

The Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter

March/April 1984

Why Christians Suffer—Part 2

Steadfastness, Soundness, Hope

Suffering is the Christian's boot camp. Those who are preparing to be soldiers must give evidence that they've got what it takes. A grueling course of endurance tests is set for them which some survive and some don't. Some decide early in the game that it's not really worth it, and drop out.

In his wonderful "Grace Chapter," Romans 5, Paul tells us that we've entered the sphere of God's grace and can therefore exult in the hope of the divine splendor that is to be ours. "More than this, let us even exult in our present sufferings, because we know that suffering trains us to endure" (vs. 3).

No normal person enjoys suffering. To "exult," however, is an action verb. It means to leap for joy, to be jubilant. It is said that when St. Francis of Assisi was persecuted he literally danced in the street for joy. He was simply being obedient to Jesus' command to rejoice when men revile you and persecute you. You can only rejoice if you take the long view, however,—the view which sees the great reward in heaven. You certainly don't rejoice if all you can see is the persecution.

I've never been in an army boot camp. I've seen pictures, and it looks awful. I can't imagine anybody enjoying some of the endurance tests that are required, *except* as the goal is kept in mind: I'm going to be a soldier. I'm going to prove myself. I'll lick this thing if it kills me.

"Endurance brings proof that we have stood the test, and this proof is the ground of hope. Such a hope is no mockery because God's love has

flooded our inmost heart through the Holy Spirit he has given us." (Rom. 5:4-5, New English Bible)

My father took us mountain-climbing when we were growing up; we were thrilled with the chance to stand the test. My brothers were certainly not going to beat me at it, nor would I dream of letting them slow down just for me. There is an exhilaration in endurance. Often I see it on the face of small boys in airports. They've just met Daddy at the plane, and insist on lugging his attache case or even his suitcase. "Sure I can, Dad!" they say, and their faces shine.

We are under the mercy of an infinitely loving Father. He will never allow us to suffer beyond what He knows is the proper measure. In the middle of it the suffering is *real*, not to be compared, of course, with the small boy with the suitcase. I think of those, for example, who are tortured because of their faith, or tortured by cancer. At such a time one desperately needs the Everlasting Word to fall back on—the Word which stands forever, which nothing on earth or in heaven can ever change: Divine splendor *is* to be ours. The soldier thinks of pleasing his commanding officer, receiving a commission, perhaps, and some day winning a victory. "Such a hope is no mockery" for the Christian who suffers. He can be absolutely sure there is reason and purpose behind it all. Phillips' translation of the passage has *steadfastness, soundness, and hope* as the reasons. In that the soldier can legitimately exult.

About My Mother

The last newsletter told of my mother's having had cranial surgery. I spent Thanksgiving weekend with her in the hospital. It was hard to see her thin, weak, and disoriented—she whom

I think of as quick-witted and alive. She will be eighty-five in June, and that kind of surgery took a great deal out of her.

Early in the morning on Thanksgiving Day I woke in her lovely little apartment at the Quarryville Presbyterian Home (she was in a hospital in nearby Lancaster, Pennsylvania). I looked around the room, so filled with her character (pictures, curios, everything exquisitely neatly arranged), I could not help wondering if she would be able to come back there. On the desk her piles of Christmas cards were lying, family letters stacked nearby, ready to be answered, and a little scrawled note to herself, reminding her of the number of her grandchildren and great-grandchildren, to whom she planned to send several crisp new dollar bills apiece.

My psalm for the day was the sixty-third: "Thy true love is better than life; therefore I will sing thy praises. . . . When I call thee to mind upon my bed, and think on thee in the watches of the night, remembering how thou hast been my help and that I am safe in the shadow of thy wings, then I humbly follow thee with all my heart." I told myself that I *must not dwell* on things seen, but on things unseen, and a lovely reminder of some of those things unseen, a verse specially for Mother, came when I turned to Psalm 45:13, "In the palace honor awaits her. She is a king's daughter, arrayed in cloth-of-gold richly embroidered."

When I went to see her later that morning, I read her the passages. I asked what reasons for thanksgiving she could think of, and she came up with quite a long list. We sang together some of her favorite hymns, such as "Beneath the Cross of Jesus," "All the Way My Savior Leads Me," "Praise the Savior, Ye Who Know Him," and "Jesus, Lover of My Soul." She couldn't quite reach the tunes now and then, but she remembered nearly every word of every stanza. The Lord was there. I was sure of it, and I was strengthened. I think she was too.

As I write now (early December) she is out of the hospital and in the convalescent wing of the Quarryville Home, improving a little every day, looking forward to returning to her own apartment.

Women of Like Passions

The leader of a women's conference asked me if I would be able to talk privately with a young woman who was in deep sorrow. She didn't want to "bother" me, the leader said, didn't feel she ought to take my time when there were hundreds of others who needed it. In fact, she was scared of me. Of course I said I'd be very glad to talk with her, and please to tell her I was not fierce.

After the talk, the young woman went to report to the leader.

"Oh, it wasn't bad after all! I walked in—I was shaking. I looked into her eyes, and I knew that she, too, had suffered. Then she gave me this beautiful smile. When I saw that huge space between her front teeth, I said to myself, 'it's o.k.—she's not perfect!'"



My daughter Valerie teaches a women's Bible class in Laurel, Mississippi. Recently she lost her place in her notes as she was speaking. She tried to find it while continuing to speak, realized she couldn't, apologized and paused to search the page. The pause grew agonizingly long. At last she gave up and ad-libbed through the rest of the lesson. She couldn't find the application, couldn't find the conclusion. Leaving the platform afterwards, she was on the point of tears because of what seemed an abysmal failure. A lady came to her to say it was the best class so far. Later someone called to thank Val for things which had helped her.

"Mama," she told me on the phone, "I couldn't understand why this had happened. I had prepared faithfully, done the best I could. But then I remembered a prayer I'd prayed that week (Walt told me it was a ridiculous prayer!)—asking the Lord to make those women know that I'm just an ordinary woman like the rest of them and I need His help. I guess this was His answer, don't you think?"

© Copyright 1984 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.

"Yes," I said, "And guess what I prayed on that very morning? I asked God to help you to say exactly what He wanted you to say, and not to say anything He didn't want you to say. It's not by might nor by power nor even, finally, by faithful preparation—but 'by my Spirit, saith the Lord.'"

Weather

Everybody keeps saying "What strange weather we've been having." I came upon a possible explanation—not from the meteorologists, but from—of all people—the prophet Jeremiah. "This people has a rebellious and defiant heart, rebels they have been and now they are clean gone. They did not say to themselves, 'Let us fear the Lord our God, who gives us the rains of autumn and spring showers in their turn, who brings us unfailingly fixed seasons of harvest.' But your wrongdoing has upset nature's order, and your sins have kept you from her kindly gifts." (5:23-25)

Modern minds will admit of no explanation for anything but the "scientific." This is the dogma that replaces religious dogma. Thus we have no need anymore of the Living Word—it doesn't apply in this, it doesn't apply in that, it doesn't apply at all—except where we need a little comfort, and you don't find much of that in science.

Letters

"I don't know if you will remember me. You sat beside me on the train going to Belfast. . . . I didn't have time to tell you, but I was going to visit my brother, he is in prison for stealing but he is on remand, he hasn't been tried yet. Since going into prison he has become a born-again Christian, he shares a cell with a man who is also a born-again Christian. The day I met you on the train, I arrived at the prison to find that my brother and his friend had been reading about you in a book, isn't that a marvelous coincidence? I was wondering if you could possibly find time to write to them a few cheery words to help them along the

path to God? These are the addresses . . ."

Will some reader of the Newsletter pray for these prisoners?

Prayer

If the frightened chirp of a falling sparrow reaches the Throne Room of the Lord of the Universe (and the Bible says it does) we can be sure He is not too high to pay attention to our smallest prayer.

Learn to talk to God about *everything*. It saves so much energy to obey Paul's word in Philippians 4—"Have no anxiety, but in everything make your requests known to God in prayer and petition with thanksgiving. Then the peace of God, which is beyond our utmost understanding, will keep guard over your hearts and your thoughts, in Christ Jesus."

Spread before Him in the morning all that you have to do that day, all the decisions that "hang over your head" for the next week or next year, the shopping, the interviews, the children, the boss, the lawn and garden, the neighbors, school-work, boyfriends, money—you name it, but be sure to name it to Him. Peace will be the result, if you name it with thanksgiving.

Prayer Requests

- Pray for help for me as I write a new biography.
- Pray for Valerie—for a safe delivery and a healthy child, who will be #4, due in April: Walter is now nearly seven, Elisabeth is four, Christiana is two.
- Pray for crisis pregnancy centers which are offering help to troubled women, to encourage them not to abort their babies, and to find for them shelter and comfort.
- Pray for the Marie Sandvik Center in Minneapolis, a city refuge for all sorts of needy people, including teen-agers, children, mothers, American Indians and others. Lars and I visited there recently and were deeply impressed with what Marie and her colleague Doris Nye are doing.

Questions and Answers

Several times this question has come: "What do you do when your husband wants you to go to work and you still have children at home and do not believe you should give that responsibility to others?"

It's a crying shame that many Christian husbands have slid into patterns of the world's thinking. They are unwilling to assume full support of the family, a God-given assignment. Sometimes they have not the courage to stand up to criticism of women who are "only" housewives. Sometimes plain greed is the motive, sometimes it's prestige, social pressure, ambition. What do you do?

Pray, first of all. Ask God to open the man's eyes to his true responsibility as husband and father.

Be quiet, chaste, reverent, gentle (see I Peter 3:1-6).

Take the matter to your church. The pastor and/or elders or deacons should be willing to discuss this from the scriptural standpoint with your husband. It's their place, not yours, to teach him.

Do not be afraid. Trust God. He may have an answer you can't even imagine. Take the risk of faith, one day at a time.

Travel Schedule April/May 1984

April 14 Lake Wales, Florida, First Presbyterian Church woman's retreat.

April 15 Lake Wales, Florida, First Presbyterian Church, Sunday school.

April 28 Del Rio, Texas, Christian Women's Conference, Mrs. Karol Green, 305 Enchanted Way.

May 18 Grabill, Indiana, Missionary Church, 219-627-2962.

May 19 Huntington, Indiana, Huntington College Commencement, 219-356-6000.

May 20 Idaho Falls, Idaho, Community Bible Fellowship, 208-524-5433.

How to Receive This Newsletter

The Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter is published six times per year. If you would like to receive it or know of others who would like to receive it, send names and addresses to *The Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter*, P.O. Box 7711, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48107.

The Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter

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

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