

The Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter

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What Love Does

Everything is an affair of the spirit. If eating and drinking can be done "to the glory of God" (1 Cor 10:31, KJV) so can everything else. For those who long to follow Christ, "the performance of smaller duties, yes, even of the smallest, will do more to give us temporary repose... than the greatest joys that can come to us from any other quarter" (George MacDonald).

At a conference where I was speaking about the little sacrifices of love I suggested that if, for example, your husband drops his clothes on the floor and leaves them there, you might, instead of nagging (your views on the subject have been well-known to him for a long time!), simply pick them up. That sort of suggestion does not go over well these days—we're terrified of being "walked on," or becoming "co-dependent" or "enablers." One woman's questions following that talk were:

1. Why shouldn't my husband *change*, and quit dropping his clothes?
2. If he doesn't, how do I handle the resentment I feel?

The first answer was simple: of course he *should* change, but you can't make him! God knows you've tried. It's time to leave him to God. I was not talking to husbands!

The second question pierces to the heart of things.

I greatly value Question and Answer sessions, hoping to clarify the application to individual lives of the principles I try to set forth. But having been at this a good number of years, I am more and more aware of the difficulty of helping people to turn their eyes to *Jesus*. The world is, as Wordsworth put it, *too much with us*. Has a husband's careless habit anything to do with my relationship to Jesus? Yes, everything to do with it, since:

1. it has become perfectly clear that I cannot change him, and,

2. I resent it. Here the question pierces to the heart—my heart, my attitude toward the man, which reveals my attitude toward Jesus Himself, for what I do to one of His brothers, I do to Him—alas!

As I reminded my daughter Valerie (in the book I wrote as a wedding present to her, *Let Me be a Woman*), you marry a sinner. There simply isn't anything else to marry. So the husband sins against the wife and—let us wives not forget—he, too, married a sinner. If he sins in being thoughtless and my reaction is sinful, two wrongs don't make a right.

Most questions about relationships can be answered quite simply if we ask ourselves *this* question: What does *love* do?

Let me start with my love for God. Loving Him means the thankful acceptance of all things which *His* love has appointed. We learn to love Him as we learn to "frame our hearts to the burden," as Samuel Rutherford said. Clothes on the floor constitute, at worst, a small "burden." This, if not accepted as soon as we find that we are not in a position to change it, becomes an irritation which becomes resentment which becomes real anger and, eventually, along with all the irritations not accepted for the love of God, full-dressed hatred. "Whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness; he does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded him" (1 Jn 2:11, NIV). No wonder we lose our way. No wonder we are baffled. Darkness descends because we do not ask the Lord to teach us *love*.

Surely the questioner would protest that she does not hate her husband. But she certainly hates what he does, and marriages break up when "small" things accumulate and resentments build. Love is the intention of unity. Resentment is the destroyer of unity.

John S. Dwight (1813-93) said, "Rest is the fitting of self to its sphere." If in my "sphere" I find things out of place through someone else's fault, this is my opportunity to *fit* myself, to *give* a little, to do the small thing that should have been done by the other. Love is very patient, very kind, never rude, never selfish. And it's amazing what rest comes from the gentle fitting of self to its sphere.

Now as to the "handling" of resentment? Again, turn your eyes upon Jesus. Had He good reason to be resentful? Did people treat Him with respect, believe His words, trust His judgments, follow His leading, love and obey Him? Think on these powerful words:

If you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.... By his wounds you have been healed. (1 Pt 2:20-24, NIV)

Some things may legitimately be alleviated, others necessarily endured. May we be wise enough to know the difference.

"If I am soft to myself and slide comfortably into the vice of self-pity and self-sympathy; if I do not by the grace of God practice fortitude, then I know nothing of Calvary love" (Amy Carmichael, *IF*, p. 29).

But how trivial *our* complaints appear in the light of Christ!

Moses and Mothering

Moses heard the people of every family wailing, each at the entrance to his tent. The Lord became exceedingly angry, and Moses was troubled. He asked the Lord,

"Why have you brought this trouble on your servant? What have I done to displease you that you put the burden of all these people on me? Did I conceive all these people? Did I give them birth? Why do you tell me to carry them in my arms, as a nurse carries an infant, to the land you promised on oath to their forefathers? Where can I get meat for all these people? They keep wailing to me, 'Give us meat to eat!' I cannot carry all these people by myself; the burden is too heavy for me. If this is how you are going to treat me, put me to death right now." (Nm 11:10-15, NIV)

Had you thought about Moses having to *mother* the people of Israel? What a job he was given! Any mother realizes that the job is too big for anyone to do alone. Moses would rather die than bear such a burden by himself. But of course he did not have to do it alone. The Lord helped him.

Yet Moses suffered. While he was praying and fasting on the mountain, terrible things happened down in the camp. There was a riot. An idolatrous cult had

been formed around a golden calf which his own brother had made. In fury he smashed the stone tablets, ground the calf to a powder, and made the people drink it. Moses, the man responsible before God for this chosen tribe, has been called the most plagued of men. It was struggle from beginning to end. The people would promise obedience, and disobey. They started things and didn't finish. When they met difficulties, they pouted and said God didn't love them. They forgot His gracious signs and miracles of mercy. The pillar of cloud and fire, steady sign of the divine presence protecting and guiding them, they ignored. They had no idea of the greatness of their leader. They were blind, unmanageable, "stiff-necked," faithless, lazy. When even God said "Let me destroy them!" it was Moses who took their part and stood his ground. But the test became so great that his faith failed. He disobeyed in striking the rock when he was told only to speak to it, and for this he was barred from ever entering the Promised Land.

To me, one of the most remarkable proofs of his earnestness in carrying out the charge is his continued obedience, day by day, *after* he had been told he would never be allowed into Canaan. It was like Job's, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him" (Jb 13:15, KJV). Moses was saying, "Though He punish me, yet will I obey Him."

Isn't it wonderful that *Moses*, that most plagued of men, was one of the two who appeared on the mountain to Jesus, who was very soon to take up His own bitter cross for the sake of His people? May all who bear responsibility and/or authority find strength and encouragement in Moses' endurance and faithfulness.

Recommended Reading

Elizabeth Rice Handford: *Me? Obey Him!* Elizabeth and I were classmates and debate colleagues at Wheaton College. I knew the man she married. Could *she* submit to *him*? I wondered. This is a thin book, packed with God's truth about that incendiary word. I keep going back to it. Sword of the Lord Publishers, P.O. Box 1099, Murfreesboro TN 37133, \$1.25.

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When One is Missing

Xvxn though my typxwritxr is an old modxl, it works wxll xnough xxxcpt for onx of its kxys. I havx wishxd many timxs that it workxd prxfctly. It is trux that thxrx arx 45 kxys that function, but just onx kxy makxs all the diffxrxncx. So thx nxxt timx you think you arx only onx pxrson and that your xffort is not nxxdxd, rxmxxmbxr my typxwritxr and say to yoursxlf, "I am a kxy pxrson. Thx Lord nxxds mx." (Anyone know the source? I don't.)

A Life's Work

Few women today are concerned about ironing sheets, but it is still possible to let many other things take precedence over the primary task. It is sobering to contemplate that day when we must answer to a holy God for the things done and not done. Hear the concerns of an unidentified writer of another era:

I am sadly concerned that thousands of mothers are so over-burdened that the actual demands of life from day to day consume all their time and strength. But of two evils, choose the lesser: which would you call the lesser—an unpolished stove or an untaught boy? Dirty windows, or a child whose confidence you have failed to gain? Cobwebs in the corner, or a son over whose soul a crust has formed, so strong that you despair of melting it with your hot tears and fervent prayers?

I have seen a woman who was absolutely ignorant of her children's habits of thought, who never felt that she could spare a half-hour to read or talk with them—I have seen this woman spend ten minutes in ironing a sheet, or forty minutes icing a cake for tea, because company was expected.

When the mother, a good orthodox Christian, shall appear before the Great White Throne to be judged for the "deeds done in the body," and to give her report of the Master's treasures placed in her care, there will be questions and answers like these:

"Where are the boys and girls I gave thee?"

"Lord, I was busy keeping my house clean and in order, and my children wandered away."

"Where wert thou while they sons and thy daughters were learning lessons of dishonesty, malice, and impurity?"

"Lord, I was polishing furniture and making beautiful rugs."

"What hast thou to show for thy life's work?"

"The tidiest house, Lord, and the best starching and ironing in all our neighborhood!"

Oh these children, these children! The restless eager boys and girls whom we love more than our

lives! Shall we devote our time and strength to that which perishes while the rich garden of our child's soul lies neglected, with foul weeds choking out all worthy and beautiful growths? Fleeting indeed, O mother, are the days of childhood, and speckless windows, snowy linen, the consciousness that everything about the house is faultlessly bright and clean will be poor comfort in that day wherein we shall discover that our poor boy's feet have chosen the path that shall take him out of the way to all eternity.

Tattle-Tales

On the phone the other day Valerie mentioned the difficult balance she must achieve when one child complains of another's treatment of him. Usually the treatment has been wrong, and needs correction, so that child must be dealt with. "But I don't want to feed self-pity in the child who has been offended," said Val. "I want to teach my children not to be *touchy*. It's so easy to make a huge *fuss* about things!"

Thank God for the wisdom He gives to parents who ask for it. I thank Him, too, for a lesson I'm sure Valerie had to learn during the first eight years of her life. I take no credit for it. She learned it from the Indians. They never made a fuss about anything—bad weather, stepping on thorns, failing to find meat to eat were taken calmly. To their self-control was added the ability to endure (see 2 Pt 1:6, JBP).

Comfort

Here's a poem sent to me in 1956 by Carol Conn, fellow missionary to the Quichuas, a few months after my husband Jim had died. It brought me much comfort then. May it bring comfort to someone who needs it today.

Dim Uncertainty?

Not in dim uncertainty I go.
What place for fear have they
whose past is filled
With witness of the power of
God Himself?
Nay, rather, as I tread
a path unknown,
I'll rest my soul on this
one thing I know,
That God who filled my past
with certain good
Is with me yet. This is
enough to know.

—Ida M. Jensen

Prayer

I offer up unto Thee my prayers and intercessions, for those especially who have in any matter hurt, grieved, or found fault with me, or who have done me any damage or displeasure.

For all those also whom, at any time, I may have vexed, troubled, burdened, and scandalized, by words or deeds, knowingly or in ignorance; that Thou wouldst grant us all equally pardon for our sins, and for our offences against each other.

Take away from our hearts, O Lord, all suspiciousness, indignation, wrath, and contention, and whatsoever may hurt charity, and lessen brotherly love.

Have mercy, O Lord, have mercy on those that crave Thy mercy, give grace unto them that stand in need thereof, and make us such as may be worthy to enjoy Thy grace, and go forward to life eternal. Amen.

—Thomas à Kempis

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Travel Schedule

September - December 1994

September 10 Marblehead, MA, Baptist Women, Lila Foster, (617) 631-6569.

September 10-11 Middleboro, MA, Missions banquet and Sunday School, Mr. Kohl, (617) 585-5242.

September 17 Lexington, MA, Grace Chapel, (617) 862-6499.

September 17 Waltham, MA, Charismatic Renewal Service, Dean Condon, (617) 891-3592.

September 22-28 Hungary and Transylvania.

September 29-October 2 Vienna, Austria.

October 3-9 Czechoslovakia and Poland.

October 13-15 Chattanooga, TN, Joyful Woman National Jubilee, Joy Martin, (800) 756-9385.

November 1-4 Holland, Evangelical Broadcasting Co.

November 5-6 Brussels, Belgium.

December 15-27 E. to California, L. to Norway (?).

December 17 Aliso Viejo, CA, Pacific Hills Church, (714) 362-7475.

December 29-30 Toronto, Ontario, Canada, Campus Crusade, Tony Wong, (613) 830-9693 or 1751.

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