

The Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter

July/August 1996

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On Asking Questions

One often hears people say, "The first question I'm going to ask God when I get to heaven is..." During His final discourse with the disciples before He went to the cross they were asking Him many questions. Jesus said to them, "Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy. In that day you will no longer ask me anything" (John 16:22, 23, NIV). The King James Version says, "You will ask me no question." May not the sight of Jesus Himself in His glory make all our questions redundant, if not simply foolish? I'm sure I will be speechless.

The Parable of the Sower teaches us that often there is not a willing reception of the Word of God. The seed falls on the footpath (e.g., the well-worn, accepted notions of the world) and Satan takes away what has been sown. Some falls on rocks, and has no staying power (when there is trouble we easily give up). Some falls among thistles (the worries of this world, the false glamour of riches, ambitions that choke out the life). And some, Jesus said, falls on good soil. His word is heard, welcomed, and produces fruit.

Any speaker who takes questions from the floor soon learns that there are not many new ones. When I examine my own heart and find that I am tempted to say to the Lord, "Yes, but—" or "What about—?" or "How can I possibly—?" I find that He has questions for me:

Are you willing to understand?

to rearrange your life?

to be healed?

to lose your life for My sake?

Do you want solutions or holiness?

answers or orders?

the light of Christ or your own logic?

And the still small voice says, *You must become like a little child.*

What does this mean? I must ask myself: do I treat the truth of God as though it were something to be tinkered with or something to be submitted to? Do I ask, "What will this *do*—to my friend or to my plans or to

myself?" God tells me I must leave such questions to Him, and do at once the thing He requires. My parents usually treated delayed obedience as disobedience. He who hesitated risked a spanking! How much more quickly we would find the answer we worry about if we just set about doing the thing the Lord tells us to do. Obedience opens our eyes. Do it, with childlike faith, no matter what the cost, for "whoever cares for his own safety is lost; but if a man will let himself be lost for my sake, he will find his true self" (Matthew 16:25, NEB).

Some of our questions, Romano Guardini says, are "afflictions of the heart that have assumed intellectual proportions." Evelyn Underhill puts it this way: "It is only disguised pride that makes us fret over what we can't understand."

God will see to it that we understand as much truth as we are willing to obey. "He who belongs to God hears what God says," Jesus told the Jews who were arguing with Him. "The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God" (John 8:47, NIV). In other words, one's commitment to God—a total self-abandonment—is prerequisite to hearing. When we wonder *how* God will do a thing this may spring from spiritual lust: I must have an explanation! We demand an answer when we ought to pray for a deeper confidence in Him who is the Answer. A simple heart, full of love for God, will soon learn what to do. Questions will be quieted. "The fruit of righteousness will be peace; the effect of righteousness will be quietness and confidence forever. My people will live in peaceful dwelling places, in secure homes, in undisturbed places of rest" (Isaiah 32:17, NIV).

Dear old George MacDonald always has a gentle understanding of our humanness and God's merciful lovingkindness. He writes, "Questions imply answers. If God has put the question in my heart, then He must hold the answer in His. I will seek them from Him. I will wait, but not until I have knocked. I will be patient, but not until I have asked. I will seek until I find. He has something for me. My prayer shall go up unto the God of my life" (*Unspoken Sermons*, First series, "The Higher Faith").

Jungle Journey

Last January, as the May/June Newsletter reported, we marked the fortieth anniversary of the massacre of five missionaries in Ecuador by visiting the Auca Indians. But the events that led up to our arrival on the Curaray River most wonderfully illustrated the guidance of a faithful Shepherd:

1. We left home in a roaring blizzard, sure that Boston's airport would be closed, and/or our flight to Miami cancelled but...
2. the Lord took us safely over hazardous highways.
3. Nearly all flights *were* cancelled except ours.
4. Although we were on standby, we got on board.
5. We met Valerie and Walt in Miami as scheduled and flew together to Quito, where...
6. their son Walter, who had been in Peru for three months with his great-uncle Bert (Jim Elliot's missionary brother), met us at the airport.

I won't go on with the numbers—it was simply one step after another as the Lord opened the way. "When He putteth forth His sheep, He goeth before." And so He did. We learned that the road to the eastern jungle was closed because of landslides. Nothing new about that, but what to do? There's another road, we learned—one that used to be a mule trail in "my" day. Could we get a bus, a banana truck, or what? Who should turn up at the guest house where we were staying but Steve Saint, son of slain missionary pilot Nate. He asked our plans. We confessed they were not very clear. "We're going to the jungle tomorrow," said he. "Why don't we go together?" We did. In a borrowed van we traveled up to the high grass country of the Andes, through Pifo and Papallacta ("Potato Town"), down through Baeza to jungle country and what used to be the very small town of Tena. Venancio, with whom I had been corresponding for six months in order to arrange to see him and the other Quichuas I know, lives near Tena. I fully expected to find him easily. What was my dismay then to find that Tena is now a metropolis.

We stopped at a small restaurant. A young man came up to the van. "Buenos dias," said he. "Buenos dias," said I. "Runa shimira rimacchu angui?" said I, which meant, "Are you a speaker of Quichua?" (my Quichua is not quite so rusty as my Spanish). An astonished smile spread over his face. "Ari!" Yes! And did he happen to know Venancio? Yes. Could he lead us to his house? Of course. Venancio's dear wife Ana fell into my arms with tears of joy, then the stunning announcement that Venancio had gone that morning to the hospital in Quito—"a ball in his neck." Alas. It sounded serious. "But he will be back this evening." We did not

believe her—a five-hour bus trip each way, a visit to the doctor, etc.? No, he couldn't possibly make it.

Next question: where could five "gringos" spend the night? Eduardo, our young guide, knew the perfect place—at his father-in-law's. Clemente Chimbo was just a boy when I left Ecuador in 1963, but now he broadcasts the gospel in Quichua on the jungle network, and has established a little "resort"—four palm-thatched huts on the beautiful Pano River. Never had I anticipated anything nearly so luxurious, not in the jungle. A hammock, perhaps, somewhere—but beds? mattresses? sheets? blankets? pillows? *mosquito nets*? They had everything, including a pet monkey and parrot to entertain us, a little girl who raced up a tree and brought down what they called grapes, and a sort of "sitting room"—a thatched roof on poles with no walls, but benches, hammocks, and a fire. We made ourselves at home.

Clemente's wife Juanita began to cry as soon as she saw Valerie. She remembered her! They were eight years old when they last saw each other. I had forgotten her, but she remembered the dolls they played with, the little playhouse which collapsed because of termites, the fun they had in the river. On and on she went, laughing and crying, hugging her friend.

But now—what would we like for supper? What did they have? Everything, they said, could be had in Tena. Everything? Well, vegetables then, please. And off they went, returning with two enormous sacks full. Juanita and her daughter-in-law soon called us to the "dining room," we ate our fill, and then sat around the fire, listening to Clemente's stories until—incredibly—Venancio suddenly appeared. He had left for Quito at 1:00 A.M. and was back. He had been the school teacher and Jim Elliot's right-hand man in Shandia, the Quichua station where we lived. Never did a man grieve more than Venancio did when, a few days after January 8, 1956, I returned to Shandia with the news that Jim and Ed and Pete, all of whom had worked there, and Nate, who served the station with his little plane, had been killed by the Aucas (now called *Waorani*). He had immediately taken up the "mantle," as it were, and become the shepherd of the flock of fifty newly baptized Quichua believers. I have never known a humbler, more

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faithful, godly man. In recent years he has been working with the Waorani also, learning their language, assisting the missionaries as he is able.

That night it rained as it can only rain in the rain forest—a tremendous battering of our thatched roofs, surely as loud as rain on palm leaves could ever be. But no—the volume gets turned up louder. And louder yet, when the Lord “tips over the water jars of the heavens” (Job 38:37). Will that flimsy thatch give way? It doesn’t. Indians know how to thatch roofs that last for years. But my, didn’t it rain, and wasn’t I delighted that we were being treated to “the works”! Getting to the out-house and down to the river to shave and wash and brush teeth—what fun for all!

We boarded a bus that morning for the fifteen-minute ride (a three-hour walk, as I remembered it) to Shandia. The bus was packed, and as one woman moved to give Valerie a seat she suddenly cried, “I know you! We used to play together! Remember the playhouse that collapsed one night?” Thirty-three years had passed, yet they knew each other. We got off the bus at the end of what used to be our airstrip, now a road, and walked to the Atun Yacu (Big River), along the cliff, and through the forest to the house Jim built, where we were welcomed by the Grifa family who live there. Of course Val showed Walt and Walter through the house—her schoolroom, the guest room, her bedroom and mine, where I had written *Shadow of the Almighty* at the desk Jim had built in the corner. Then upstairs, where I taught Quichua girls to read, write, and sew. The Grifas fixed us a lunch of manioc, boiled eggs, and chicha, a drink made from manioc. While we were sitting there, up the trail came an Indian followed by a tall, blond young man wearing a very fancy motorcycle suit. He came in, spoke to Walt and Lars in English with a foreign accent, then came toward me with hand outstretched.

“I know you,” he said. “I’ve read your books in German.”

I gasped. He had been studying Spanish in Quito for some time, but was determined to make a trip to Shandia to see the house Jim built, for his testimony had made a profound impact on this man’s life. So he had ridden his motorcycle for five hours. Unbelievable that, in the short time we were there, this dedicated “fan” of Jim’s should arrive and find Jim’s wife and daughter in that house! Have we not a faithful—and amazing—Shepherd?

We had another night in our little huts, flagged a pickup truck next morning and went to church in Tena with Venancio and Ana, and were then picked up by a Mission Aviation pilot and flown to the home of Steve and Ginny Saint (as told in the May/June Newsletter)

on the Curaray, downriver from where the five men were killed in 1956. What a reunion with my Auca friends—many who are now Christians, Ipa, who was a great help to me when I was first learning their language, and many others.

Walt, Walter, and Lars were eager for a jungle trek. I bowed out. Five hours on a jungle trail? Mud? Ravines? Rainstorms? and lots of *et ceteras*? I’d *been* there, *done* that! Steve flew them to another airstrip and, accompanied by an Indian and Steve’s son Jess, they slogged five hours through the forest, most of the time in a state-of-the-art downpour. Lovely. The full treatment, the works, again, and nary a syllable of complaint from one of them.

Ginny served us, in addition to more familiar things, wild turkey, wild pig, and woolly monkey which one of the hunters brought. In the evening a great crowd filled all the hammocks in the house—school children and their teacher, proud parents who couldn’t read but were thrilled that their children could. They recited and sang for us, and some of the old men and women sang their ancient traditional three-note songs (I remembered one of them and sang along). Then we *kuwuri* (foreigners) were commanded to perform as well. We obliged, with old gospel songs (in English, of course) and even some childhood songs with motions—“Climb, climb up Sunshine Mountain,” etc. No one wanted to leave. It was far past bedtime for us old folks, but who could leave such a joyful company? Who could bear to miss hearing Kimo and Minkayi, two of the men who had had part in the massacre, pray, thanking God for sending Jesus to teach them how to live, asking Him to help them to love Him more?

Consciousness from Lars

In response to a letter a woman sent me a card saying “your letter flowed out of a stream of consciousness.” It was news to me. As I sit trying to put a few things together and get nothing I wonder about the reality of her statement. Reminds me of a time when I told Elisabeth: “I tell you everything that’s on my mind.” Her reply was, “Well, that doesn’t amount to much.” “You’re right about that.” Let’s see if my mind is at least in drive.

A huge thank you should have been included in the Jan/Feb issue for again making my work on the Newsletter easy. Many do not know that should the Newsletter run in the red, I’m the one who would have to write the triple-underline, exclamation point, triple-P.S. letters of appeal. Your generosity has kept me from trying this and we are grateful. Thank you too for your response to the *Keep a Quiet Heart* book offer.

Biggest change of '95 at home was my getting a push button phone. Don't enjoy it. Now all I get are options and recorded voices. Would like to go back to "number please." Biggest addition—MAIL. We can't keep up with it. We do appreciate your many kind and encouraging words to E. Also prayers for my glaucoma. It does seem my eyes are holding and able to continue as though I was normal.

As some of you know, I try to answer part of the mail on postcards. It's not much, but it's the best I can do. Elisabeth, of course, reads it all, and, as I said, is very thankful for the response.

Well, for the rest of '96 and into whatever years the Lord allows Elisabeth to continue writing the Newsletter, and my every now and then adding to it, we trust that computers, voiceless phones, and any other modern convenience will work smoothly and cause you kind folks fewer problems.

Norway is a beautiful country in May if the sun shines. According to Elisabeth, it does, of course, rain most of the time, and is not too warm. I disagree. In May of '93 we did have a tour in northern Norway from Oslo by bus to Kirkenes and then south by steamer through the fjords. That time the sun did shine—even throughout the night. I'm toying with the idea of having another similar tour in May of '97. Might there be a few who would be interested in coming along? Elisabeth would join us just for the boat part. Besides the weather perhaps being a drawback, Norway is an expensive country. The tour price (unless we get group rates) is \$3000 for the eleven days, not including airfare from the U.S. Accommodations and meals are first class by land or sea. If interested, *don't write to the Newsletter*. Write to me: Lars Gren, 10 Strawberry Cove, Magnolia, MA 01930.

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ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

Travel Schedule July - September 1996

July 7 Asbury Grove, S. Hamilton, Mass.

July 13 Anaheim, Calif., Christian Home Educators, (310)864-CHEA.

July 14 La Mirada, Calif., Granada Heights Friends Church, Mina Taylor, 15120 Carretera Dr., Whittier, CA 90605.

July 15, 16 Anaheim, Calif., Christian Booksellers Convention.

August 25-31 N. Ireland, Bangor Worldwide Missionary Convention, Mr. Raymond Pitt, (011)353-247-460868.

September 1 N. Ireland.

September 2-7 speaking in England.

September 25-30 Toalmas, Hungary.

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