

The Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter

January/February 1990

ISSN 8756-1336

Little Things

When we were growing up our parents taught us, by both word and example, to pay attention to little things. If you do a thing at all, do it thoroughly—make the sheets really *smooth* on the bed, sweep all the corners and move all the chairs when you sweep the kitchen, roll the toothpaste tube neatly and put the cap back on, clean the hair out of your brush each time you use it, hang your towel straight on the rod, fold your napkin and put it into the silver ring before you leave the table, never wet your finger when you turn pages. They kept promises made to us as faithfully as they kept those made to adults. They taught us to do the same. You didn't accept an invitation to a party and then not turn up, or agree to help with the Vacation Bible School and back out because a more interesting activity presented itself. The only financial debt my parents ever incurred was a mortgage on a house, which my father explained was in a special class because it was *real estate* which would always have value.

When I went to boarding school the same principles I had been taught at home were emphasized. There was a hallway with small oriental rugs which we called "Character Hall" because the headmistress, Mrs. DuBose, could look down that hall from the armchair where she sat in the lobby and spot any student who kicked up the corner of a rug and did not replace it. She would call out to correct him, "It's those tiny little things in your life which will crack you up when you get out of this school!" In the *little things* our character was revealed. Our response would make or break us. "Don't go around with a Bible under your arm if you don't sweep under the bed," she said, for she would have no pious talk coming out of a messy room.

"Great thoughts go best with common duties. Whatever therefore may be your office regard it as a fragment in an immeasurable ministry of love" (Bishop Brooke Foss Westcott, b.1825).

It is not easy nowadays to find children or adults who are dependable, careful, thorough, and faithful. So many lives seem honeycombed with small failures, neglectful of the little things that make the difference between order and chaos. Perhaps it is because they are so seldom taught that visible things are signs of an invisible reality; that common duties may be "an immeasurable ministry of love." The spiritual training of souls must be inseparable from practical disciplines, as Jesus so plainly taught; "The man who can be trusted in little things can be trusted in great; the man who is dishonest in little things will be dishonest in great. If then you cannot be trusted with money, that tainted thing, who will trust you with genuine riches? And if you cannot be trusted with what is not yours, who will give you what is your very own?" (Luke 16:10-12, Jerusalem Bible. The footnote to "your very own" says, "Jesus is speaking of the most intimate possessions a man can have; these are spiritual.")

Homeschooling

A reader asks me, as grandmother and outside observer of homeschooled children, to answer her questions. Is *any* school out of the question for a Christian?

While homeschooling is an alternative I would urge all parents carefully to consider and earnestly to pray about, I would not say that a regular school is "out of the question for a Christian." I went to public schools myself through the ninth grade (public schools were quite different fifty years ago from what they are now, I think), and then to a Christian boarding school, mainly because I wanted Christian friends. There was no such thing as a Christian day school that we knew of.

I had a good many misgivings when my daughter and her husband decided to try homeschooling. Would the children receive the *best* education this way? Could Valerie possibly cope with that, in addition to all her other “mothering” duties? Would the children rebel? I have been happily surprised at the “proof of the pudding”—*e.g.* when the oldest, Walter, finished second grade he tested at twelfth grade reading level. The rate at which the children learn is astonishing when given individual attention and allowed to work at their own speed. There were many interruptions and distractions with three pre-school-age children in the house, but the work seems to get done, perhaps not always triumphantly but somehow.

But what about the argument that Christian children ought to be in public schools sharing the gospel, as salt and light? my correspondent asks. That seems to me an exceedingly heavy burden to place on a child. A Christian child can witness just by being obedient, diligent, and honest, of course, but I would not make the decision to place him there for that reason. The importance of strong nurturing at home, without separation from parents during the crucial first eight years or so, can hardly be exaggerated in today’s world. But again, this is a matter for the parents themselves to decide before God.

A fascinating book which not only allayed my fears but opened to me compelling reasons for homeschooling that I had not thought of before is David and Micki Colfax’s *Homeschooling for Excellence*, Warner Books (available through your local Christian bookstore). They homeschooled four sons from kindergarten through high school. All four went to Harvard. Read the book before you make a decision for your family! It’s an eye-opener.

Up to 100 copies of an article may be made for private distribution but not for resale. Please cite full credit as given below. For permission to make more than 100 copies of an article, please write to the Newsletter.

© Copyright 1989 by Elisabeth Elliot Gren

The Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter is published six times a year by Servant Publications. Donations to the newsletter are tax-deductible and should be sent to: The Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter, P.O. Box 7711, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48107.

Gateway to Joy

A sign painter from North Carolina wrote to say that he and his crew listen to my radio program every afternoon. “She could talk about assembling a bike and I’d still be refreshed in spirit!” Another man, on his way to his lawyer to begin divorce proceedings, tuned in, listened, and decided to turn around and go home. Isn’t it nice to know *men* are willing to listen? I’ve been surprised at the number who have written or called. Will you keep on praying for Jan (who is a newlywed now—she married Lauren Wismer, an attorney who is also organist in her church in Lincoln, in November) and me and all those who help with book and tape orders, answer mail, edit programs, and do everything else that a radio program requires? For stations in your area see the November/December 1989 Newsletter, or write to Box 82500, Lincoln, NE 68501.

Prayer and Feelings

Our adversary the devil has many tricks to keep us from praying effectively. C.S. Lewis gives us a glimpse at some of them in his *Screwtape Letters*, in which an older demon is instructing a younger one in a few of those tricks:

“Whenever they are attending to the Enemy [*i.e.*, God] Himself we are defeated, but there are ways of preventing them from doing so. The simplest is to turn their gaze away from Him toward themselves. Keep them watching their own minds and trying to produce *feelings* there by the action of their own wills. When they meant to ask Him for charity, let them, instead, start trying to manufacture charitable feelings for themselves and not notice that this is what they are doing. When they meant to pray for courage, let them really be trying to feel brave. When they say they are praying for forgiveness, let them be trying to feel forgiven. Teach them to estimate the value of each prayer by their success in producing the desired feeling; and never let them suspect how much success or failure of that kind depends on whether they are well or ill, fresh or tired, at the moment” (*The Screwtape Letters*, pp. 19-21).

A Cesspool Transfigured

My brother Dave wrote of the Lausanne II Congress in Manila that the highpoint was the brief testimony of a Chinese who had spent eighteen years in hard labor camp.

"Because he was a Christian they wanted to give him the worst job in camp. So he was assigned to clean out the cesspool every day, as the Chinese cart off the waste as fertilizer. There was only one cesspool for the whole large camp, so it always overflowed on the ground around it. Therefore he had to literally wade through human excrement to get to the pool to empty it. But he said, 'I rejoiced at this, because I was able to get alone with the Lord in a way that was not possible for anyone else.' He began to think of the cesspool and surrounding filth as his garden where, as he waded through the waste, he would sing, 'I come to the garden alone.' I used to think of that as a sickly sweet, rather sentimental song. But my whole concept of it changed as I heard him quote the whole song and apply it to his situation: 'And He walks with me, and He talks with me, and He tells me I am His own; and the joy we share as we tarry there none other has ever known.' Put that in the context of wading through sewage! Then he sang the whole song to us in Chinese, and I doubt that there was a dry eye in the auditorium. . . . I felt unworthy even to shake his hand."

"Inclusive" Language

In many churches today the hymns, prayers, and Scriptures are revised to make the language "inclusive." This means that whenever the generic term *man* is used it is deleted or replaced by a word like person, people, others, men and women, etc. A line of the grand old hymn, "Holy, Holy, Holy"—"though the eye of sinful man Thy glory may not see"—has been revised to read, "though the sinful human eye," which of course is a Manichean (see below) heresy. It stops me cold every time we sing it. And at Harvard University professors demand the use of "non-sexist" language such as (I'm not making this up) the "freshperson" class. Is it mere ignorance of the meaning of *generic* which produces this outrageous mutilation of

our glorious language, or is it a far more insidious and calculating determination to alter our vision of the nature God created when He designed man and woman? My brother Tom Howard explained his objections to "inclusive" language. Here's part of what he said:

"I use the traditional word 'men' because I am not a Manichaeon (a Persian system of belief which held that the soul is good and the body evil). The ancient edifice of language judges us, not we it. I am not prepared to leach away the almost sacramental solidity of words by expunging the rich and protohistoric 'men' and 'women' in favor of the eviscerate 'persons.' Remember, the word 'man' somehow bespeaks all of us mortals and sinners; and the word 'woman' bespeaks us *as we receive* the approaches of the Divine. You and I must accept the mystery of our gender, and wear it with dignity and grace."

A Good Sleeping Pill

When I was a little girl this poem hung on the wall of the room where I slept in our summer cottage. I learned it then and often go to sleep on it. A framed copy, illustrated by my brother Jim (forgive me for mentioning three of my brothers, all in one issue of the Newsletter!) hangs now on my guestroom wall. I wish I knew the author.

Sleep sweetly in this quiet room,
O thou, whoe'er thou art,
And let no mournful yesterdays
Disturb thy peaceful heart;
Nor let tomorrow scare thy rest
With thoughts of coming ill,
Thy Maker is thy changeless Friend,
His love surrounds thee still.
Forget thyself and all the world,
Put out each feverish light,
The stars are watching overhead—
Sleep sweetly, then. Good night.

Prayer Requests

- For the fight against abortion and drug imports.
- For men and women to lay down their lives as spiritual fathers and mothers.

Escape from Rape

Two letters have come telling me horror stories of attempted rape. One woman was at home vacuuming in the morning when suddenly a man appeared in the living room and hustled her out to a nearby woods. Another was sound asleep when a man broke the apartment door and entered her bedroom. Both women used the only defense they had: prayer. Both prayed out loud for the Lord's protection and deliverance, and in both cases the men "lost interest" and fled, the second into the arms of the police who had been called by a neighbor.

Another friend was jumped as she walked to her car late one night in a shopping center. Two men forced her into the front seat, demanded

her keys, and headed for the stateline. She prayed loudly and continuously for *them* until, completely unnerved by this strange behavior, they put her out near a motel—but not before she asked if she might take her packages from the back seat!

"More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of."

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 1990

January 29-February 1 Kerrville, TX; Laity Lodge, women's retreat, (512)896-2505.

February 16-18 Sedona, AZ; women's retreat, Jan Webb, (602)482-5604.

March 1-4 Tucson, AZ; Casa Adobes Baptist Church World Missions Fair, (602)297-7238.

March 8-18 Scotland; **19** Cambridge, England.

March 30-April 1 Toronto, Ontario; Alliance Women's Retreat, Louella Gould, (416) 639-9615.

April 1 Willowdale, Ontario; Bayview Glen Church.

April 20, 21 Concord, CA; Nazarene Women's Retreat, Barbara Latter, (415)932-1202 or 935-0158 (home).

April 23 Laguna Niguel, CA; Aliso Creek Presbyterian Church, women's retreat, Valerie Shepard, (714)951-1468.

April 26 Atlanta, GA; Mt. Paran Church of God, Mel Holmes, (404)261-0720.

April 27, 28 Providence Baptist Church women's retreats.

April 29 Matthews, NC; Church of the Savior missions banquet, (704)882-3453.

The Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter

Servant Ministries, Inc.
Post Office Box 7711
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48107

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

Non-Profit
Organization
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit No. 14
Ann Arbor, MI