

The Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter

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Not to Be Loved but to Love

The concept of self-love, propagated as though it were something we must all learn (it was a remarkably easy lesson for Adam and Eve) is a lethal virus infecting Christians' minds. The message of the cross is self-donation, abandonment for the love of God. The word of Mark 12:30 is "Love the *Lord* your *God* with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength" (NIV, emphasis added). The second commandment is "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Mk 12:31, NIV). The love to which Jesus refers is, I think, simply the normal attention we pay to our own needs. We look after ourselves, feed, clothe (and often pamper) ourselves, protect what we think of as our rights, and usually give ourselves as many "breaks" as we can. That comes naturally. What doesn't come naturally is to give our neighbor (who might be a sweet lady or a shrew) at least the breaks we allow ourselves.

"Please give up wanting to be loved," wrote J. Heinrich Arnold. "It is the opposite of Christianity. The prayer of St. Francis says, 'Grant that I may not so much seek to be loved as to love.' As long as you seek to be loved, you will never find peace. You will always find reasons for envy. But its real root is self-love." (From a little booklet, *Discipleship*, sent to me by the Hutterian Brethren of Farmington, Pennsylvania).

There is a strong warning in 2 Timothy 3:1-2 which ought to give us pause: "Mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves" (NIV).

One evening as I was cooking supper, glancing now and then at the small TV that sits on the kitchen counter, my attention was arrested by a close-up of a very earnest young man who was saying, "I forgive them," a statement seldom heard on a national talk show, especially one whose host is a notorious cynic. A woman leaped to her feet in the audience shouting, "That's sick! If you forgive them you're just *condoning* what they did!" Camera switches back to that calm and earnest face. No reply. The host then, in his most sardonic tone, countered, "But isn't that what *Jesus* told His followers to do? Aren't we *supposed* to forgive our enemies?"

"Yes," said the earnest young man. His next words gave testimony to being a follower of Christ. That was

his reason for forgiveness. I became aware that I was looking at Reginald Denny, the trucker who was dragged from his cab in the Los Angeles riots and beaten. Next on screen was a woman who wanted the audience to know that she understood Mr. Denny's reason, for she, too, was a Christian. She was the *mother* of one of those who had beaten him.

"What my son did was wrong, and he deserves punishment," she said, "But in the courtroom Mr. Denny came toward me with hand outstretched. In two seconds we were in each other's arms."

A shocker for the mass media—a live picture of amazing grace. Self-preservation is the strongest instinct, yet the grace of forgiveness is stronger. Not merely an instinct but evidence of the power of Christ in a man's life, the power of Him who when He hung on the cross asked His Father's forgiveness for those who had put him there.

That same Savior and Lord speaks to us: "If a man will let himself be lost for My sake he will find his true self" (Mt 16:25, NEB).

Joy in Serving

I have written about our dear Mrs. Kershaw, a household helper who blessed our family. George MacDonald writes about another such one:

Grizzie afforded a wonderfully perfect instance of a relation which is one of the loveliest in humanity—absolute service without a shade of servility [mean or cringing submissiveness, obsequiousness]. She would have died for her master, but even to him she must speak her mind. Her own affairs were nothing to her, and those of her master as those of the universe, but she was vitally one of his family, as the toes belong to the head! In truth, she was of the family like a poor relation, with few privileges, and no end of duties; and she thought ten times more of her duties than her privileges. She would have fed and sometimes did feed with perfect satisfaction on the poorest scraps remaining from meals, but a doubt of the laird's preference of her porridge to that of any maker in broad Scotland, would have given her a sore heart. She would have wept bitter tears had the privilege of washing the laird's feet been taken from her. If reverence for the human is an

essential element of greatness, then at least greatness was possible to Grizzie....

Such as Grizzie will perhaps prove to be of those last foredoomed to be first. With the tenderness of a ministering angel and mother combined, her eyes waited upon her master.... And if she might be permitted to creep about the place after nightfall, she desired nothing better than the chance of serving him still, if but by rolling a stone out of his way. The angels might bear him in their hands—she could not aspire to that, but it would be much the same whether she got the stone out of the way of his foot, or they lifted his foot above the stone!

—from *Warlock O' Glenwarlock*, 1881

A Transformed Marriage

Those of you who pray for God's working through my speaking will be glad to know of one who had not only ears to hear, but a heart to obey. Here is a heart-warming testimony to the power of God and the rewards of obedience.

"Thank you for saving my marriage for good," she begins (although *she* knows and *I* know Who saved it).

It seemed to me that my marriage of thirty-three years was really ending. There was no communication. I prepared to finish off what had not only ruined my life but also ruined my two boys of thirty and twenty-seven.

"Please heal my marriage," I pleaded to God. Then one day I went to hear you speak. God told me through you, "Go and treat your husband as you would treat Jesus. Call him lord [see 1 Peter 3:6] and serve him." I did not have anything to lose so I decided to try. I went home. He was still sitting in his chair like a mummy, not even blinking, watching TV. I hate that scene, but I controlled myself and very respectfully asked if I could talk for a moment. He immediately to my surprise switched the TV off and listened.

What do you do next if it's Jesus you're talking to? You ask forgiveness, right? So I did. I told him how *un*-understanding I was, how stupid I was, how wrong I was my whole life, and asked him for his forgiveness, even though he had decided not to continue our marriage.

Another surprise: he said he loved me and had always loved me and wanted to leave because he felt he was a burden to me and our family. Since he is not working and had been smoking and often drunk previously (he does not drink anymore), he said he feels inadequate himself and it has nothing to do with me. Then I told him how important it is

for me to be with him, and to have him in the house for me and for the boys. Thus I understood how our communication was distorted because of our own distorted feelings about ourselves.

We are still the same people, but our home is based on God's teachings and whenever I am angry with him and want to put him down I remember: how would I treat him if he were Jesus? My whole approach changes. My words are so different. I speak with love and respect. Do you know what? It's more than one month, never happened before in thirty-three years, we *did not fight!* I do not have cramps in my stomach when he opens his mouth to speak! I dearly love him, accept him as he is, and gladly do what he asks me to do. I listen and respect his ideas even though they are 180 degrees different from mine. I also have the courage to speak my ideas, but try to say them in a way that will not offend him (hard work, but worth it).

Elisabeth, there is such a peace in my house that I never, never had. This house was built by Jesus and it will stand forever. I thank God for everything.

I do not try to hurt my husband, but I am not always successful. So I tell him I am sorry the same day, just as the Bible teaches. I also talk about my hurts with him, and we solve them the same day. Oh, how it works well! My only regret is that I did not know it sooner. God has promised to restore my past and I trust He will. I love God with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength. May God bless you and your ministry.

Three months after she had written this letter I called to ask permission to quote her. She granted it at once, and added, "Oh Elisabeth! I have *so much love* for my husband now! I hated him. Every time he went out the door I hoped he would be killed. Now we have a wonderful marriage."

After I had told this story in a meeting a radiant woman came to tell me she had almost the identical experience. Thirty-three years of marriage, and she had actually asked God to kill her husband. "But now—what a *difference!*"

"Love... does not pursue selfish advantage. It is not touchy. It does not keep account of evil or gloat over the wickedness of other people...."

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"Love knows no limit to its endurance, no end to its trust, no fading of its hope; it can outlast anything. It is, in fact, the one thing that still stands when all else has fallen" (From 1 Cor 13, J.B. Phillips).

Garage Sales

Hudson Taylor, founder of the China Inland Mission, disciplined himself to take inventory of everything he possessed which hadn't been used for a year. He discarded the worthless and gave away the useful. It sounds to me like a practice we should consider. Think how much simpler life would be!

Garage sales are a great way to unload everything you haven't used for a year or more. I'm all for people *having* sales, but I'm not much of a customer, though I did spend five dollars on an electric mixer and fifty for a recliner for my son-in-law. As I survey what's for sale I wonder what it tells us about American life.

Restlessness. Discontent. Ceaseless activity. Short attention span.

The skis and skates and surfboards have perhaps been outgrown by the children. That's understandable. But the Skidoos and scuba-diving stuff, all those cute and clever but unnecessary gadgets, the expensive exercise machines, the tables loaded with useless bric-a-brac—I suspect it was adults who thought they needed those.

A life lived without reflection can be very superficial and empty. That emptiness must be filled. Not knowing the One who alone can fill the *heart* man grabs repeatedly for some new stimulation, sensation, satisfaction to fill his time and slake his restlessness. His enjoyment is short-lived. What he got for Christmas or bought at a garage sale last year he soon tires of. It furnishes him with goods for his own garage sale. He is like the man who wrote, "I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure.... Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind" (Eccl. 2:10-11).

How much is enough? "Godliness with contentment is great gain" (1 Tm 6:6).

Valerie's Letter

My daughter, who has been homeschooling for more than ten years, has been asked for a letter describing her more recent experience. If you would like a copy, please send a self-addressed, stamped envelope directly to *her*, NOT TO THE NEWSLETTER. She is Mrs. W.D. Shepard Jr., 31801 Via Alegre, Trabuco Canyon, CA, 92679.

A Prayer for the Middle-Aged

The following prayer has been attributed to any number of ministers and religious writers, a member of British royalty, a sea captain, and a medieval nun. One newspaper account claims it was written by none of the above, but by Alta Becker of Dayton, Ohio, in 1956. She used it in her Lenten Lectures at the Dayton Women's Club and was asked each year for copies. The Duchess of Windsor used it in her New Year's resolutions with no credit cited. *The Reader's Digest* credited it to Thomas E. Dewey in 1952. Although there are several different versions, and the origin remains uncertain, I find the words well worth pondering:

Lord, Thou knowest better than I know myself, that I am growing older and will, some day, be OLD.

Keep me from getting loquacious, and particularly from the fatal habit of thinking I must say something on every subject and on every occasion.

Release me from craving to try to straighten out everyone's affairs.

Make me thoughtful, but not moody, helpful but not bossy. With my vast store of wisdom it seems a pity not to use it all. But Thou knowest, Lord, that I want a few friends at the end — at least enough for pallbearers, with a mourner or two. Do not let the editor head my obituary with the words, "Old Crab Dies at Last: Everybody Glad."

Keep my mind free from the recital of endless details. Give me wings to get to the point.

Seal my lips on my aches and pains. They are increasing and love of rehearsing them is becoming sweeter as the years go by. I dare not ask for grace enough to enjoy the tales of others' pains, but help me to endure them with patience.

I dare not ask for improved memory, but for a growing humility and a lessening cocksureness when my memory seems to clash with the memories of others.

Teach me the glorious lesson that occasionally I may be mistaken.

Keep me reasonably sweet; I do not want to be a Saint—some of them are so hard to live with. But a sour old woman is one of the crowning works of the devil.

Give me the ability to see good things in unexpected places and in unexpected people. Give me the grace to tell them so. Amen.

Recommended Reading

If you read Elizabeth Prentiss's *Stepping Heavenward*, you'll want this book too: *More Love to Thee, The Life and Letters of Elizabeth Prentiss*, an intimate look at the character of a wife, mother, and writer who loved God and earnestly sought to help others to love Him. The publishers are kindly offering this book postpaid to readers of my newsletter (if you tell them I sent you!) for \$16.95 (regularly \$18.95 plus shipping). You can purchase both books for \$25 postpaid. A lovely children's story, *The Little Preacher*, will be "thrown in" for another \$5, making a total of \$30.

Order directly from Calvary Press, Box 805, Amityville NY 11701. Phone: 516-789-8175.

Thank God

- that Mardelle Brown, veteran missionary in Ecuador, and my dear friend, the first to visit me when I lived with the Aucas, is now in Lincoln, Nebraska with her husband Malcom. Both are working, without salary, helping to answer the ever-increasing mail that comes in response to my radio program, *Gateway to Joy*.
- for His daily supply of help and strength to do the work He has given us to do, and more serenity and peace than we've ever known.

Pray

- for Lars's eyes. There has been some deterioration. Medicine has been increased.

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Servant Ministries, Inc.
Post Office Box 7711
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48107-7711

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

Travel Schedule May - August 1995

May 8-9 Taping for *Gateway to Joy*.

May 12 Brockton, Mass.; Foursquare Gospel Church, (508) 427-1744.

May 17 Keswick, N.J.; Spring Women's Day, Judee Dickinson, (908) 350-1187.

May 18 Schooley's Mountain, N.J.; Emmanuel Bible Church, Barbara Nugent, (908) 852-7305.

May 27 Hampstead, N.H.; Island Pond Baptist Church, Shirley Paz, (603) 329-8047.

June 3 Oklahoma City; Women's Conference, Max Barnett, (405) 321-2810.

June 30 Rumney, N.H.; Bible Conference, Andrew Accardy, (603) 786-9504.

July 9 Asbury Grove, Hamilton, Mass.; (508) 525-3653.

July 19-20 Denver, Colo.; Christian Booksellers Association.

August 21-28 Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; Southern Baptist Missionary Women's Retreat, Sharon Fairchild, Travessa Jaicos 18 Tijuca, 20521-280 Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

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