

The Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter

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Suffering and Joy

In 1976 I learned that Corrie ten Boom was to speak at nearby Gordon College in Wenham, Massachusetts. "Oh!" thought I, "I do hope she will tell us of her prison experience!" Of course I bought tickets for my daughter and me, and it was with great anticipation that we went. She did indeed tell her story and then, to my astonishment, she invited Valerie and me to have tea with her later that week. When we arrived at the house where she was staying her secretary met us at the door, explained that Corrie was in bed—not ill, just her one-day-a-week in bed, doctor's orders, so that she could continue to "tramp for the Lord." She was by then, I believe, in her eighties.

As we entered the bedroom she stretched out her hands to us with a warm, welcoming smile. We asked for more of her story.

"Oh, I've had a very happy life! I've been single because the Lord chose single life for me. I had said, 'I'm yours, Lord, lock, stock, and barrel!' I prayed for victory over the sex life and Jesus gave it."

We spoke of the meaning of suffering. "American Christians are open and eager," she said, "but they do not understand the suffering they must undergo. Christians in Communist countries are much happier. They have to be genuine because of the terrible price they must pay."

I asked how we ought to prepare for suffering.

"Soak in the Word!" was her answer. I was glad for that, for I have often been asked why I speak and write so often about suffering. There are more than a hundred references to suffering in the New Testament alone.

"I learned of my heavenly Father's love through my own father," Corrie said. "When as a child I couldn't sleep he would put his big hand over my little face. In prison I would say to the Lord, 'Father, just put Your big hand over my little face.' Then I could sleep."

Did she like the movie about her life, *The Hiding Place*?

"Yes, but of course only about one one-hundredth of the suffering was shown."

Because I speak often in public I wondered if she

might sometimes feel as I do: Is it right to tell the same story over and over? What if my audience were to say, "Has she got nothing else to talk about except things that happened decades ago?" Her answer comforted me.

"Oh, yes! I dreaded that criticism. But I spoke to my Father—I must have something new! But He said, 'That is the story I gave you. You tell that story!' No, it is humbling to have to say the same thing."

And what of earthly honor?

"If He gives grace, He may give honor too. But I always remember the donkey—he was not proud. He knew that the palms and Hosannas were not for him. They were for Jesus! So when I'm given compliments I make a little bouquet of them at the end of the day, and I give my bouquet to Jesus."

Her secretary served us tea and biscuits as we talked about many things. Then Corrie suddenly jumped out of bed and ran (in her purple silk pajamas) over to her suitcase. She took out a square of satin which she held up so that we saw nothing that could be called a pattern, only a jumble of colored threads. Turning it over she showed us a beautifully embroidered gold crown on a purple background. Then she repeated from memory the lovely words of Grant Colfax Tullar, entitled "The Weaver":

"My life is but a weaving betwixt my Lord and me,
I do not choose the colors—He worketh steadily.
Ofttimes He weaveth sorrow, and I in foolish pride,
Forget He sees the upper, and I the underside.
Not till the loom is silent, and the shuttles cease to
fly
Shall God unroll the canvas and explain the reason
why.
The dark threads are as needful in the Weaver's
skillful hand
As the threads of gold and silver in the pattern He
has planned."

She inscribed her book *In My Father's House* for me, and *The Hiding Place* for Val. We left there knowing we had been with a true saint and prophet. It was an especially crucial juncture in my life. My one and only child was about to leave for college, an event filled with joyful anticipation for her but a great mixture of

sorrow and joy for a mother. I was a widow then, and dear Corrie, such a glad and strong soldier for Christ, was a very special messenger for me at a crossroad.

How blessed I have been in my life to have known many true soldiers of the Cross. I cannot count them, but I know that my mother's guest book holds the names of people from forty-two countries and twenty-four nationalities. We grew up on missionary stories. So I take the admonition of the writer to the Hebrews:

"We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure. We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised" (Hebrews 6:11,12, NIV).

"Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.' So we say with confidence, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?' Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Hebrews 13: 5-8, NIV).

Whatever may be troubling you at this moment is not new to the Lord Jesus. He is not taken by surprise. He is *the same*—in a prison cell in World War II and in the midst of your dilemma. It is no dilemma to Him. Consider the outcome of Corrie's life. Jesus is the same for you. He is not going to leave you. The negatives in verse six in the original are more powerful than the English language can express.

When Billy Graham on one of his television broadcasts interviewed Jeanette Clift George, who played the part of Corrie in *The Hiding Place*, he asked what characteristic of her personality seemed most outstanding. Without a moment's hesitation Jeanette answered, "Joy! It was her joy!" What was the source of that joy? Was it because Corrie was blessed with an unusual optimism, or because things had always worked out so nicely for her? It was far from that. She had learned the meaning of Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 4:15-18:

"All this is for your benefit.... Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal."

She followed her Master, fixing her eyes on Him "who for the joy set before him endured the cross,

scorning its shame, and sat down at the right of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart" (Hebrews 12:2, 3, NIV).

No Excuses

"In retrospect, almost all my life since the day I was first arrested had been the same: just for that particular week, that month, that season, that year, there had always been some reason for not writing—it was inconvenient or dangerous or I was too busy—always some need to postpone it. If I had given in to common sense, once, twice, ten times, my achievement as a writer would have been incomparably smaller. But I had gone on writing—as a bricklayer, in overcrowded prison huts, in transit jails without so much as a pencil, when I was dying of cancer, in an exile's hovel after a double teaching shift. I had let nothing—dangers, hindrances, the need for rest—to interrupt my writing, and only because of that could I say at fifty-five that I now had no more than twenty years of work to get through, and had put the rest behind me.

"My petty interferences—people, children, housework, public demands (but most of all, my own native undisciplined self)—bump against such reality. I continue to pound my balled fist against my own soft soul and to insist, No excuses! No excuses!"

Alexander Solzhenitsyn

Child Training

In 1956, when Valerie was nearly a year old, Mother sent me these excellent principles from Matthew Henry (1662-1714):

Proverbs 19:18 "Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying." Parents are here cautioned against the foolish indulgence of their children, that are untoward and viciously inclined, and that discover such an ill temper of mind

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as is not likely to be cured but by severity.

1. Do not say that it is all in good time to correct them. No, as soon as ever there appears a corrupt disposition in them, check it immediately, before it gets head [sic] and takes root, and is hardened into a habit; *chasten thy son while there is hope*, for, perhaps if he be let alone awhile, he will be past hope, and a much greater chastening will not do that which now a lesser would effect. It is easier plucking up weeds as soon as they spring up, and the bullock that is designed for the yoke should be betimes [before it is too late] accustomed to it.

2. Do not say that it is a pity to correct them, and that because they cry and beg to be forgiven, you cannot find in your heart to do it; if the point will be gained without correction well and good; but if you find as it often proves, that you are forgiving them once, upon a dissembled [false, counterfeit] repentance, and promise of amendment, does but embolden them to offend again, especially if it be a thing in itself sinful, as lying, swearing, ribaldry, stealing or the like; in such a case put on resolution, and *let not thy soul spare for his crying*. It is better that he should cry under thy rod, than under the sword of the magistrate, or, which is more fearful, that of divine vengeance.

Family Devotions

A reader asks me for suggestions for devotions for families with older children. I am very thankful to have grown up in a home where family devotions were held every morning *and* evening—without regard to our ages. Few families do that today. Few did it in “my day,” but my father took seriously the command of Deuteronomy 6:5-7, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.”

Every morning after breakfast we went into the living room for what my father called “Prayers.” The routine was always the same, even though there was a sixteen-year span between the oldest and youngest. Top priority was learning to sit still. The baby on Mother’s lap was not exempt from that lesson. We were reminded that the same applied at the table, in the car (seatbelts were unknown) and in church. It seems to be taken for granted today that children cannot be quiet.

Some folks even think it would be cruel to expect it!

We began with a hymn. Either Dad or Mother played the piano, and we all sang, all the stanzas. As a result, we learned theology quite painlessly from those great old hymns, and they are in our heads and in our hearts to this day.

Then followed a short reading from Hurlbut’s *Story of the Bible* (we wore out three copies, I think). We then went to our knees. Daddy prayed, including each of us and others. He ended his prayer with, “In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray,” whereupon we joined in praying the Lord’s Prayer.

Were we model children who paid attention to all this? Far from it! But it is wonderful how much sinks in by “osmosis”! We know dozens, perhaps hundreds, of hymns by heart. On the rare occasions when we get together, we sing—in parts. We have little trouble locating things in the Bible. We were greatly blessed in having parents who prayed.

I was with my daughter and son-in-law the first day they attempted “family” prayers. Their first child was two or three days old. Predictably, he set up an ear-splitting shriek as soon as Walt opened the Bible. Walt gave it a few tries, then sent the Bible skidding across the table. “Forget it! No way can we have family devotions with *this* going on!” Stick with it, I told him. You’ll be astounded at your children’s retention. Trust God for them.

Unequal Marriage?

If your spouse is an unbeliever or an uncommitted believer, you may receive a small bimonthly publication from Mary B. Wine, Box 2611, Kokomo, IN 46904. To subscribe she asks only for a donation. For a sample, please send one first-class stamp.

I Can Never Be Thrown Away

“God has created me to do Him some definite service; He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another. I have my mission.... I am necessary for His purpose. I may never know it in this life, but I shall be told it in the next.... I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons. He has not created me for naught. I shall do good, I shall do His work; I shall be an angel of peace, a preacher of truth in my own place, while not intending it, if I do but keep His commandments and serve Him in my calling.

"Therefore I will trust Him. Whatever, wherever I am, I can never be thrown away. If I am in sickness, my sickness may serve Him; in perplexity, my perplexity may serve Him. If I am in sorrow, my sorrow may serve him. My perplexity, or sickness, or sorrow may be necessary causes of some great end, which is quite beyond us. He does nothing in vain; He may prolong my life, He may shorten it; He knows what He is about. He may take away my friends, He may throw me among strangers, He may make me feel desolate, make my spirits sink, hide the future from me—still He knows what He is about!"

John Henry Newman

The Shepard Family's Move

Last November my son-in-law, Walter D. Shepard III, accepted the pastorate of the Harrison Bridge Road Church in Simpsonville, South Carolina, of which Dr. Jay Adams had been the pastor. Dr. Adams, a well-known author and teacher who has been a mentor to Walt for a number of years, is in his mid-seventies now and has not the best of health. Walt was happy in the church he had served for ten years in Orange County, California and was surprised to receive Dr. Adams' invitation. But consultation with his wife and family, his own congregation, the people in Simpsonville, and, of course, lots of praying and seeking the will of God convinced him that this was His call. Valerie and the children are happy at the prospect of being in a small town, a great contrast to the "other world" of southern California.

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ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

Travel Schedule March–May 1998

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*.

April 3, 4 Orlando, Fla., Calvary Chapel of Merritt Island, Linda Wolfe, (407)452-8387.

April 15, 16 Caister, England, FIEC, Malcolm Laver, 011-44-181-681-7422.

April 17 Hertford, England, All Nations College.

April 18 Harrow, England, Rayners Lane Baptist Church, 011-44-181-868-8584 or 427-6576.

May 2 Cincinnati, Ohio, Christian Medical and Dental Society, (423)844-1000.

May 3 Bristol, Tenn., The Cameo Theatre, Jennifer Berkley, (423)878-6279 (8:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M. EST).

May 8, 9 Wheaton College 50th class reunion.

May 10 Jacksonville, Fla., First Baptist Church, Guinell Freeman, (904)366-1242.

May 15, 16 Toronto, Canada, Focus on the Family, Dr. Bruce Gordon, (604)684-8333.

May 23 Memphis, Tenn., Victory Valley Auxiliary, Chryll Vollmer, (901)526-8403.

May 30 Mobile, Ala., Mrs. John Blachscher, Dauphin Way Baptist Church, (334) 342-3456.

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