

The Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter

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The Childless Man or Woman

Children, God tells us, are a heritage from Him. Is the man or woman to whom He gives no children therefore disinherited? Surely not. The Lord gave portions of land to each tribe of Israel except one. "The tribe of Levi . . . received no holding; the Lord God of Israel is their portion, as he promised them" (Joshua 13:14, REB). Withholding what He granted to the rest, He gave to Levi a higher privilege. May we not see childlessness in the same light? I believe there is a special gift for those to whom God does not give the gift of physical fatherhood or motherhood.

I have known many women (and a few men) who have sorrowed deeply over being childless. My brother-in-law Bert Elliot and his wife Colleen, missionaries in Peru for about forty years, longed for children of their own. They asked the Lord for children if that would best glorify Him. His answer was no. They wondered about adoption, which would not have been nearly so difficult there as it is in the States. Again the answer seemed to be no, but God has given them the privilege of fathering and mothering hundreds of Peruvians, both white and Indian, in the jungle and in the high Andes, where they bear on their shoulders the care of dozens of little churches.

A woman of about fifty wrote, "Each Mother's Day became a little harder for me as I realized another year had gone by and after many years of marriage I am still childless—the only woman in my Sunday School class who is not a mother. The morning service started. . . I could not see the pastor for the tears in my eyes. Almost at the end of his message he said, 'I know there are some of you women here this morning who would like to be mothers, but for some reason God has chosen differently. Don't question Him. He has a reason.'"

Childlessness, for those who deeply desire children, is real suffering. Seen in the light of Calvary and accepted in the name of Christ, it becomes a chance to share in His sufferings. Acceptance of the will of the

Father took Him to the Cross. We find our peace as we identify with Him in His death and resurrection.

Look around your church. If you are a parent, look for those who aren't. Might they not be ready to "father" or "mother" you or your children, to be adopted as a grandparent, for example, or an aunt or uncle? My life was enriched by unmarried aunts and friends who paid attention to us children, celebrated our birthdays and sometimes even helped us with homework. The love they would have poured out on their own children had God given them marriage, they poured out instead on us and we were blessed as we could not have been had they had children. Their loss was our gain, and, as Ugo Bassi said, we are to measure our lives "by loss and not by gain; not by the wine drunk but by the wine poured forth, for Love's strength standeth in Love's sacrifice, and he who suffereth most hath most to give."

What of the thousands who have not had the mothers and fathers they desperately longed for while they were growing up? Is not God calling all whose ears are open to Him to recognize the wounds of the world and to pour forth His love to the lonely young man whose relationship with his father seems to have destroyed his fitness for manhood? Or to the expectant mother whose own mother is far away, or indifferent, or dead, who longs for a mother to share her joy? Whose will be the strong shoulder of sympathy (the word means "to suffer *with*") ready to bear another's burdens?—not with the tepid sentimentality which only weakens, but with the burning love which gives hope and cheer and strength?

My correspondent says God has given her "several kids adopted in my heart to pray for whose mothers say they haven't time to pray." Another girl asked her to be grandmother to her new baby. "Well, what a blessing and how this has changed my life!" she says. "If I had sat around and felt sorry for myself look at the above blessings I would have missed. What a thrill on Mother's Day this year to get a Grandmother card!"

And what of the *young* childless woman? Is she merely to mark time, hoping against hope that someday she will be given a child? There are always younger people who need a boost, some encouragement in their

struggles against the pull of the world, a listening ear when they face hard decisions, someone who will simply take time out from his own concerns to pray with them, to walk with them the way of the Cross with its tremendous demand—the difficult and powerful life of glad surrender and acceptance. As the branches of the vine pour out their sweetness so young women may see their opportunity, as branches of the True Vine, to pour out their lives for the world.

Starting a WOTTs Group

Men and women who are committed to obedience to Titus 2:1-5 are desperately needed in the world, in the church, and in the home. Writing on what I called spiritual motherhood I referred to them as WOTT's (Women of Titus Two). A reader asks if I have guidelines, structure, organization, information about such a group. Well, not much—for this reason: as soon as you organize, you have to have meetings! What we don't need is one more meeting to take us away from our homes and telephones. My suggestions are simply these:

1. Pray. Ask God to show you the needs and ways in which you yourself can help. Pray (perhaps on the phone if it's difficult to get together) with one or two others who understand the need.

2. Ask your pastor if he might preach on the Titus passage. It will take courage for him to do this.

3. In Bible studies, Sunday School classes, over your kitchen table or wherever you have opportunity, raise the subject of spiritual motherhood. Tell others of the blessing your own spiritual mothers have been to you. (If you had none, find a model in a book, as I did in Amy Carmichael. Then seek to be one.)

4. Post a list on the church bulletin board of the WOTT's—women who earnestly desire to be available. Mothers (in the usual sense and in the spiritual) are people who must be available—not all the time, not to meet every demand, but as needs arise which they can meet, they are prepared to do so, no matter how humble and unsung the job. In the article above I have outlined the deepest needs—godly examples, ears to hear, shoulders to cry on, hearts to pray. Then there are the humble tasks which lighten others' burdens: drive someone to the doctor, do somebody's ironing, take a friend and go clean somebody's refrigerator and oven (jobs young mothers find it hard to get around to); babysit—in your house or theirs. Rock a baby, read a story, cook the supper, do the mending. Take an old

person shopping and to lunch. Clean their house, do the gardening, write letters at their dictation or tell them about government postcards—so cheap, so easy to write a note on if *you* address them first. God will give you many other ideas if you ask Him.

The Angel in the Cell

My brother Dave Howard does a lot of traveling and comes back with wonderful stories. Last June when the six of us Howards with our spouses got together for a reunion Dave told us this one, heard from the son of the man in the story.

A man whom we'll call Ivan, prisoner in an unnamed country, was taken from his cell, interrogated, tortured, and beaten nearly to a pulp. The one comfort in his life was a blanket. As he staggered back to his cell, ready to collapse into that meagre comfort, he saw to his dismay that someone was wrapped up in it—an informer, he supposed. He fell on the filthy floor, crying out, "I can't take any more!" whereupon a voice came from the blanket, "Ivan, what do you mean, you can't take any more?" Thinking the man was trying to get information to be used against him, Ivan didn't explain. He merely repeated what he had said.

"Ivan," came the voice, "Have you forgotten that Jesus is with you?"

Then the figure in the blanket was gone. Ivan, unable to walk a minute before, now leaped to his feet and danced round the cell praising the Lord. In the morning the guard who had starved and beaten him asked who had given him food. No one, said Ivan.

"But why do you look so different?"

"Because my Lord was with me last night."

"Oh, is that so? And where is your Lord now?"

Ivan opened his shirt, pointed to his heart—"Here."

"O.K. I'm going to shoot you and your Lord right now," said the guard, pointing a pistol at Ivan's chest.

"Shoot me if you wish. I'll go to be with my Lord."

The guard returned his pistol to its holster, shaking

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his head in bewilderment.

Later Ivan learned that his wife and children had been praying for him on that same night as they read Isaiah 51:14, "The cowering prisoners will soon be set free; they will not die in their dungeon, nor will they lack bread."

Ivan was released shortly thereafter, and continued faithfully to preach the Gospel until he died in his eighties.

A Child's Lesson in Trust

Last fall my daughter Valerie, with her husband's urging, came to visit me for a week, leaving all six children in California. Elisabeth, her oldest daughter, age eleven, wrote, "Evangeline wet the floor twice. Oh Mom, it seems like she goes every five minutes!" To me she wrote, "Evangeline's potty training is getting me discouraged (here she drew a face with a bemused expression). My mother told me to trust in God. I am trying very hard."

God honored her efforts. One evening when the three younger ones were in bed, their father Walt asked the three older ones what they were learning in this experience of having their mother gone. Elisabeth spoke up: "Daddy, I'm really learning to trust the Lord for Evangeline. He is helping me!"

A Day in the Life of...

Take a Monday, for example, last August. Hot. Windows open. Wind blew from the south all night, whistling in the balcony door, rattling my study door, bringing rain this morning. Waves break on the rocks—a noisy and wonderful sound-and-light show.

Up at usual hour, breakfast at eight. Dishes, vitamin pills, and all the et ceteras. To desk to work. Long phone call about a film somebody might someday make. Dictate letters. Later morning, mail arrives. The sorrows of others:

- 1) a mother can't stay home with her two-year-old, must work.
- 2) pastor-husband has no desire to live with the family or return to the Lord.
- 3) "been sanctified seven times—still not perfect"
- 4) mother of four—"financial despair, very little help from husband"
- 5) "lost best friend/prayer partner"
- 6) "lost my husband, my best friend, and my

brother—I never had all in one man."

7) "poor health, welfare, indifferent children, suicidal."

I pray over these letters, try to answer with words from the Word.

Afternoon: walk with Lars. Desk work. Make a zucchini/curry/cream soup. (I make a gourmet soup for company? while others suffer so?) Sprinkle clothes for ironing, trying to think through what folks mean when they speak of wanting to be a "whole person." Some talk as though a single individual, in one short life, could pursue *all* his interests seriously, carefully, responsibly, and somehow achieve wholeness, balance, fulfillment—without being a mere dilettante. (I had to ask somebody today who Irwin Shaw is. Answer: "One of the most famous writers of this century." Name rang only the faintest of bells. So much for my "whole personhood"!)

Don't try to decipher any hidden meaning from the above. It's just a day, picked at random. People ask us what we *do*. While I'm doing the above Lars is in his office next to my study, usually on the phone—shielding me from answering, fielding questions, dealing with travel agents and publishers, ordering books for our next trip. When he's not on the phone he's painting the house, fixing the car, running errands, wrapping tapes and books for mail orders, and who knows what else. We both love what we do—we believe God gave it to us and are very thankful.

Note from Lars

Greetings for the New Year! I know you missed my Christmas note. Do want to tell you why. Contributions of 1990 covered all of our expenses and enabled us to send the Newsletter to many who can't pay and to overseas readers. I'm thankful that in only two of the nine years we've been publishing have I made any mention of money. Hope there are some of you out there who have been with us that long, and to all of you I say thank you for making my job easy.

My identification with Elisabeth is becoming more and more entwined. Recently I received a letter addressed to Mr. Lars Elliot and not long ago someone wrote that Elisabeth should change her name to Gren so that I would have a "whole wife." I tried to explain the reasoning for her using a pen name, and assured him I had never had a "partial" wife. Of course Elisabeth doesn't escape entirely—she had a card addressed to "Mrs. Elisabeth Elliot or Whosever Wife You Are Now."

Travel Schedule January - May 1991

January 18-20 Winnipeg, Manitoba; Missionfest; David Robbins, (204) 956-5379.

January 22 Waco, TX; Columbus Ave. Baptist Church; Beth Durham, (817) 752-1655.

February 16 Tucson, AZ; city-wide women's seminar, Christ Community Church; Cynthia Heald, (602) 298-5810.

February 26 Laguna Niguel, CA; Aliso Creek Presbyterian Church women's day.

March 1, 2 Sun Valley, CA; Grace Community Church women; Linda Dunning, (818) 363-0974

March 7 Lancaster, PA; Friendship Foundation; Dona Fisher, (717) 560-1550

March 8-10 Dayton, OH; Fairhaven Church, (513) 434-8627.

March 16 Worcester, MA; Catholic Charismatic Renewal; Julie A. Pierce, (phone number to be sent).

April 21 Chicago, IL; Moody Church missions banquet; Evelyn Rankin, (312) 943-0466.

April 23, 24 Wheaton, IL; Billy Graham Center; Dr. Tim Beougher, (708) 945-8800, ext. 343.

May 6 West Bridgewater, MA; New England Ladies' Seminar; Mrs. Thomas Ward, (508) 584-5188.

May 16 Rochester, NY; Mars Hill Broadcasting Co. banquet; Gordon Bell, (315) 469-5051.

May 17 Syracuse, NY; radio banquet; same sponsorship as Rochester.

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.

Disclaimer

My endorsement on the dust jacket of *Dating with Integrity* by John Holzmann is no longer valid. The manuscript was drastically altered *after* I endorsed it, and does not now at all represent my views. The quotation from my newsletter in chapter six is misused.

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