

# The Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter

March/April 1994

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## Stillness

Full moon on a silver sea. Shadows throwing into sharp relief the luminous rocks. I sat in the antique rocking chair by the window, a cup of hot Postum in my hand, fascinated by the undulation of great swaths of foam on the ocean, almost fluorescent in the moonlight.

Stillness. Perfect stillness. It is a very great gift, not always available to those who would most appreciate it and would find joy in it, and often not appreciated by those who have it but are uncomfortable with it. External noise is inescapable in many places—traffic on land and in the air, sirens, horns, chain saws, loud voices and, perhaps worst of all, screaming rock music with thundering amplification which makes the very ground shudder.

I think it is possible to *learn* stillness—but only if it is seriously sought. God tells us, “Be still, and know that I am God” (Ps 46:10, NIV). “In quietness and confidence shall be your strength” (Is 30:15, KJV).

The stillness in which we find God is not superficial, a mere absence of fidgeting or talking. It is a deliberate and quiet attentiveness—receptive, alert, ready. I think of what Jim Elliot wrote in his journal: “Wherever you are, be *all there*. Live to the hilt every situation you believe to be the will of God”—not so difficult, perhaps, for a sports fan, eyes riveted on the game. For me, however, this quietness in the presence of God, this being “all there” for Him, though I treasure it and long for it, is not easy to maintain, even in the beautiful place where I live. I am easily distracted, more so, it seems, as soon as I try to focus on God Himself and nothing else. Why should this be? I think C.S. Lewis puts his finger right on it in *The Screwtape Letters*, which purports to be the correspondence between Screwtape, under-secretary to the devil, and his nephew, Wormwood, instruct-

ing him in the best ways to tempt the followers of the Enemy, God:

My dear Wormwood: Music and silence—how I detest them both! How thankful we should be that ever since our Father entered Hell—though longer ago than humans, reckoning in light years, could express, no square inch of infernal space and no moment of infernal time has been surrendered to either of those abominable forces, but all has been occupied by Noise—Noise, the grand dynamism, the audible expression of all that is exultant, ruthless, and virile—Noise which alone defends us from silly qualms, despairing scruples, and impossible desires. We will make the whole universe a noise in the end. We have already made great strides in this direction as regards the Earth. The melodies and silences of Heaven will be shouted down in the end. But I admit we are not yet loud enough, or anything like it. Research is in progress.

C.S. Lewis died in 1963. Research in noise-making has made considerable progress since then, don't you think? To learn stillness we must resist our ancient foe, whose craft and power are great, and who is armed with cruel hate. There is One far greater who is on our side. His voice brought stillness to fierce winds and wild waves, and He will surely help us if we put ourselves firmly and determinedly in His presence—“I'm here, Lord. I'm listening.” If no word seems to be forthcoming, remember “it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord,” and “when He gives quietness, who then can make trouble?” (Lam 3:26, NIV; Jb 34:29, KJV).

Silence is one form of worship. When the seventh seal was opened (in St. John's Revelation), there was silence in heaven for the space of half an hour. What would happen in our homes if we should try to prepare ourselves for those heavenly silences by having just one half-hour when there is no door slamming, no TV, no stereo or video, and a minimum of talk, in quiet voices? Wouldn't it also be a calming thing just to practice the stillness which is the absence of *motion*? My father used to have us try this every now and then. Why not

try a Quiet Day or even a Quiet Week without the usual noises (could anyone endure a TV-less week?). It might open vistas of the spiritual life hitherto closed, a depth of communion with the Lord impossible where there is nothing but noise. Does God seem absent? Yes, for most of us He sometimes does. Even at such a time may we not simply be still before Him, trusting that He reads the perplexity we cannot put into words?

## *Fear of Future*

One of the greatest obstacles to waiting silently on God is fear. We fear silence itself—what might it reveal? We fear boredom. We fear intimacy, lest we find ourselves exposed. And we fear the future. Francois de la Mothe Fénelon has a word for us here:

The crosses which we make for ourselves by a restless anxiety as to the future, are not crosses which come from God. We show want of faith in Him by our false wisdom, wishing to forestall His arrangements, and struggling to supplement His Providence by our own providence. The future is not yet ours; perhaps it never will be. If it comes, it may come wholly different from what we have foreseen. Let us shut our eyes, then, to that which God hides from us, and keeps in reserve in the treasures of His deep counsels. Let us worship without seeing, let us be silent; let us abide in peace.

## *The Favor*

A girl of eleven who wishes to remain nameless wrote this, based on John 3:16:

"Son!" The Father called His Son to His side.

"Yes, my Father," the Son answered. He knew what was coming.

"I want to ask a favor of you."

The Son didn't need any more hints. "This is it," He thought. And said out loud, "Yes?"

The Father could tell by His Son's face. He knew everything about "the favor."

"You know about it?"

"Well..." the Son answered.

"I want you to... to sacrifice Yourself... to come as a little baby boy, normally, from a woman's womb, and then grow up normally—and sacrifice Your life... for the whole world."

"I will do it—everything, anything You ask of Me," the Son said.

"You know what this means... no wife, no sons

and daughters, hardly any friends. You will be cheated, laughed at, looked down upon, hated, despised, tempted, and rejected in every way. But..."

"Yes, my Father, I know all that... but I will do it happily, willingly, and obey You right away."

"But just remember," the Father continued, "whenever any of that happens, You have more power than anyone and everything."

"I will remember."

The time came for the Son to go. "Son, besides remembering You have all that power, remember that I love You... more than ever... today, and always."

"I love You, too!" the Son answered. And He left.

Jesus was the Son in the story, who came to earth willingly, to save us from our sins. For the rest of the story—told better than anyone—read all four gospel books of the Bible.

## *Vinson: Afraid? Of What?*

I was eight years old when one of my missionary heroines, Betty Scott Stam, was beheaded by Chinese Communists, along with her husband. Her biography contained a poem which made a very deep impression on me then, and an even deeper one years later, when my husband Jim Elliot was speared to death in Ecuador. Here is the story of how that poem came to be:

In 1931 a missionary named John W. Vinson was itinerating in North China when an army of bandits swooped down on the village where he was staying, looting, burning, and killing. They then took captive about 150 Chinese to hold for ransom. Their prize captive was John Vinson. When government troops pursued them the bandits offered Vinson his freedom if he would write a letter to the commanding officer, asking him to withdraw his troops.

"Will you also free these Chinese prisoners?" Vinson asked.

"Certainly not!" was the reply.

"Then I refuse to go free."

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That night the bandits tried to flee, taking Vinson with them. Many were killed, and many of the captives escaped, but because of a recent operation Vinson could not run. One of the prisoners, a little Chinese girl, later told of seeing a bandit point a gun at Vinson's head.

"I'm going to kill you," he said. "Aren't you afraid?"

"No, I am not afraid," was the calm reply. "If you kill me, I will go right to God."

Another missionary, E.H. Hamilton, also itinerating in bandit territory, heard the sad news. For a few moments he sat silently in his study, then, picking up his pen he wrote this poem in fifteen minutes:

Afraid? Of what?

To feel the spirit's glad release?  
To pass from pain to perfect peace,  
The strife and strain of life to cease?  
Afraid—of that?

Afraid? Of what?

Afraid to see the Savior's face,  
To hear His welcome, and to trace  
The glory gleam from wounds of grace?  
Afraid—of that?

Afraid? Of what?

A flash—a crash—a pierced heart,  
Darkness—light—Oh, Heaven's art!  
A wound of His a counterpart!  
Afraid—Of that?

Afraid? Of what?

To enter into Heaven's rest,  
And yet to serve the Master blest,  
From service good to service best?  
Afraid—of that?

Afraid? Of what?

To do by death what life could not:  
Baptize with blood a stony plot,  
Till souls shall blossom from the spot?  
Afraid—of that?

## *The God-Potential in Children*

"I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth" (3 Jn 4, NIV).

From time to time a missionary in Costa Rica named Aziel Jones writes to me. Last November he told of the dedication of the New Testament which he and his

family had translated into Cabecar. The church in that tribe had grown up around their little simple Bible studies, held in Indians' homes. People learned to read, to participate, and some believed.

So the Word gave birth to the church, so there was a church to receive the New Testament.... It was fun to watch people open the book and find what they wanted immediately—they were already on familiar territory. The Lord had done a lot more preparation of the soil than we realized, and the church was stronger and bigger. Yesterday I got my first direct expression of appreciation from a Cabecar: "Praise the Lord you came!" As you know, missionaries may wait a lifetime for that!...

Elisabeth, I want to say one thing about children: I wish couples could see the potential that children are, as they are molded for God. I insist, in our case, that it is grace—even if we did do a few things right. But I am appalled at the lack of vision for the "God-potential" in children. Here I want to point out what I'm experiencing to the hilt, and have heard very little about: the joy of having children with you in the ministry, the satisfaction of letting them take the reins of your ministry, and the deep awareness that you live on in them. It is the Christian answer to the futility of life. Finally, the joy of seeing five sons in the context of the New Testament dedication is worth all the efforts to mold them, all the money to train them, all the snide remarks when having them, all the years of discipling (teaching, training and punishing), all the prayer and fasting for them in their struggles, all the sacrifice of lifestyle that a large family involves, and all the complexities of coming and going, living cross-culturally—and seeing them talk and fit in better than you do. Well, Elisabeth, *this* end of things should determine one's vision for children, in having and training them. *We are truly blessed*, and everyone knows it. But we were truly blessed when *no one* knew it—*except us!* "Where there is no vision the people perish."

## *Prayer*

O Lord, who art as the Shadow of a great Rock in a weary land, who beholdest Thy weak creatures, weary of labor, weary of pleasure, weary of hope deferred, weary of self; in Thine abundant compassion and unutterable tenderness, bring us, I pray Thee, unto Thy rest. Amen.

—Christina Rosetti

- Please pray for Rachel Saint, who has cancer. She and I worked for two years with the Aucas (Waurani) of eastern Ecuador. She has been there most of the time ever since 1958.
- Praise for an unforgettable weekend at America's Keswick in New Jersey last October, a place filled with memories of my childhood when our family used to go there, and of great men and women of God who deeply influenced my life, e.g. James Mallis of India, L.L. Legters of Mexico, Tommy Titcombe and Dr. Virginia Blakesley of Africa, not to mention my father, a frequent speaker there. I never imagined myself as a speaker forty-three years later. It's all of *grace*. I know I have nothing that has not been *given* and I thank the Giver.

### 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.

### Travel Schedule March-July 1994

**February 19-March 7** Tour in Ireland and England, auspices of Saltmine Trust, 0902-881080.

**March 19** Akron, OH; Moody Seminar, Mrs. Jo' McCarthy, (312) 329-4000.

**March 26** South Hamilton, MA; Gordon-Conwell Seminary, Robert Freeman, (508) 468-7111.

**April 9** Grand Junction, CO; Redlands Community Church, Sharon Gross, (303) 245-9020 or 8071.

**April 22-24** La Jolla, CA; Women's retreat, Cindy Travisano, (714) 581-5391 or 770-3147.

**May 7** Syracuse, NY; Radio rally, Gordon Bell, (315) 469-5051.

**May 14** Harrisburg, PA; Home Schoolers' Fair, Kim Huber, (717) 653-8892.

**May 19-30** Ecuador, South America.

**June 7** Peterboro, NH; Pregnancy Resource Center, Beth Cutaiar, (603) 924-8788.

**June 24-26** NC, E's 50th high school reunion.

**July 23** Tuxedo, NC; Camp Greystone.

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