

# The Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter

September/October 1996

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## *Faith for the Unexplained*

"We know that to those who love God, who are called according to his plan, everything that happens fits into a pattern for good" (Romans 8:28, PHILLIPS). Most of us have heard that verse quoted when we were in the throes of something which did not seem as though it could possibly fit into any such pattern. If the evidence for this astounding statement were perfectly obvious to us right then and there, we should accept the truth without question. There would be no room for doubt. Everything would be explainable, so there would be no room for faith either! We would simply accept the written Word unthinkingly, as a matter of course, without the exercise of intelligence or the discipline of faith, for faith goes to work where there are no explanations.

"I am telling you this now," said Jesus, "so that your faith in *Me* might not be shaken" (John 16:1, PHILLIPS). He knew from His own life experience here on earth that everything else is shakable. He was, of course, perfect God, but He was also perfect *man*, having both the nature of God and the nature of man. As man He prayed, He submitted, He obeyed, and He "*learned* obedience by the things He had *suffered*" (Hebrews 5:8).

This is a great mystery and it requires a costly faith. It is a necessary part of our probation that we should be puzzled and even scandalized. "Things that cause people to sin are bound to come, but woe to that person through whom they come" (Luke 17:1, NIV). Here we are face-to-face with that mystery which theologians describe as Will and Necessity—the will of God and the necessity of evil.

Is there a more nettling and problematic passage in the Bible than Acts 2:23—unless it is Acts 4:27 and 28? Whenever we ask, "But how can God allow (this or that)?" our mouths are stopped by this unfathomable paradox.

Ronald Knox writes, "Take the mystery of grace and free will. How, you ask, can one and the same action, at one and the same time, be God's action and mine? It's impossible. But no, you see... free will is a mystery that defies all explanation and when you think you have come across an explanation you find

that, after all, you have left the facts out of the account."

When we are stalling over some difficult decision, or hesitating to make an affirmation, *faith* comes in to strengthen and encourage us, but faith's object is dim to our human eyes. In the face of obscurities Jesus is saying, "Trust Me." Grace then is given which confirms our will and helps us toward a faith which can rest with the unexplained.

## *Another Letter from Peru*

In the March/April Newsletter you read of my grandson Walter Shepard III's adventures with his great-uncle, Bert Elliot, in Peru. Toward the end of his time there he visited a cousin, Steve Hawthorne, missionary doctor in Bolivia. On his way back to his uncle's, he was "robbed blind, accosted by two pairs of wretches two times. A few items snatched, the notable one being my passport. Next afternoon my personal effects were liberated from the rightful owner. Not a few irreplaceable stuffs [e.g., photographs, journal covering the whole six months in South America] are gone, man, solid *gone!* What I did *not* lose: plane ticket, camera, shoes and jacket on my back, money (not one centavo lost), Santa Biblia. These, you will agree with me, are good not to lose and I am most grateful to our Father for what He allowed me to *keep*, perhaps most notably would be life on this earth....

"Still I have the same support and fortitude as lots of men abiding in much awful-er wildernesses. This was Job's support: he was not overcome with rage and despair when he received news that the Sabeans had carried off his cattle and slain his servants and that the remainder of both were consumed with fire; that the Chaldeans had robbed him of his camels, and that his seven sons were crushed to death by the falling of the house. He resolved all these misfortunate horrors into the agency of God, His power and sovereignty, and even thanked Him for doing what He would with His own (Job 1:21). If another should slander me in word, injure me in deed, I shall not be prone to anger when, with David, I consider that the Lord hath bidden him (2 Samuel 16:10)....

"This is all part of growing up and—more vital—learning to pray without hesitation nor reserve, that His will may be done in us, on us, and by us, and that in all His dealing with us He may 'consult His own glory alone.' Am very, very humbled by all this and I hope a good blow has been struck at my pride. Of course, it is all by our Lord's grace and mercy holding me up from falling into the most lowdown, filthy, thievingest, throwaway, dirt-ragged stealer ways of a worthless jerk who takes what ain't his by rotten means.

"Physically I'm turning out fine, there don't seem to be any mental anguish or other uncalled-for personal problems, although having no underwear is troublesome. Bruises and soreness starting to go away. Have had some mean dreams, but I'm so tired I forget and it goes away. Earthly possessions, no matter what, are too foolish to lose any time/energy/religion over.... All this turmoil in me over some little bereavement! Yet it eats on me. Hard part is, at first glance, this is an absurd, unreal, and without-meaning chance occurrence giving me grief with no reason or justification, but there is a purpose. This is real, and God has a very sure plan for it all. My truly insignificant (this I forget quick) possessions weren't ever mine truly, but given me to use but a little while. Now it's all given to someone else.

"P.S. Police hard to love."

Later we learned that Walter, eyeball-to-eyeball with the mob in the marketplace, was yelling (in Spanish): "Help! I'm being robbed! Call the police!" No one raised a finger. A tough series of lessons for an eighteen-year-old. We thank the Lord for giving him eternal perspective.

## *Why Memorize?*

Our parents saw to it, by having daily family prayers, that we learned the Scriptures and the great hymns of the faith. I don't remember ever being sat down to memorize—the process was quite painless. Few families arrange to do this regularly, but perhaps time could be found now and then for memorization. I think poetry and hymns are especially easy to memorize, and the repeated reading of selected Scripture passages will cause the words to stick in a child's mind. My mother read the twenty-third psalm every evening for a week to my brother Jim when he was about three years old. By Saturday night he had it by heart. A child's power of memorization is nothing short of astounding.

But why memorize? A.N. Gilbey, in his book *We Believe*, gives a clear answer: "The whole point of teaching by heart is to leave a child in sure possession of something absolutely true, on which he can medi-

tate to his dying day. Give him something vague and amorphous and he has nothing to ponder."

## *Come, Lord*

O Lord, when I am tempted to betray  
Your love, your faithfulness, your pain;  
To spurn the heart, the hands which one dark day  
Were broken to destroy sin's reign;  
When all resolve is weak, and grows desire  
In this my feeble heart of clay  
Like leaping tongues of all consuming fire,  
And love for you seems far away;  
Then come, Lord, in the blackness of the night,  
And come in strength when foes would give me  
fight,  
Yes, come, and fill my soul, I pray.  
Come whisper to my heart your words of peace,  
Come, let me grasp your piercèd hands  
Which from my sin, my bondage, spell release,  
My all, your sacrifice demands!

—Eugene Howard

## *The Simple Life*

The Dohnavur Fellowship, the work Amy Carmichael started in South India, is always on my heart. I want to do all I can to remind you that it still goes on. Neither I nor anyone else is authorized to solicit funds for the DF, but I am allowed to give you glimpses now and then of the sort of place it is. Margaret Holland wrote in *Dust of Gold*, the DF prayer letter, of how they continue to cling to "the simple life" because it usually costs less, and "we have a duty to our friends who give, often sacrificially, to be good stewards of all that we have. Many things available to us now are not wrong in themselves but are not necessities, and we have always wanted the Family to grow up free from the deception of materialism and able to find their joy and satisfaction in life from all the good things the Lord has given us so freely, both in the spiritual realm and in the natural world around us. Many of our sisters have gone out to jobs or marriage in a rural environment where, for economic and social reasons, life has remained simple and

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conservative. For them it is essential that they should know how to grind their own flour by hand, cook over a wood fire, and be used to hard physical work.

"Gradually, as people have begun to enjoy better incomes and an improved standard of living as a result, the world around is changing and so is the answer to the question, 'What is the simple life?' Some changes have been adopted of necessity, e.g., the changeover to gas from firewood for cooking purposes, although the old stoves are still used for some things. Shortage, the poor quality of firewood, and ever-increasing prices were major factors, together with an awareness of the damage to the environment as wood-cutters made ever-deeper inroads into the foothill forests to cut green wood.... Other areas of improvement: installation of an electric wet-grinder for the preparation of rice-flour for breakfast food. This was done formerly in the evening in the kitchens using granite pestles and mortars sunk into the kitchen floor.

"It was quite an innovation when about six transistor radios were introduced about twenty years ago and circulated 'round the compounds in turn so that people could listen to the news!... Not all have very good discretion when it comes to choice of programmes, but there is a limit to the extent to which rules and regulations can be laid down governing every aspect of life. Developing a sense of personal responsibility would seem to be the profitable way....

"For many years a holiday highlight was the wildlife and documentary reel-films loaned out by the various High Commissions. A few years ago these were replaced by videos and so it seemed the time had come to buy a TV and a video recorder, and also to take advantage of the same kind of BBC programmes obtainable by satellite; hence the satellite dish located in the field between the kindergarten and the clock tower!

"While our hospital retains its simplicity, it is nevertheless the 'Place of Heavenly Healing,' where prayer and medicine are practised together. However, our three dental surgeries are equipped with the most modern equipment which compares favourably with any well-equipped practice in the West." She goes on to mention telephones, a FAX machine, and—to help with the editing and mailing of *Dust of Gold*—a computer is being considered.

"Some of you, whilst reading the above, may be amused to think that we should even bother to write about such things, when they have been taken for granted as part of everyday life in the West for so long. But perhaps that is what most underlines what tremendous changes are taking place in rural India, which is struggling to catch up not just with the West, but with modern India itself.

"What is the simple life? Obviously, it is made up of different things for different people. Perhaps one way of looking at it might be to say that anything which works for the common good in a community may have a rightful place without increasing 'clutter' and materialism. The danger comes when, in our personal lives, we feel we need to possess everything that is available just because it's there, or for prestige or self-indulgence. To make do with less, or the lesser, will mean, for most of us, that we have more to share with others whose basic spiritual and material needs are unmet. We cannot generalize, but each one of us does have the responsibility both personally and corporately to be faithful stewards of what God has entrusted to us, and to live in the spirit of the Scripture verse, 'Do not love the world or anything in the world.' We have Someone far more worthy of our love—the Giver of every good and perfect gift."

If you wish to know prayer needs, you may receive *Dust of Gold* from Mrs. Lark Sessions, 3737 W. Lake Dr., Augusta, GA 30907. No charge—prayer alone is requested.

## *Recommended Reading*

*Oswald Chambers: Abandoned to God*, by David McCasland (Thomas Nelson Publishers). Biographies are wonderfully faith-strengthening. This one is a gem, revealing the man, his perplexities, his steadfast conviction that the Lord would work all things for the very best. We see the dilemmas, we see the outcome—the whole panorama from birth to death which reveals the utter trustworthiness of God. Yes, it's in print, and I could hardly put it down.

*A Woman More Precious than Jewels*, by Bonnie Trude. An excellent Bible study course delineating the biblical position of a woman's place in the home. It's thorough, it's gentle, and the price is right—\$6.00 ppd. (Minnesota residents add sales tax). Order from 100 Broadway, Wrenshall, MN 55797. Phone (218)384-4506. Make checks payable to "Jewels Book."

## *A Puritan Prayer*

Thou art good when Thou givest, when Thou takest away, when the sun shines upon me, when night gathers over me, Thou hast loved me before the foundation of the world, and in love didst redeem my soul; Thou didst love me still, in spite of my hard heart, ingratitude, distrust. Thy goodness has been with me during another year leading me through a twisted wilderness,

in retreat helping me to advance, when beaten back making sure headway. Thy goodness will be with me in the year ahead; I hoist sail and draw up anchor, with Thee as the blessed pilot of my future as of my past. I bless Thee that Thou hast veiled my eyes to the waters ahead. If Thou hast appointed storms of tribulation, Thou wilt be with me in them; if I have to pass through tempests of persecution and desolation, I shall not drown; if I am to die, I shall see Thy face the sooner; if a painful end is to be my lot, grant me grace that my faith fail not; if I am to be cast aside from the service I love, I can make no stipulation: only glorify Thyself in me whether in comfort or trial, as a chosen vessel meet always for Thy use.

—From *The Valley of Vision:*  
*A Collection of Puritan Prayers and Devotions,*  
 edited by Arthur Bennett

### Mailing List

Would you like to get off? It's easy. Just don't return the card you receive which asks you if you want to stay on. If you're wondering why your name was *removed* from the list, it's simple—you didn't return the card.

**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

#### September 1996 - January 1997

**September 1** N. Ireland.

**September 2-7** speaking in England.

**September 25-30** Toalmas, Hungary.

**October 1-6** Hungary.

**October 26** Lincoln, Neb., Berean Church missionary conference and radio rally, Linda Meyers, 1-800-759-6655.

**October 27-29** Taping for *Gateway to Joy*.

**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, Linda Meyers, 1-800-759-6655.

**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 Ave. Church,

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