

The Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter

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What Is a Wife To Do?

Many women write to me about their husbands—some of them so thankful for the godly men they've been given, some of them deeply troubled by ungodly behavior. I hear stories of professing Christians, pastors, church leaders who abuse their wives, neglect their children, spend money foolishly, etc. Recently several have written about men who habitually indulge in sexual sin of one sort or another. Usually the wife tells me she has confronted him with God's word, requested that he desist, begged him to submit to Christian counselling, discussed the deleterious effect it has on their marriage, and asked him to understand how deeply he is hurting those who love him. He turns a deaf ear.

What is a *wife* to do? *That* is the question I am asked. If I were asked what the husbands should do the answer is simple: quit it. When I say simple, of course, I do not mean easy. First a man must repent and admit his helplessness, which may be harder for a man than for us. Then he may be willing to accept the help of others who have walked the same path. Accountability and encouragement can help him see his sin for what it is.

God has given us a will, and promises the strength to say no to temptation. He never allows us to be tempted beyond our ability to resist. He will give us all the help we are *willing* to receive. "I will obey your decrees. I call out to you; save me and I will keep your statutes. I rise before dawn and cry for help; I have put my hope in your word. My eyes stay open through the watches of the night, that I may meditate on your promises" (Ps 119:145-148, NIV). The man whose temptation is pornography, for example, is not *forced* to go to the blue movie, open the pornographic mail or magazine, or visit the "adult" bookstore. But he, of

course, is not asking me or anyone else for advice. He doesn't want it. No amount of counselling, professional or otherwise, will change his lust unless he is willing to be changed. There must be a readiness to do what God says. "It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen" (1 Thes 4:3-5, NIV). That is what God has to say about it, and He has never given a command which he will not enable us to obey. It is ALWAYS possible to do the will of God.

In some cases the wife has not felt that it was *her* duty to confront him. While my first impulse was to say she should, further thought and prayer convinced me that she may be right. Are we not to have a gentle and quiet spirit? Is it the wife's place to confront, in view of 1 Peter 3:1-2, 6? "[Your husbands] may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. ... You are [Sarah's] daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear" (NIV). Things that are impossible with us are possible with God. He is in the business of changing men's hearts and transforming lives—often in answer to a wife's prayers.

It may not be amiss for the wife to seek human help, perhaps in a spiritual "mother," a woman who has walked with God for years and knows how to pray and how to keep a confidence. If professional counselling is sought, let it be truly Christian, i.e., Christ-centered, cross-centered. This week I received a letter from a woman who had had an apparently immovable obstacle in her relationship with her husband. She had struggled, prayed, searched desperately for answers, went with her husband to two Christian counsellors who were, in the end, as baffled as she was. Then one day, while working around the house, she prayed "just about every minute of the day, asking God to get through to me on what I needed to do." Next day's

sermon was an encouragement to step out in faith if one has a word from the Lord. She wrote,

I remembered your saying on the radio that when people tell you their problems, you often ask them what they think the Lord wants them to do. I was very surprised at the time to find I had an answer to my problem! A simple thing, acting against my feelings. I had tried to do what I thought God wanted me to do then, but decided it was too hard and wouldn't work anyway. I determined to try again. Things did not change overnight, but I persevered. Things changed dramatically. My husband can hardly believe the change in his wife! I can hardly believe it either!

In difficulties of all kinds I've been wonderfully helped by taking time to look at them in the light of Christ Himself. Do you know the hymn, "Beneath the Cross of Jesus"? (if not, you'd find it a great comfort to learn it by heart). That is where we must take our stand. It was at the cross that Jesus dealt with all our sins, griefs, and sorrows. He calls us to give up all right to ourselves, take up the cross, and follow. This hard place in which you perhaps find yourself, so painful and bewildering, is the very place in which God is giving you opportunity to look only to Him, to travail in prayer, and to learn long-suffering, gentleness, meekness — in short, to learn the depths of love that Christ Himself has poured out on all of us. It is *His* love that must be manifest in you as you quietly submit to what hurts you (Jesus submitted, too); treat your husband as we are commanded to treat enemies—with love (so did Jesus); refrain from taking moral responsibility for your husband (it is not our assignment as wives to do an overhaul job!), except as you daily lift him up to God. This form of suffering is your opportunity to learn to *leave with God what only God can do*. It is His mercy that offers it to you, and don't forget that "Love is His meaning," as Mother Julian of Norwich wrote.

One of the most transfiguring truths I know is that of our being called to *share* the sufferings of Christ. Colossians 1:24 and 1 Peter 4:12-19 put a wholly different perspective on the matter than any of us could have come up with. It's up to God to change hearts. It's up to us to do the simple (not always *easy*), humble,

sacrificial thing, and to faithfully leave the rest to God. "Continue to do good" (1 Pt 4:19, NIV), which means just **DO THE NEXT THING**, whatever that may be (mend those trousers? starch a white shirt?).

The fretting friction of our daily life,
Heart-weariness with loving patience borne,
The meek endurance of the inward strife,
The painful crown of thorn,
Prepare the heart for God's own dwelling place,
Adorn with sacred loveliness His shrine,
And brighten every inconspicuous grace,
For God alone to shine.

— Mary E. Atkinson

Recommended Reading

William K. Kilpatrick, *Why Johnny Can't Tell Right From Wrong*, Simon & Schuster, \$23.00. Are we aware that forty years ago American schools deliberately abandoned traditional character education? In its place we now have what's called the "non-judgmental" approach, celebrating the pupil's ego and feelings to the exclusion of moral principles. The loss of the capacity to form convictions threatens the fabric of society.

The author's prescription: **READ TO YOUR CHILDREN!** Expose them to literature that offers real characters from whom we can learn about real life. He gives an excellent reading list which includes Dickens' *Great Expectations* and Tolkien's *The Hobbit*.

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Recommended Listening

This is a first, and may be the last, but Bill Brehm just sent me his tape, *Ev'rything!* You all know that I am terribly partial to the *great, old*, strong-theology-filled HYMNS of the church. I find most modern gospel songs quite thin theologically, often grammatically insupportable, lacking in coherence, and set to music which has no real melody, let alone a tune one can memorize easily. *Ev'rything!* is gospel songs, but the voices are true singing voices, and most of the melodies are eminently singable. Best of all is the lyric of the title song. William K. Brehm, 4061 Ridgeview Circle, McLean VA 22101-5809, (703) 241-0588, \$4.00 (an accompanying book also available, \$4.00).

Got A Problem?

Jungle Indians had no problems. They hadn't even a word for it. Whatever life dealt out they seemed to accept with good humor and humility, did whatever needed to be done, and went on to the next thing. But in North America? We're different. Riddled with problems. We make problems where there aren't any. We're problem-oriented, and often come to a dead halt instead of quietly viewing the thing in the presence of God. Here's what two saints who seemed to view things that way wrote, many years ago.

Any problem that comes between God and myself springs out of disobedience; any problem, and there are many, that is alongside me while I obey God, increases my ecstatic delight, because I know that my Father knows, and I am going to watch and see how He unravels the thing.

— Oswald Chambers
My Utmost for His Highest, Dec. 14

It is good that we should have to submit to what we do not understand, it teaches us the laws of faith and hope.

It is good that we should have to do what we should rather not, in circumstances not of our choice.

It is good that there should be always something to prick us on, something to remind us that we are in an enemy's country, belonging to a marching column.

It is good that every creature we lean upon should fail or disappoint us.

It is good that we should meet with checks and failures in what we undertake, to keep us humble and prayerful.

All these things belong to sowing in tears.

— Janet Erskine Stewart

She refers here to Psalm 126:5-6: "Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy. He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him" (NIV). Should not my particular problem today, if I receive it as a trust from the Lord, lead to songs of joy?

A Child's Hymn

Each night until we children were perhaps eight or ten years old, one or the other of our parents tucked us into bed, prayed for us, and sang with us. The earliest hymn we learned, I think, was this, a lovely one for a child to go to sleep on. Many a night in the jungle, as Valerie lay in the little bed her father had made for her just before he died, or on a bamboo slab in her blanket, she and I sang this together.

Jesus, Tender Shepherd, Hear Me

Second Tune
BROCKLESBURY
In unison, simply

87. 87

Melody by
CHARLOTTE A. BARNARD, 1868

1 Je - sus, ten - der Shep - herd, hear me; Bless thy lit - tle lamb to - night:
2 All this day thy hand has led me, And I thank thee for thy care;

Through the dark - ness be thou near me, Keep me safe till morn - ing light.
Thou hast warmed me, clothed, and fed me; Listen to my eve - ning prayer. A - men.

The image shows a musical score for the hymn 'Jesus, Tender Shepherd, Hear Me'. It consists of two systems of music. The first system includes the title, 'Second Tune', 'BROCKLESBURY', 'In unison, simply', the number '87. 87', and 'Melody by CHARLOTTE A. BARNARD, 1868'. The music is written on a grand staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). Below the staff are two verses of lyrics. The second system continues the musical notation with the same lyrics.

Intercession

The women of two different churches have promised to "take me on" as a specific prayer burden. For this I am unspeakably grateful, and for each of you Newsletter readers who prays, I do thank you in Jesus' name. How *much* I need that help.

Pray for the many who have cancer and for the families that love them (so many write of their anguish); for our lawmakers and all who stand against laws which seem to open the floodgates of evil.

Prayer

"When Thou rememberest what relates to me, think of me only in the light of Thy mercy—forget all else, O Thou, my injured and justly offended God, my unspeakably gracious Benefactor. Put out of sight all that has severed between me and Thee." (William Kay's note on Psalm 25:7)

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 May–October 1993

May 5-7 Taping for *Gateway to Joy*.

May 11 Collingswood, NJ; Women Alive Ministries; Shirley Hughes, (609) 858-6750.

May 14-15 Boring, OR; Good Shepherd Community Church, (503) 663-5050.

June 25-26 Rancho Cucamonga, CA; Calvary Chapel; Janice Orate, (714) 276-9782.

July 23 Haywood County, NC; Bethel Baptist, (704) 648-6621.

July 24-25 Tuxedo, NC; Camp Greystone, (704) 693-3182.

July 26 Omaha, NE; Pope Paul VI Institute; Dr. Thomas W. Hilgers, (402) 390-6600.

August 16-18 Taping for *Gateway to Joy*.

September 13-15 Asheville, NC; Billy Graham Training Center, (704) 298-2092.

September 16-18 Eagle River, MI; Lois Stout, (906) 482-1435.

October 15-16 Bakersfield, CA; Fruitvale Community Church, (805) 589-9733.

October 22-24 Whiting, NJ; America's Keswick, (908) 350-1187.

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