

# The Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter

January/February 1989

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## A Child Learns Self-Denial

One of the countless blessings of my life is having a daughter who actually asks for my prayers and my advice (and heeds the latter). She phoned from California this morning, describing the difficulties of home-schooling three children in grades six, four, and one, when you also have a four-year-old who is doing nursery school and a two-year-old, Colleen, who wants to do everything. And on November 9, Evangeline Mary was born, so a nursing baby now claims attention as well. How to give Colleen proper attention and teach her also to occupy herself quietly for what seems to her long periods? Valerie was deeply concerned over whether she was doing all she should for that little one.

I reminded her of the women of Bible times—while probably not homeschooling her children, an ordinary village woman would have been working very hard most of the time, carrying heavy water jars, grinding grain, sweeping, planting, and cooking while tending children. This was true also of the Indians with whom Val grew up. An Indian mother never interrupted her day's work to sit down with a small child and play or read a story, yet the children were more or less always with her, watching her work, imitating her, learning informally. They had a strong and secure home base, "and so have yours," I told her. "Don't worry! You are not doing Colleen an injustice. Quite the contrary. You are giving her wonderful things: a stable home, your presence in that home, a priceless education just in the things she observes."

The demands on Val, as on any mother of small children, are pretty relentless, of course. She does all the housework (except the heaviest cleaning) with the help of the children (a

schedule of chores is posted on the refrigerator). People usually gasp when I tell them the number of my grandchildren. "Wow," said one, "it takes a special woman to have five children." Special? Not really. Millions have done it. But it takes grace, it takes strength, it takes humility, and God stands ready to give all that is needed.

I suggested to Valerie that perhaps she could define the space which Colleen is allowed to play in during school time, and make it very clear to her that school time is quiet time for her brothers and sisters. When Valerie was Colleen's age she had to learn to play quietly alone, because I was occupied for a good portion of every day in Bible translation work, or in teaching literacy and Bible classes in our house. She knew she was not to interrupt except for things I defined as "important." At that time there were seldom children of her age to play with, and she had neither siblings nor father, yet she was happy and, I think, well-adjusted. (For a certain period we had the added difficulty of living with a missionary family of six children under nine whose mother felt obliged to be more or less available for her children every minute—they were thought too young to learn not to interrupt. It was not an ordered home, and the mother herself was exhausted most of the time.)

Does this training seem hard on the child, impossible for the mother? I don't think it is. The earlier the parents begin to make the laws of order and beauty and quietness comprehensible to their children, the sooner they will acquire good, strong notions of what is so basic to real godliness: self-denial. A Christian home should be a place of peace, and there can be no peace where there is no self-denial.

Christian parents are seeking to fit their children for their inheritance in Christ. A sense of the presence of God in the home is instilled by the simple way He is spoken of, by prayer not only at meals but in family devotions and

perhaps as each child is tucked into bed. The Bible has a prominent place, and it is a greatly blessed child who grows up, as I did, in a hymn-singing family. Sam and Judy Palpant of Spokane have such a home. "Each of our children has his or her own lullaby which I sing before prayer time and the final tucking into bed," Judy wrote. "That lullaby is a special part of our bedtime ritual. Whenever other children spend the night we sing 'Jesus Loves Me' as their lullaby. What a joy it was on the most recent overnighter to have the three Edminster children announce, 'We have *our* own lullabies now!' Matt, who is twelve and who can be so swayed by the world, said, 'Mine is "Jesus Keep Me Near the Cross."'"

The task of parents is to show by love and by the way they live that they belong to another Kingdom and another Master, and thus to turn their children's thoughts toward that Kingdom and that Master. The "raw material" with which they begin is thoroughly selfish. They must gently lay the yoke of respect and consideration for others on those little children, for it is their earnest desire to make of them good and faithful servants and, as Janet Erskine Stuart expressed it, "to give saints to God."

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Surely it was not coincidence that my friend Ann Kiemel Anderson called just as I was finishing the above piece. She has just received little William Brandt, her fourth adopted son. The others are four and three years old and ten months. She is thrilled, and not nearly as exhausted as she expected to be, thankful for the gift of the child and for the gift of the needed grace and strength for one day (and one night) at a time.

"But oh, Elisabeth!" she said in her huskily soft voice, "when I had only one, I thought I knew all the answers. There is nothing so humbling as having two or three or four children."

I needed that reminder. Jim and I had hoped for at least four children. God gave us one, and that one gave me hardly any reason for serious worry, let alone despair. She was malleable. What "worked" for her may not work for another child, but I offer my suggestions anyway—

gleaned not only from experience as the child of my parents and the parent of my child, but from observation of others. My husband Add Leitch had three daughters. "If I'd only had two, I could've written a book on child training," he told me. One of them proved to him that he couldn't.

## God's Curriculum

One day recently something lit a fuse of anger in someone who then burned me with hot words. I felt sure I didn't deserve this response, but when I ran to God about it, He reminded me of part of a prayer I'd been using lately: "Teach me to treat all that comes to me with peace of soul and with firm conviction that Your will governs all."

Where could that kind of peace come from? Only from God, who gives "not as the world gives."

His will that I should be burned? Not exactly, but His will *governs* all. In a wrong-filled world we suffer (and cause) many a wrong. God is there to heal and comfort and forgive. He who brought blessing to many out of the sin of the jealous brothers against Joseph means this hurt for my ultimate blessing and, I think, for an increase of love between me and the one who hurt me. Love is very patient, very kind. Love never seeks its own. Love looks to God for his grace to help.

"It was not you who sent me here but God," Joseph said to his brothers. "You meant to do me harm; but God meant to bring good out of it" (Gn 45:8, 50:20; NEB).

There is a philosophy of secular education which holds that the student ought to be allowed to assemble his own curriculum according to his preferences. Few students have a

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strong basis for making these choices, not knowing how little they know. Ideas of what they need to learn are not only greatly limited but greatly distorted. What they need is *help*—from those who know more than they do.

Mercifully, God does not leave us to choose our own curriculum. His wisdom is perfect, His knowledge embraces not only all worlds but the individual hearts and minds of each of His loved children. With intimate understanding of our deepest needs and individual capacities, He chooses our curriculum. We need only ask, "Give us this day our daily bread, our daily lessons, our homework." An angry retort from someone may be just the occasion we need in which to learn not only longsuffering and forgiveness, but meekness and gentleness, fruits not *born* in us but *borne* only by the Spirit. As Amy Carmichael wrote, "A cup brimful of sweetness cannot spill even one drop of bitter water, no matter how suddenly jarred."

God's curriculum for all who sincerely want to know Him and do His will will always include lessons we wish we could skip. But the more we apply ourselves, the more honestly we can say what the psalmist said, "I, thy servant, will study thy statutes. / Thy instruction is my continual delight; / I turn to it for counsel. / I will run the course set out in thy commandments, / for they gladden my heart" (Ps 119:23, 24, 32; NEB).

## When Your Children Grow Up

In response to my question as to what readers would like, one asked "how to look at one's purpose in life when your children are grown up and gone?"

If one's supreme aim in life is to glorify God by doing what He wants, I would suggest a careful study of the characteristics of godly women in the New Testament as set forth in I Timothy 5:5-10 and Titus 2:3-5. Nancy Krumreich of Anderson, Indiana, makes a practical suggestion that fits Paul's advice: "You might write about what you think older women ought to be doing in our world (besides going to

retreats!). It seems to me that there is a gaping need for women in this category to do things other than seek careers, things which teach us younger women how to love our husbands and children. And things which we younger ones should *not* be doing, like being Crisis Pregnancy Center directors, picketers of abortion clinics, spending hours of time volunteering which needs to be spent with our children and/or husbands. Perhaps even things like helping us younger ones with our heavy loads and giving practical guidance and encouragement. . . . Are there churches out there bold enough to teach that older women have this responsibility? It seems to me that the attitude is strong both in church and out of it, that once the youngest child is in school, women are freed up to pursue whatever they wish.

"I'm a young woman in search of a mother-figure, mine having died three years ago when my middle daughter was newborn."

I'm sure Nancy is all for the CPC's, the protests against abortion, and volunteer work—for those who can be free to participate without neglecting the first God-given duties. But if the young women can't do those jobs, and older women choose to pursue something called fulfillment, who is available?

Are there some out there with ears to hear this plea?

\* \* \*

*He sufficeth thee: apart from Him nothing sufficeth thee.*

—St. Augustine

### Prayer

Dear Lord, help me to live this day  
quietly, easily;  
To lean upon Thy great strength  
trustfully, restfully;  
To meet others  
peacefully, joyously;  
To face tomorrow  
confidently, courageously.

## Lilias Trotter on Tape

Lilias Trotter (1853-1928), a talented English artist, went to North Africa and founded the Algiers Mission Band (now a part of the North Africa Mission). Her little book, *Parables of the Cross*, illustrated with exquisite water-colors of plant life, was dedicated to one "B.A.B.," and to Amy Carmichael (whom she never met). A spiritual classic which profoundly expounds the great principle of the Cross, life out of death, it has been out of print for years. I have tried to persuade publishers to reprint it, but they tell me the cost of reproducing the water-colors is prohibitive. So I have put it on tape. You may order it from Lars Gren, 10 Strawberry Cove, Magnolia, MA 01930 for \$4.50 (includes postage).

### 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.

### Travel Schedule January-April 1989

**January 27-29** Pasadena, CA; Lake Avenue Congregational Church.

**February 9** Fort Monroe, VA; National Prayer Breakfast and Women of the Chapel, Thomas L. Deal, Chaplain (Colonel).

**February 10, 11** Newport News, VA; Peninsula Community Chapel, marriage retreat, (804)595-9019.

**March 2** Fort Smith, AR; Ozark Conferences women's day, (501)666-3266.

**March 3-5** Morgantown, WV; Living for Christ Conferences, (304)455-5322.

**March 30, April 1** Camp Manitoqua, IL; Christian Women's Retreat, Mrs. Bea Porter, (312)754-7958.

**April 2, 3** Wellington, FL; Women in the Church, Mrs. Barbara Abril, (407)793-0899.

**April 4** Ft. Lauderdale, FL; Westminster Academy Auxiliary, (365)771-4600.

**April 27, 28** Lancaster, PA; Fellowship of Christian Assemblies, Carl Johnson, (914) 634-7828.

**April 29** Westerville, OH; Hosanna Praise Gathering, Susan Zartman, (614)431-8222.

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