

The Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter

January/February 1987

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Prayer Is Conflict

Prayer is no easy pastime. As I grow old I find that I am more conscious than ever of my need to pray, but it seems at the same time to become more of a struggle. It is harder to concentrate, for one thing. I was greatly helped by some private notes Amy Carmichel wrote to her "Family" (hundreds of children and their helpers, both Indian and European) in Dohnavur, South India, to help them prepare for a special day of prayer. She quoted Paul's letter to the Colossians (2:1): "I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you." He is referring at least in part to the conflict of prayer. The same verse is translated "how greatly I strive" in the Revised Version; "how deep is my anxiety" in J.B. Philips; and, in the Jerusalem Bible, "Yes, I want you to know that I do have to struggle hard for you . . . to bind you together in love and to stir your minds, so that your understanding may come to full development, until you really know God's secret in which all the jewels of wisdom and knowledge are hidden."

Here are Amy's notes:

With what do I struggle?

1. With all that says to me, what is the use of your praying? So many others, who know more of prayer than you do, are praying. What difference does it make whether you pray or not? Are you sure that your Lord is listening? Of course He is listening to the other prayers but yours are of such small account, are you really sure He is "bending His ear" to you?

2. With all that suggests that we are asked to give too much time to prayer. There is so much

to do. Why set aside so much time just to pray?

3. With all that discourages me personally—perhaps the remembrance of past sin, perhaps spiritual or physical tiredness; with anything and everything that keeps me back from what occupied St. Paul so often—vital prayer.

What will help me most in this wrestle?

1. The certain knowledge that our insignificance does not matter at all, for we do not come to the Father in our own name but in the Name of His beloved Son. His ear is always open to that Name. Of this we can be certain.

2. The certain knowledge that this is Satan's lie; he is much more afraid of our prayer than our work. (This is proved by the immense difficulties we always find when we set ourselves to pray. They are much greater than those we meet when we set ourselves to work.)

3. Isaiah 44:22 and kindred words, with 1 John 1:9, meets all distress about sin. Isaiah 40:29-31 with 2 Corinthians 12:9,10 meets everything that spiritual or physical weariness can do to hinder. Psalm 27:8 with Isaiah 45:19 meets all other difficulties. And the moment we say to our God, "Thy face, Lord, will I seek," His mighty energies come to the rescue. (See Colossians 1:2, 9) *Greater, far greater, is He that is in us than he that is against us. Count on the greatness of God. But are we to go on wrestling to the end?*

No, there is a point to which we come, when, utterly trusting the promise of our Father, we rest our hearts upon Him. It is then we are given what St. Paul calls access with confidence (Eph 3:12). But don't forget that this access is by faith,

not by feeling, faith in Him our living Lord; He who says "Come unto Me" does not push us away when we come. As we go on, led by the Holy Spirit who so kindly helps our infirmities, we find ourselves in 1 John 5:14, 15 and lastly in Philippians 4:6, 7. It is good to remember that immediate answer to prayer is not always something seen, but it is always inward peace.

And if the day ends otherwise and we are discouraged? Then tell Him so, "nothing ashamed of tears upon His feet" [here she is quoting from F.W.H. Meyers's poem "St. Paul"]. Lord, Thou knowest all things. Thou knowest that I love Thee. "Yes, my child, I know." But don't settle down into an "it will never be different" attitude. It *will* be different if only in earnest we follow on to know the Lord.

The Gift of Work

The principal cause of boredom is the hatred of work. People are trained from childhood to hate it. Parents often feel guilty about making children do anything but the merest gestures toward work. Perhaps the children are required to make their beds and, in a feeble and half-hearted fashion, tidy up their rooms once a month or so. But take full responsibility to clear the table, load the dishwasher, scrub the pots, wipe the counters? How many have the courage to ask this of a ten-year-old? It would be too much to ask of most ten-year-olds because parents have seriously asked nothing of them when they were two or three. Children quickly pick up the parents' negative attitudes toward work and think of it as something most sedulously to be avoided.

Our Lord and Savior worked. There is little doubt that He served in the carpenter shop under the instruction of His earthly father Joseph, putting in long hours, learning skill, care, responsibility, and above all, the glory of work as a gift to glorify His heavenly Father. He did always those things that pleased the Father. Later He chose almost all His disciples from

those who labored with their hands. The apostle Paul, a man of brilliant mind, made tents.

Booker T. Washington, a black who grew up in the South when blacks were expected to do the hardest and dirtiest jobs, learned his greatest lesson from the example of a Christian woman. A New Englander, the founder of the Hampton Institute, she washed the windows the day before school started, so it would be nice for those children who had been born slaves.

Is work a necessary evil, even a curse? A Christian who spent many years in Soviet work camps, learning to know work at its most brutal, its most degrading and dehumanizing, testified that he took pride in it, did the best he could, worked to the limit of his strength each day. Why? Because he saw it as a gift from God, coming to him from the hand of God, the very will of God for him. He remembered that Jesus did not make benches and roofbeams and plow handles by means of miracles, but by means of saw, axe, and adze.

Wouldn't it make an astounding difference, not only in the quality of the work we do (in office, schoolroom, factory, kitchen, or backyard), but also in our satisfaction, even our joy, if we recognized God's gracious gift in every single task, from making a bed or bathing a baby to drawing a blueprint or selling a computer? If our children saw us doing "heartily as unto the Lord" all the work we do, they would learn true happiness. Instead of feeling that they must be allowed to do what they like, they would learn to like what they do.

St. Ignatius Loyola prayed, "Teach us, Good Lord, to labor and to ask for no reward save that of knowing that we do Thy will." As I learn to pray that prayer, I find that there are many more rewards that come along as fringe benefits. As we make an offering of our work, we find the truth of a principle Jesus taught: fulfillment is not a goal to achieve, but always the by-product of sacrifice.

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Readers Write

"Your book *A Lamp for My Feet* was a big instrument in encouraging my husband this past three weeks or so. Our one and only daughter was married on Saturday, and he was very concerned over walking her down the long aisle (thirty-five seconds, actually, from start to finish), and then of greeting guests of whom he was sure he would forget the names. It was becoming a high anxiety day instead of a joy. He has been reading your book in the mornings, but stopped about two weeks ago on page 67, "God's Help for God's Assignment," and there he stayed. He reread it every day, to remind himself of the truth in it. And not only was he not confounded or ashamed, but he had one of the happiest days of his life! Lives were touched through the ceremony and all the prayer that surrounded it. It was a 'Victory Day' in every way for us and our God."

The following is the excerpt referred to above from my book *A Lamp for My Feet*:

God's Help for God's Assignment

Sometimes a task we have begun takes on seemingly crushing size, and we wonder what ever gave us the notion that we could accomplish it. There is no way out, no way around it, and yet we cannot contemplate actually carrying it through. The rearing of children or the

writing of a book are illustrations that come to mind. Let us recall that the task is a divinely appointed one, and divine aid is therefore to be expected. Expect it! Ask for it, wait for it, believe that God gives it. Offer to Him the job itself, along with your fears and misgivings about it. He will not fail or be discouraged. Let his courage encourage you. The day will come when the task will be finished. Trust Him for it.

"For the Lord God will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded, therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed" (Is 50:7 AV).

January/February/March 1987

January 9, 10 Sharon, MA; Nazarene Women's Retreat; 617-662-9628.

January 16 Gordon-Conwell Seminary; Dr. Wilson, 617-468-7111.

January 28 McPherson, KA; First Baptist Church; 316-241-6400.

January 29 Steubenville, OH; Ohio Valley Christian Association; Mary Kay Locke, P.O. Box 972, Steubenville, OH.

January 30 St. Paul, MN; Mrs. McDonald, 612-633-5914.

January 31 Edina, MN; Colonial Church; 612-925-2711.

February 1 Edina, MN (see above).

February 6-8 Jacksonville, FL; All Souls Episcopal Church, 904-268-4600.

February 9, 10 Nashville, TN; Christ Presbyterian Church, 615-373-2311.

February 26 Atlanta, GA; Junior League; Mrs. Linda Simpson, 404-261-7799.

February 27, 28 Augusta, GA; First Presbyterian Church, 404-823-2450.

March 6 Burlington, MA; Fellowship Bible Church, 617-272-2278.

March 13, 14 Poulsbo, WA; Crista Camps and Conferences, 206-697-1212.

March 27, 28 Columbus, OH; Ohio District Council, 614-890-2290.

THANKS—to those who offered help for the man in Palm Beach. We found it.

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