

The Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter

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Why Is God Doing This to Me?

An article appeared in the *National Geographic* fourteen years ago which has affected my thinking ever since. "The Incredible Universe," by Kenneth F. Weaver and James P. Blair, included this paragraph:

"How can the human mind deal with the knowledge that the farthest object we can see in the universe is perhaps ten billion light years away? Imagine that the thickness of this page represents the distance from the earth to the sun (93,000,000 miles, or about eight light minutes). Then the distance to the nearest star (4-1/3 light years) is a 71-foot-high stack of paper. And the diameter of our own galaxy (100,000 light years) is a 310-mile stack, while the edge of the known universe is not reached until the pile of paper is 31,000,000 miles high, a third of the way to the sun."

Thirty-one million miles. That's a very big stack of paper. By the time I get to thirty-one-and-a-half million I'm lost—aren't you? I read somewhere else that our galaxy is one (only one) of perhaps ten billion.

I know the One who made all that. He is my Shepherd. This is what He says: "With my own hands I founded the earth, with my right hand I formed the expanse of sky; when I summoned them, they sprang at once into being. . . . I teach you for your own advantage and lead you in the way you must go. If only you had listened to my commands, your prosperity would have rolled on like a river in flood. . . (Isaiah 48:13, 17, 18, NEB).

Hardly a day goes by without my receiving a letter, a phone call, or a visit from someone in

trouble. Almost always the question comes, in one form or another, *Why does God do this to me?*

When I am tempted to ask that same question, it loses its power when I remember that this Lord, into whose strong hands I long ago committed my life, is engineering a universe of unimaginable proportions and complexity. How could I possibly understand all that He must take into consideration as He deals with it and with me, a single individual? He has given us countless assurances that we cannot get lost in the shuffle. He choreographs the "molecular dance" which goes on every second of every minute of every day in every cell in the universe. For the record, *one* cell has about 200 trillion molecules. He makes note of the smallest seed and the tiniest sparrow. He is not too busy to keep records even of my falling hair.

Yet in our darkness we suppose He has overlooked us. He hasn't.

I have been compiling a list of the answers God Himself has given us to our persistent question about adversity. My early Newsletters dealt with eight of them. Here are two more:

1. We need to be pruned. In Jesus' last discourse with His disciples before He was crucified (a discourse meant for us as well as for them), He explained that God is the gardener, He Himself is the vine, and we are branches. If we are bearing fruit, then we must be pruned. This is a painful process. Jesus knew that His disciples would face much suffering. He showed them, in this beautiful metaphor, that it was not for nothing. Only the well-pruned vine bears the best fruit. They could take comfort in knowing that the pruning proved they were neither barren nor withered, for in that case they would simply be burned up in the brushpile.

Pruning requires the cutting away not only of what is superfluous but also of what appears to be good stock. Why should we be so baffled when the Lord cuts away good things from our lives? He has explained why. "This is my Father's glory, that you may bear fruit in plenty and so be my disciples" (John 15:8, NEB). We need not see *how* it works. He has told us it *does* work.

2. We need to be refined. Peter wrote to God's "scattered people," reminding them that even though they were "smarting for a little while under trials of many kinds" (they were in exile—the sort of trial most of us would think rather more than a "smart"), they were nevertheless *chosen* in the purpose of God, *hallowed* to His service, and *consecrated* with the blood of Jesus Christ. With all that, they still needed refining. Gold is gold, but it has to go through fire. Faith is even more precious, so faith will always have another test to stand. Remember God's loving promise of II Corinthians 12:9.

But Thou art making me, I thank Thee, sire.
What Thou hast done and doest Thou
knows't well,
And I will help Thee; gently in Thy fire
I will lie burning; on Thy potter's wheel
I will whirl patient, though my brain should
reel.
Thy grace shall be enough the grief to quell,
And growing strength perfect through
weakness dire.
(from George MacDonald, *Diary of an Old Soul*, October 2)

Prayer

O Lord my God, make me obedient without argument, poor without embarrassment, chaste without prudishness, patient without complaint, humble without hypocrisy, joyful without silliness, mature without grouchiness, eager without thoughtlessness, reverent without servility, truthful without guile, forceful without presumption, willing to correct my brother without superiority, and to help him by word and deed without pretence.

(St. Thomas Aquinas)

Readers Write

"'Those Christmas Letters' (November/December Newsletter) I find excessively filled with salt and no hint of love or grace. Ironic that it was followed by an article entitled, 'A Spiritual Spanking.' Who needs the spanking?"

My comments on the Christmas letters were tongue-in-cheek. I am so sorry they sounded unloving. Please don't take me off your Christmas list!

Another reader wonders why the subscription rate is so high. The actual cost to send the newsletter for one year is \$6.00. Some people pay and some cannot, but we continue to send the newsletter to anyone who asks for it. Currently for a donation of \$25.00 or more, you will receive an extra year on your subscription plus a copy of my new book, *A Chance to Die: The Life and Legacy of Amy Carmichael*. Donations should be made payable to The Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter, P.O. Box 7711, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48107.

A Small Section of the Visible Course

The house where I was born, at 52 Rue Ernest Laude in Brussels, looks exactly as it does in the picture in my mother's photo album. The old snapshot is a study in grays. The one Lars took last August is in color. The cobblestone street is the same in both. The bricks of which the house is built turn out to be rather pink; the white marble facade of the second and third stories has not changed. They have put new shades in the two first-floor windows, and the people in the pictures are different. In the first, on the second-floor wrought-iron balcony in sunshine, stands my mother, twenty-four years old, slim and straight, with a wonderful pile of dark satiny

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hair. She is wearing a dark ankle-length dress with a wide white cape-collar. In the colored picture there are two cars, and near the front door, very wind-blown, stand I. How I longed to ask the present tenants to allow me to go up to the balcony, even into the kitchen where I was born.

Sixty years and four months had passed since I was last there. My mother had locked the front door when she turned to the Dutch lady who was her helper.

"I feel as though I've forgotten something."

Adri knew very well what it was, and wondered how far my mother would get before realizing that the five-month-old baby was still upstairs, wrapped in her bunting, ready for the ocean voyage.

There was something wondrously comforting about knowing, as I stood before that unremembered house, that this is where my parents lived, where they loved, where they welcomed into their small cold-water flat the newborn sister of their son Philip. They were missionaries, working with what was then the Belgian Gospel Mission. Lars and I visited the old buildings; the little Flemish chapel where my father taught Sunday School and probably played the Steinway piano that stands there—bought by Mrs. Norton, wife of the founder of the mission (she sold her jewels to pay for it). We looked at an old photo album there with pictures of my grandparents, my great uncle, and my parents.

All of the past, I believe, is a part of God's story of each child of His—a mystery of love and sovereignty, written before the foundation of the world, never a hindrance to the task He has designed for us, but rather the very preparation suited to our particular personality's need.

"How can that be?" ask those whose heritage has not been a godly one as mine was, whose lives have not been peaceful. "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing" (Proverbs 25:2). God conceals much that we do not need to know, yet we do know that He calls His own sheep by name and leads them out. When does that begin? Does the Shepherd overlook anything that the sheep need?

William Kay's note on Psalm 73:22 is this: "Though I was supported by Thee and living 'with Thee' as thy guest, yet I was insensible to

Thy presence;—intent only on a small section of the visible course of things;—like the irrational animals that are ever looking down at the ground they are grazing."

"Yet I am perpetually with Thee, Thou hast laid hold on my right hand," wrote the psalmist. "Thou wilt guide me with Thy counsel and afterwards receive me in glory. . . . And as for me, nearness to God is my good; I have put my trust in the Lord God" (vss. 23, 24, 28).

A Word from the C.E.O. (Chief Executive Officer)

Is it permissible for a husband to brag a bit on his wife? No? Oh well, I'll let someone else do it. Vernon Grounds of Denver Seminary wrote to Revell Publishers, "That Elliot biography of Amy Carmichael is one of the finest published in recent years. I predict it will gain the stature of a Christian classic."

The Most Creative Job in the World

It involves:

taste	fashion
decorating	recreation
education	transportation
psychology	romance
cuisine	designing
literature	medicine
handicraft	art
horticulture	economics
government	community relations
pediatrics	geriatrics
entertainment	maintenance
purchasing	direct mail
law	accounting
religion	energy
and management	

Anyone who can handle all those has to be somebody special.

She is.

She's a homemaker.

(Message published in the Wall Street Journal by United Technologies Corp., Hartford CT 06101; reprinted by permission)

Recommended Reading

Amy Carmichael's *If* (a very thin book that packs a terrific wallop on the subject of love) and *Edges of His Ways*, selections from her writings arranged for each day of the year. Both available from Christian Literature Crusade, Fort Washington, PA19034.

For sheer delight, read Isak Dinesen: *Out of Africa*, perhaps the most beautiful prose written in this century. The movie was pitifully feeble by comparison with the book, which is one of the Greats. (Life is too short to read all the good books. Read great ones. That means you'll eliminate mine, alas.)

January/February/March/ April 1988

January 22-26 Auburn, AL; Covenant Presbyterian Church, (205) 821-7062.

January 28 Grantham, PA; Messiah College, (717) 766-2511.

January 29 Gettysburg, PA; Mid-eastern Leadership Conference, Mrs. John Metcalf, (301) 262-0884.

January 30 Boston, MA; Evangelistic Association of New England, Miss Laurel Breton, (617) 523-3579.

February 8, 9 Briarcliff Manor, NY; The King's College, (914) 941-7200.

February 14 Chicago, IL; Chicago Sunday Evening Club, (312) 427-4483.

February 15-17 Deerfield, IL; Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.

February 26, 27 Sand Springs, OK; Angus Acres Baptist Church, Mrs. Donna Moore, (918) 245-3198.

March 2 South Hamilton, MA; Fairhaven Christian School.

March 5 Trenton, MI; St. Paul Mini-Retreat, St. Paul Lutheran Church, (313) 676-1565.

March 11-13 Birmingham, AL; Briarwood Presbyterian Church single women, Marnie Birdsong, 967-1760.

March 14, 15 Columbus, GA; women's conference, Jeannie Illges, (404) 324-2647.

March 20 Portland, ME; Payson Park Evangelical Free Church.

April 8, 9 LaCrosse, WI; Whole Women Breakaway, Darlene Dixon, 416 McHugh Street, Holmen, WI.

April 16 Quincy, IL; Lighthouse Ministries, Debbie Niederhauser, (217) 228-1731.

April 27 Byfield, MA; Byfield Parish Church, (617) 352-2022.

April 30 Chicago, IL; Moody Bible Institute, Mrs. Jo McCarthy, (312) 329-4402.

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