firmly I waited, tarried, prayed, hoped and believed, in ignorance, arrogance, and stubbornness for the fruits of the Spirit to be poured out on me as a gift. I assumed God would grant love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness [meekness], goodness, faithfulness, and self control just as He granted my salvation. How my mouth dropped open and my eyes filled with tears and my head shook 'No' as this answer came to my desperate entreaties. I realized that peace lies in obedience, doing the will of my Father, and acceptance.... My next step led to searching every scripture

on meekness (the opposite of anger) and finding out that meekness is a cultivated response. I am forced to learn of Christ."

Gateway to Joy

Some of you may not know about a fifteen-minute broadcast called Gateway to Joy, five days a week. One listener says my program is "not easy to listen to—the issues you address are painful, unpopular, uncomfortable—but I love listening, learning, sharing with others, and being accountable before my children!" By calling 1-800-759-4JOY you can find out if there is a station near you that carries it. Those who have computers may wish to visit our Web site at www.gatewaytojoy.org, where transcripts of the programs are available for reading (or listening through RealAudio).

Note from Lars

The day is sunny—78 degrees. I've not gone bonkers. Today is 14 September. Of course you're reading it in January '98. That's the way deadlines work. So it is with positive anticipation that I thank all of you for keeping the newsletter in the black through another year. We also appreciate those who sign up but are unable to contribute. Never hesitate to do so if that is your case.

Through the year we have had the pleasure of meeting some of you on the road. Always enjoyable unless there have been mailing problems. Others of you have been helping to increase the volume of letters to us. Since letters are handled by the Grens it has passed the point where we can answer all. I try to help out with a postcard, which may or may not be a help. But we do read them and take them seriously.

So now that '97 is behind us, may '98 be for you a year of experiencing God's peace and joy, as Elisabeth says, "in this present moment."

Prayer

My brother Phil Howard has reminded me of the desperate plight of so many Christians who are being horribly persecuted, imprisoned, tortured, and killed. He sent me a map showing Cuba, Algeria, Iran, Sudan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Sri Lanka, China, Bhutan, and Indonesia—all of them places where severe persecution

is a near-daily occurrence. The twentieth century has seen more Christians die for their faith than in the previous nineteen centuries combined. Dr. Paul Marshall's book *Their Blood Cries Out* (Word Publishers), is a bibliography describing what is happening. May God give us compassion and the will to seek His direction about what we can do.

Against Counseling?

Word has got round somehow that Elisabeth Elliot is categorically against folks going to professional Christian counselors. Not true! I most earnestly want to encourage people in trouble to take those troubles *first* to the Cross. An hour of silence on our knees in the presence of God is worth far more than hours of stewing or phone calls to people who will feel sorry for us. This is not to say that all difficulties should be resolved in an hour, of course. Learning to *accept* one's lot for today only is a good beginning. Waiting on God is a hard discipline. We'd often rather talk about it to "somebody with skin on." But "O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear, all because we do not carry everything to God in prayer!" "But I did pray and nothing happened," we may say. Love is very patient. Love always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Remember that we have a "Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father" (Isaiah 9:6).

KEEP IN TOUCH

Are you moving? Getting married? Leaving school? *Don't forget to send us your change of address.* The post office DOES NOT FORWARD third class mail like the Newsletter. *Please remove your address label below and send it with your new address to:* The Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter, Post Office Box 7711, Ann Arbor, MI 48107-7711.

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ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

Travel Schedule January – March 1998

January 12, 13 Taping for *Gateway to Joy*.

January 17 S. Hamilton, Mass., Gordon-Conwell Seminary, David Horne, (508)468-7111.

January 20 Leesburg, Fla., First Baptist women's dinner, (352)787-1005.

January 31 Boston, Mass., Vision NE Congress, Andrew S. Accardy, (617)229-1903.

February 14 Louisville, Ky., Southeast Christian Church, Lynn Reece, (502)451-0047.

February 20 Houston, Tex., New Life Christian Center, Sharon Cave, (713)947-1678.

February 21 Bryan/College Station, Tex., women's conference, Marsha Ross, (409) 694-9335.

February 28 Murfreesboro, Tenn., Trinity Presbyterian Church, (615)895-2018.

March 1, 2 Murfreesboro (same as above)

March 2, 3 Lookout Mountain, Tenn., Lookout Mountain Presbyterian Church, (423)821-4528.

March 7 Denver, Colo., Pillar of Fire, Pat LaPlante, (303)428-0910.

March 8 Denver, Colo., Radio 910 KPOF, Belleview Community Chapel, (303)428-0910.

March 13, 14 San Juan Capistrano, Calif., Assemblies of God, Judy Rachels, (714)252-8695.

March 16 Modesto, Calif., Calvary Chapel, Karin Kyle, (209)521-5501.

March 23, 24 Taping for *Gateway to Joy*.

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