

The Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter

July/August 1988

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A Man Moves toward Marriage

Letters keep coming from both men and women who are in a quandary about how one ought to move toward marriage. While I was sitting here, rereading some of them, a man phoned with a question about the same subject. I wonder what is happening. Why so much confusion? Here's one of the letters:

"I'm a male Christian who needs help. I just ended a long-term 'relationship' with a non-Christian girl. I made plenty of compromises during those years, and by God's grace I hope next time will be better. I read your book *The Mark of a Man* and was shown things I never knew before which blew my mind. I'm excited about the idea of sharing life with a girl in a way which would honor Jesus. At the same time I get scared about making bad moves, when to initiate, and financial fears about supporting a family if I'm a missionary, which at the moment I'm being directed to. These things may seem silly but they're real to me. I only ask that in future Newsletters you could address some issues which could benefit us guys who see marriage as a blessing and not as years of imprisonment."

No, the questions do not seem silly to me—far from it. They are vital questions, and I'm glad there are men to whom they matter enough to pray about and ask counsel for.

I think one reason for confusion is the notion which arose, before the men who are now in their twenties and thirties were born, about the "equality" of the sexes. It is a word that belongs to politics but certainly not to courtship, a realm which concerns human beings in their entirety.

Another reason for confusion is misunder-

standing the order which God established in the beginning. I've tried to explain that divine arrangement in two books: *Let Me Be a Woman* and *The Mark of a Man*. If men would be men, women could do a better job of being women (and *vice versa*, of course, but the buck really stops with the men). What does it mean to be a man?

Christ is the supreme example. He was strong and He was pure, because His sole aim in life was to be obedient to the Father. His very obedience made Him most manly—responsible, committed, courageous, courteous, and full of love. A Christian man's obedience to God will make him more of a man than anything else in the world. Consider these qualities:

Responsibility. He must work out the salvation that God has given him "with a proper sense of awe and responsibility, for it is God who is at work" in him, giving him the will and the power to achieve His purpose (Phil 2:12, 13; J.B. Phillips). Man was made to be initiator, provider, protector for woman.

Commitment. He must be a man of his word, no matter what it costs. My father's strong counsel to my four brothers: Never tell a woman you love her until you are ready to follow that immediately with, "Will you marry me?" In other words, a man's love for a woman, if deep and abiding, leads to a lifetime commitment to her. Many heartaches would be avoided if he held back any expressions of love until he is ready to make that commitment. Once promised, he never goes back on that word.

Courage. A man must be willing to take the risks of rejection (she might say No), blame, and all that commitment costs.

Courtesy. A Christian's rule of life should be, *My life for yours*. He is concerned about the comfort and happiness of others, not of himself. He does not seek to have his own needs met, his own image enhanced, but to love God, to make

Him loved, and to lay down his life to that end. In small ways as well as great, he shows the courteous love of the Lord.

Purity. He must be master of himself if he is to be the servant of others. This means "buffeting" his body, bringing it into subjection, as Paul did. It means restraint, discipline, the strength to wait. It means an utter yielding to the will of God as revealed in 1 Cor 6:12-20 and 1 Thes 4:2-8.

As I have heard the sad stories and studied what I call "The Dating Mess" of today, it appears to me that men have generally overlooked another vital matter which ought to precede all overtures in the direction of a prospective wife. If we assume that a man is an adult when he is eighteen (or twenty-one at the latest), he should by that time be giving marriage some serious thought. He should get down to brass tacks with God to find out if this may be a part of His agenda for him. This will take time, and it might help if during this period he simply quits dating and starts praying. As long as the answer is uncertain, don't date. Does this sound extreme? It wasn't my idea. I learned it from a group of young men who have chosen this way. It is a guaranteed way of avoiding sexual activity (always illicit outside of marriage), of preserving one's wholeness and holiness, and of preventing the heartbreaks we see on every hand.

I urge you to trust God. He wants to give you the best. He will help you. He has promised to guide. He knows what you need. Ask Him to show you *whether, when, and whom* you should marry.

And don't be alone in this. Ask counsel of your spiritual superiors who are wise, who know how to pray and how to keep silence. Take their counsel seriously. If they have suggestions as to a possible mate, take those very seriously. My own parents prayed for godly spouses for all six of us, and actually named before God the very people that four of us married.

Read Genesis 24, study the principles Abraham's servant followed. Pray silently. Watch quietly.

Before you start dating, draw clear guidelines for yourself as to "how far to go." The only truly safe line is a radical one, but it works: hands off

and clothes on. If you think you can put the line somewhere else, remember that a little thing leads on to a bigger thing. A touch leads to a hug which leads to a kiss which leads to play which leads to consummation. That was how God intended the whole thing to work, but the idea of the whole thing was marriage and babies.

Can you trust yourself to quit once you start? The Bible says, "Flee youthful lusts." Don't toy with them. There is a very dangerous book and study guide, popular at least in California, called *Too Close, Too Soon*. It outlines a hazardous program of toying.

When God has guided you* as to the whether, the when, and the whom, then you must choose to love and not to fear. The Will of God always involves risk and cost, but He is there with grace to help and with all the wisdom you need. Every deliberate choice to obey Him will—depend upon it—be attacked by the enemy. Never mind. Nothing new about that. Be a man and stick with it.

*(My little book *A Slow and Certain Light* deals with the question of how to discern the Lord's will.)

The Thick Darkness

(Ex 20:21, Moses approached the dark cloud where God was. 1 Kgs 8:12, "O Lord, who hast set the sun in the heaven, but hast chosen to dwell in thick darkness. . . .")

I thought I was walking all alone
Into darkness immense and drear.
But where it was densest a Hand touched
my own,
And a Voice spoke, gentle and clear:
"Do you not think you might have known
That I should be here?
Your need is met, your way will be shown.
Be of good cheer."
(Bishop F. Houghton, China Inland Mission)

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This was sent to me recently by Ann Draisey, an old friend whose husband was killed by a drunken driver in 1952. At his funeral my father handed her the above poem. "I was helped many times in reading this and thinking of the one who gave it to me," she writes. "When Ed died, my whole world turned upside down. He was a stronger Christian and I leaned much on him." Ann has been widowed a second time, but says, "I marvel now at the goodness of the Lord and His care over me since that day. He is so faithful."

Grandchildren

Thanks to one of those wonderful frequent flyer bonuses, I went to visit my grandchildren last March. A few "clips": Three little children in the bathtub, splashing, laughing. When Granny appeared, Colleen (whose vocabulary, at not quite two, is limited to single words, pronounced very firmly and clearly) said: "Out." I got her out, stood her on the toilet seat, dried and dressed her. Jim, not quite four, was next. Christiana manages alone. . . . A breakfast of fresh pineapple, apple, and orange, scrambled eggs, homemade bread. Dishwasher broken, so Walt (the father) washed the dishes, bless 'im. . . . Table for eight in Claim Jumpers (a restaurant) after church. You could see people counting the parade of children, looking with awe, sympathy, or horror at the parents. The grandmother wanted to say, "It isn't going to be nearly as bad as you think." The children behaved. Colleen spent a good bit of the long waiting time eating crackers, dipping them and a small fist into a glass of water, and licking the fist. . . . A relay race at school. Elisabeth rushing over to exclaim with ecstasy, "I got second place *twice!*" . . . A walk with Val in the cool of the early morning while the rest of the family slept. Sprinklers on. Scent of jasmine and fresh green things. Snails drawing their shining pathways across the pavement. Val spoke of some lessons in the willingness to be nobody if only she may serve faithfully in her place. . . . The whole family in the living room, singing as I played the piano, "Great Is Thy Faithfulness, O God My Father."

The Saving Power of Housework

"Manual employments, especially if varied [and household occupations afford a great variety], give to children a sense of power in knowing what to do in a number of circumstances; they take pleasure in this, for it is a thing which they admire in others. Domestic occupations also form in them a habit of decision, from the necessity of getting through things which will not wait. For domestic duties do not allow of waiting for a moment of inspiration or delaying until a mood of depression or indifference has passed. They have a quiet, imperious way of commanding, and an automatic system of punishing when they are neglected, which are more convincing than exhortations. Perhaps in this particular point lies their saving influence against nerves and moodiness and the demoralization of 'giving way.' Those who have no obligations, whose work will wait for their convenience, and who can if they please let everything go for a time, are more easily broken down by trouble than those whose household duties have still to be done, in the midst of sorrow and trial. There is something in homely material duties which heals and calms the mind and gives it power to come back to itself. And in sudden calamities those who know how to make use of their hands do not helplessly wring them, or make trouble worse by clinging to others for support." (Janet Erskine Stuart: *The Education of Catholic Girls*, p. 85—now out of print.)

Prayer Request

A daily fifteen-minute radio program has been asked for, and a new series of videos. I wonder if this may possibly be one of the ways in which I am to obey Hebrews 10:24 (NIV): "Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds." Pray that I may not mistake the "how."

Recommended Reading

Elizabeth Prentiss: *Stepping Heavenward*. The diary of a woman from 1831, when she was sixteen, to 1858, full of wisdom about life and death and love and motherhood, full of intimate glimpses of her daily work and walk with God. May be ordered from Reiner Publications, P.O. Box 25, Sterling, VA 22170 for \$8.61 postpaid.

Travel Schedule

July-September 1988

July 15-17 Lebanon, OR; Camp Tadmor, Carla Stenberg, 503-657-4105.

July 18, 19 Cody, WY; Missionary Alliance Church, Rev. James N. Howard, 307-587-3418.

September 2, 3 Montreal, Quebec; Seminaire Baptiste Evangelique, 514-337-2555.

September 8 Langhorne, PA; Philadelphia College of Bible, 215-752-5800.

September 26 Dallas, TX; Dallas Prayer Ministry, Mrs. Meletio, 214-956-8915.

September 27 Dallas, TX; Green Acres Baptist Church.

September 28 Dallas, TX; Dallas Christian Leadership, Marlee Hinckley, 214-363-9352.

September 29 Dallas, TX; Youth Specialities, Tic Long, 619-440-2333.

A Wife's Prayer for Her Husband

Lord, grant me the vision of a true lover as I look at _____. Help me to see him through Your eyes, to read the thoughts he does not put into words, to bear with his human imperfections, remembering that he bears with mine and that You are at work in both of us. Thank You, Lord, for this man, Your carefully chosen gift to me, and for the high privilege of being heirs together of the grace of life. Help me to make it as easy and pleasant as I possibly can for him to do Your will.

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