

The Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter

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Joy to the World

Thanksgiving and Christmas (now called "Turkey Day" and "Sparkletime" by some, alas!) are holidays that are supposed to be happy. When there is no one to thank and the Christ of Christmas is unknown, there may be a measure of happiness—if the dinner is as delectable as hoped, and the relatives manage to treat each other fairly civilly. But how many stories we hear of bleak and miserable family get-togethers—"Never again!"

A holiday is a holy day, meant to be *hallowed*—meant also to hallow the rest of life. Alexander Schmemmann says that to the man of the past, "a feast was not merely a 'break' in an otherwise meaningless and hard life of work, but a *justification* of that work, its fruit, its—so to speak—transformation into joy, and therefore into freedom. A feast was thus always deeply and organically related to time, to the natural cycles of times, to the whole framework of man's life in the world. And, whether we want it or not, whether we like it or not, Christianity *accepted* and made its own this fundamentally human phenomenon of feast, as it accepted and made its own the whole man and all his needs. But, as in everything else, Christians accepted the feast not only by giving it a new meaning, by transforming its 'content,' but by taking it, along with the whole of 'natural' man, through death and resurrection...."

Schmemmann points out a strange paradox here: Christianity is, on one hand, the *end* of all natural joy, "because by revealing the perfect man it revealed the abyss of man's alienation from God.... Since the Gospel was preached in this world, all attempts to go back to a pure 'pagan joy,' all 'renaissances,' all 'healthy optimisms' were bound to fail. 'There is but one sadness,' said Leon Bloy, 'that of not being a saint.' And it is this sadness that permeates mysteriously the whole life of the world, its frantic and pathetic hunger and thirst for perfection, which kills all joy.... Christianity was the revelation and the gift of joy, and thus, the gift of genuine *feast*" (*For the Life of the World*, pp. 54-55).

Have we Christians accepted the "whole ethos of our joyless and business-minded culture," relegating joy to

the category of "fun," "relaxation," or a time for "winding down"? Do we know much of true joy, or does the word frighten us? Do we look at it with suspicion in the world which Wordsworth said is "too much with us," a world of "getting and spending," where "we lay waste our powers"? Life is punctuated here and there with a little happiness. We give ourselves permission to have fun and then wonder if we had any. We try to relax and tomorrow's business constricts our hearts. Gerard Manley Hopkins asks, "Why are we so haggard at the heart, so care-coiled, so fagged, so fashed, so clogged, so cumbered?"

Feast means *joy*. Joy is the keynote of the Christian life. It is not something that happens. It is a *gift*, given to us in the coming of Christ. A few humble shepherds, doing their routine sheep-watching duty in the fields near Bethlehem one night, were astounded when an angel appeared. There was no question about it—it was an angel all right, and the glory of the Lord encompassed them. They were terrified. But the angel brought good news of great joy, meant not only for them but for all people throughout the world. (Had you thought that Mary and Joseph did not hear the angels' song? DeSales suggests that they only heard the child weep, "and saw, by the little light borrowed from some wretched lamp, the eyes of this divine child all filled with tears, and faint under the rigor of the cold.")

It did not take Mary long to hurry to the home of her cousin Elisabeth (yes, the King James Version has an *s* in that name!), who was herself miraculously pregnant in her old age. Perhaps it was while Mary talked with the older woman that she was enabled to grasp a new aspect of the solemn mystery she bore in her womb. This child was her Savior! (Luke 1:47). She His mother, and He her Redeemer, and she was filled with joy, and sang about it in the beautiful Magnificat, "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit doth rejoice in God my Savior."

God gives to us a heavenly gift called joy, radically different in quality from any natural joy. John the Baptist, knowing that Jesus was now to be the greater, and he the lesser, was full of joy at hearing the Bridegroom's voice. When Jesus was about to leave His disciples, He gave

them His own joy, in order that their joy might be complete. The apostle Paul, chained in prison, wrote to the Philippians the Epistle of Joy. When the apostle Peter was writing to exiles ("strangers in the world"), he reminded them that although they had had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials, these had come so that their faith might be proved genuine and might "result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls" (1 Pet. 1:7-9).

And throughout the millennia Christians who have known deep suffering have found at the same time the gift of joy. Suffering and joy are not mutually exclusive. Little Fanny Crosby, blinded at six weeks because of a doctor's mistake, wrote when she was only nine,

"O what a happy soul am I, although I cannot see!
I am resolved that in this world contented I will be.
How many blessings I enjoy that other people don't!
To weep and sigh because I'm blind, I cannot and I won't."

The joy of the Lord was her strength, as it was for Corrie ten Boom, who had survived the indescribable horrors of concentration camp. She personified joy as she "tramped for the Lord" around the world, telling her story.

Love and obedience are the secrets of true joy. "Joy," wrote C.S. Lewis, "is the serious business of heaven." I love that, and I am sure it must be true, for heaven is peopled with those who want no other business but to love God and to manifest that love, perfectly and continuously, by a glad obedience. Jesus said, "If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that *my joy* may be in you and that your joy may be complete" (John 15:10-11).

Thanksgiving and Christmas then, for us who love God, are not mere "time out" from work days. They are a celebration of the gift of work itself, days on which we celebrate work by declaring our freedom. In a manner of speaking we announce that on this one day we may rest from our work and, without pressure or guilt, we may be glad. A holiday is a holy day—meant for rejoicing in God.

Joy to the world—the Lord is come! May we, at this Christmas time, prepare room in our hearts to receive our

King. Perhaps we will want to pray the words of Jeremy Taylor, "Lord, do Thou turn me all into love, and all my love into obedience, and may my obedience be without interruption." Love equals joy which equals peace.

The Mother of the Lord

The threefold terror of love; a fallen flare
Through the hollow of an ear;
Wings beating about the room;
The terror of all terrors that I bore
The Heavens in my womb.

Had I not found content among the shows
Every common woman knows,
Chimney corner, garden walk,
Or rocky cistern where we tread the clothes
And gather all the talk?

What is this flesh I purchased with my pains,
This fallen star my milk sustains,
This love that makes my heart's blood stop
Or strikes a sudden chill into my bones
And bids my hair stand up?

William Butler Yeats

Each of Us Is Necessary

"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 may never know it in this life but I shall be told it in the next. Somehow I am necessary for His purpose, as necessary in my place as an Archangel in his—if indeed I fail, He can raise another, as He could make the stones children of Abraham. Yet I have a part in this great work: 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,

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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 sing, hide the future from me—still He knows what He is about" (John Henry Newman).

"The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord. It is good for a man to bear the yoke while he is young. Let him sit alone in silence, for the Lord has laid it on him. Let him bury his face in the dust—there may yet be hope. Let him offer his cheek to one who would strike him, and let him be filled with disgrace. For men are not cast off by the Lord forever. Though he brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love. For he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to the children of men" (Lam. 3:25-33).

Prayer

"Lord, I know not what I ought to ask of Thee; Thou only knowest what I need: Thou lovest me better than I know how to love myself. O Father! give to Thy child that which he himself knows not how to ask. I dare not ask either for crosses or consolations; I simply present myself before Thee, I open my heart to Thee. Behold my needs which I know not myself; see and do according to Thy tender mercy. Smite or heal; depress me or raise me up; I adore all Thy purposes without knowing them; I am silent; I offer myself in sacrifice; I yield myself to Thee; I would have no other desire than to accomplish Thy will. Teach me to pray. Pray Thyself in me. Amen."

François de la Mothe Fénelon

(from Mary Wilder Tileston: *Great Souls at Prayer*)

Shorten Those Meetings!

It was in Maine that an outspoken person of the old school prayed, "O Lord, have compassion on our bewildered representatives and senators. They have been sitting and sitting and have hatched nothing. O Lord, let

them arise from their nests and go home, and all the praise shall be Thine." We might greatly shorten committee meetings and such if we would only swallow this simple solution. (It might also help if we remembered that not everything needs to be said *by everybody*.)

Quest for Love

This is my new book, a collection of what might be called "cautionary tales" which illustrate some of the pitfalls to be avoided in seeking a mate, and some wonderful ways in which God brings the right man and the right woman together *without dating*. I felt compelled to write this because of the confusions and disasters detailed in mail I received from men and women who had read *Passion and Purity*. They begged me for help. Is dating necessary? Is there perhaps another way? I offer no single formula for approaching marriage. The recurrence of certain themes, methods and timeless principles is noteworthy, for example the help of a third party in bringing together two people who are humble enough to listen.

I hope my readers will not be limited to singles who are searching. It would be a lovely thing if older people would do what was done in my mother's day. She met my father at a dinner party for young people, given by an older lady who made a habit of this. My father courted my mother in the safety of her parlor at home. If they went out, it was with a chaperone or a group, never the two alone. Where are the spiritual fathers and mothers with the courage to offer their homes, their time, their prayers? to be broken bread and poured-out wine for the life of these young seekers? Fear not the label "match-maker." Just be there for those who have ears to hear. "Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand" (Isaiah 41:10).

"Let us be Christ's men from head to foot, and give no chances to the flesh to have its fling" (Rom. 13:14, PHILLIPS).

The publisher is Revell. The book may be ordered for \$11.00 including postage, from Lars Gren, 10 Strawberry Cove, Magnolia, MA 01930 (*not from the Newsletter*).

Prayer and Praise

Because this newsletter is being written in July, it's difficult to know just what to ask you to pray about by the time you receive it. You can always ask the Lord to give Lars and me wisdom in accepting or declining speaking invitations—very hard choices. "The wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere" (Jas. 3:17). Ask that I may never be merely a *talker* or a *writer*, but a true-hearted DOER of the Word. "Pray that I may proclaim [the mystery of Christ] clearly, as I should" (Col. 4:4).

Praise God for the countless miles of safe travel He has given. We had a close call in June. Caught in turbulence from the plane that had taken off just before ours, we were jerked around a bit—nothing alarming, but we learned from a former pilot who was sitting nearby that had we been in a smaller plane we would have gone nose-down.

Thank God too for testimonies from some who attended our meetings and actually decided to act on something learned. We are very grateful for Brad Waller who helps here at home, Pat Cresoe who copies and labels tapes for Lars, her daughter Alice who drives us to and from the airport, and Mary Marques who types my dictated letters. Please pray for each of them. We would not know how to do without them.

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.*

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ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

Travel Schedule November 1996-February 1997

November 2 Boston, Mass., Ruggles Street Baptist Church.

November 9 Indianapolis, Ind., Hearts at Home Conference, East 91st St. Christian Church, Cindy Mossburg, (317)776-1451.

November 16 Park Cities Presbyterian Church, Dallas, Tex., 8:30 A.M., radio rally, 1-800-759-4569.

November 23 Rhode Island, Rev. John Gibson, (401)885-8490.

November 28 THANKSGIVING.

December 25 CHRISTMAS.

December 28 Urbana Student Missionary Convention.

January 2 Spartanburg, S.C., Ladies' First Thursday, First Baptist Church, Ruth Neely, (803)585-0834.

January 31 Pasadena, Calif., Lake Avenue Church, David Koser, (818)795-7221.

February 1 Redlands, Calif., Moody Women's Day, Jo' McCarthy, (312)329-4402.

February 21, 22 Dubuque, Ia., Women's Bible Studies of Dubuque, Ann Riley, 1733 Eden Lane, Dubuque, IA 52001.

February 28 Hampton, Va., Liberty Baptist Church, Sharon Haughton, (804)826-2110.

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