

The Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter

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The Suffering of Divorce

Many Christians now seem to regard divorce as an option, even when adultery is not involved. If they are not "comfortable" with their spouse, if they are "under too much pressure," if the grass looks greener elsewhere (which, given our usual distorted view of happiness, it generally does), they simply opt out. Untold suffering is always the result. As I travel around, I meet many of the victims. What can I say to them? I've never been divorced. I can only watch the effects, listen to the tragic tales, try to give help and comfort as it is asked for. One thing I can say with confidence to these suffering people is, "I don't know what you're going through. But I know the One who knows."

I also know from scripture, from reading the works of many who have walked the pathway of suffering and learned from it, and from some experiences of my own, that the Lord wants to transform every form of human suffering into something glorious. He can redeem it. He can bring life out of death. Every event of our lives, even so terrible a thing as divorce, provides an opportunity to learn the deepest lesson anyone can learn here on earth: "My present life is not that of the old 'I,' but the living Christ within me" (Gal 2:20, J.B. Phillips). In order for Christ to live His life in me, the self-life must be brought down to death. Death comes to us in many forms before we actually breathe our last, but as in the case of the wheat seed which falls into the ground, God's marvelous purpose is to bring life out of that buried thing. He can do it. Only He can do it. But He asks our acceptance of the painful process and our trust that He will indeed give resurrection life.

Indecision

It is painfully obvious that young people today have an awful time making up their minds about anything. They're not "really sure" what college to go to, what to major in, whom to room with, what career to prepare for, whether or whom to marry, whether to bother with children if they do marry, when to bother with them, what to do with them if they get them, whether to attempt to instill any "values" in their children (not to make up your mind on this issue is, of course, already to have instilled a value in the mind of the child).

Gary Trudeau, author of the cartoon "Doonesbury," has noticed this prevalent indecision. In a recent strip he has a young man appearing for an interview with the president of an advertising company.

"So you want to be an ad man, eh, son?" says the executive.

"Well, I think so, sir," says the youth. "I mean, I can't be certain, of course, but it seemed worth looking into, you know, to see if it worked out, if it felt right and . . . I . . . uh . . ."

I guess there's nothing new about indecision. James wrote about it in his epistle, and he shows that the remedy for it is trust. He tells us to ask for wisdom if we don't know what to do. "But when you ask him, be sure that you really expect him to tell you, for a doubtful mind will be as unsettled as a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind; and every decision you then make will be uncertain, as you turn first this way and then that. If you don't ask with faith, don't expect the Lord to give you any solid answer" (Jas 1:6-8, LB).

Questions and Answers

Please share some ideas of how to encourage intellectual pursuits with our children.

A friend who has four boys, the oldest of whom is eight, prints a different hymn and several scripture verses each week and posts them on a large, stiff cardboard in the breakfast nook. The whole family learns the hymn and verses. She has a chart showing each child's chores. This may not sound very intellectual, but the orderly doing of household chores forms habits of an orderly life, and orderly lives and orderly minds go together. This same mother bought a microphone and small public address system. She has each child stand up at one end of the living room, while the others sit in a row like an audience and listen to him recite a verse, a hymn, a poem, or make a short speech. This teaches poise, articulation, the art of speaking up, standing still, keeping the hands relaxed, etc. The same thing could probably be accomplished with a pretend microphone—an ice cream dipper, for example.

Teach your children to memorize! Their ability to quickly pick up anything you repeat often enough is nearly miraculous. Last week I was with my grandchildren for four days. The seven-year-old and the five-year-old learned to repeat the Greek alphabet almost perfectly in that time. I didn't make a federal case out of it, but merely repeated it now and then at odd moments. The five-year-old was quickest to learn it, probably because she thought it was fun while her brother thought it was kind of crazy.

Ask questions at the table which will make children think, e.g., God answers prayer—does that mean that God always gives us exactly what we ask for? Help the child to find the answer in Bible stories.

Read aloud to children. My father did this for us as long as we lived at home. He would bring a book to the table and read a paragraph, or share something in the evening as we all sat in the living room reading our own books.

Buy a microscope or a magnifying glass. Study a housefly's leg or the dust from a moth's wing, etc.

Have a globe on which they can find any

country they hear named in the news or in conversation.

Teach them to see illustrations of abstract truth in concrete objects. This is how Jesus taught—by the use of parables.

Boswell tells how when Samuel Johnson was still a child in petticoats, his mother put a prayer book into his hands, pointed out the collect for the day, and said, "Sam, you must get this by heart." She went upstairs, leaving him to study it. By the time she had reached the second floor, she heard him following her. "What's the matter?" she said. "I can say it," he replied, and repeated it distinctly, though he could not have read it more than twice.

Was he a genius at that age? Perhaps. But I think it more likely that his intellectual powers owed much to his parents' expectations and patient instruction. Expect little and you'll surely get it.

I've "blown it"—my virginity, that is—do you think it would be wrong for me to ask a girl who is a virgin to marry me? Sometimes I think it would—doesn't she deserve somebody who hasn't blown it?

It's heartening to find there's some chivalry left in the world. I applaud the nobility of your feeling there is something precious in her virginity, and your recognition that you've squandered yours. But I could not say it would be wrong for you to propose to the girl. If you are both Christians, you know that to be in Christ is to be a new creature. In the Corinthian church there were people who had been fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, homosexuals and other things. None of those, Paul said, would "possess the kingdom of God. . . . But you have been through the purifying waters; you have been dedicated to God and justified through the name of the Lord Jesus" (1 Cor 6:10, 11). The blood of Christ covers all kinds of sin. In other words,

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even though those church members had been among the sinners Paul names, they were now pure. He goes on to exhort them to honor God in their bodies (vs. 20). You can start over once you've confessed your sin and received God's forgiveness. "All alike have sinned, and are deprived of the divine splendor, and all are justified by God's free grace alone . . . He justifies any man who puts his faith in Jesus" (Rom 3:23, 24, 26 NEB).

Why Bother to Pray?

If God is sovereign, and things will be as they are going to be anyway, why bother to pray? There are several reasons. The first is really all we need to know: God has told us to pray. It is a commandment, and if we love Him, we obey His commands.

Second, Jesus prayed. People sometimes say that the only reason for prayer is that we need to be changed. Certainly we do, but that is not the only reason to pray. Jesus did not need to be changed or made more holy by praying. He was communing with His Father. He asked for things. He thanked God. In His Gethsemane prayer, He besought His Father to prevent what was about to take place. He also laid down His own will.

Third, prayer is a law of the universe. God ordained that certain physical laws should govern the operation of this world. Books simply will not stay put on a table without the operation of the law of gravity. There are spiritual laws as well. Certain things will not happen without the operation of prayer. God could cause books to stay on tables by what theologians call "divine fiat." Everything we pray for could occur in the same way, but that is not how things were arranged. Pascal, the great French thinker, said that in prayer God gives us "the dignity of causality."

Bible reading should shape our prayers. Here is a passage from Colossians (3:12-14, J.B. Phillips) which hits me between the eyes and shows me very clearly some changes I need God's help to make:

"As God's picked representatives of the new humanity, purified and beloved of God himself,

be merciful in action, kindly in heart, humble in mind. Accept life, and be most patient and tolerant with one another, always ready to forgive if you have a difference with anyone. Forgive as freely as the Lord has forgiven you. And, above everything else, be truly loving, for love is the golden chain of all the virtues."

HELP! Lars and I are contemplating having my mother come to live with us. We need someone to live here and help us care for her. She is very frail, but still ambulatory and does not need a trained nurse. You would receive board, room with private bath, and modest salary. Please write us c/o the Newsletter, or call 617-525-3653.

Prayer Requests

My nephew Gene Howard and his wife Terry and baby Heidi are on their way to Nepal as missionaries. The following list of prayer requests is from their recent letter. It is a good list for all of us to ask for ourselves as well as for others:

- That we will serve the Lord with an undivided heart. There are so many things to divide our allegiance.
- That we will persevere in the race He has marked out for us, as we fix our eyes on our Lord. There is always the temptation to slack off, but "those who have been given a trust must prove faithful."
- That we will always make the one needful thing the top priority of our lives, that is, time at the feet of Jesus. It is easy to allow busyness, even in doing the King's work, to keep us from spending time with the King Himself.

I know that many of you pray for me, and I am very thankful for that. I realize that I have no special claim on your prayers, but if the Lord brings my name to mind, please ask Him to give me fresh draughts from the well of Life to give to others. Regular writing and speaking can become pretty dusty and parched.

A Christian Woman's Service

A reader in Barbados asks that I include suggestions in the Newsletter for opportunities for women to serve outside the confines of the church. I like the list she herself gave:

- mixing with the poor or elderly within their environment;
- assisting with community projects—even if it's no more than toting a Red Cross or Poppy Day collection tin;
- sharing oneself and one's resources with neighbors, e.g., stop at the bus pole and give a lift to as many as the car will hold ("I'm not talking about casual hitchhikers and strangers," she adds);
- giving aid to non-Christian neighbors after the birth of a baby.

Thank you, Ann Gale. These seem to be in harmony with the list of women's work found in Titus 2:3-5, a passage largely forgotten now that even Christian churches are joining the world's pressure to get women into careers, as though women have no special, God-given responsibilities and are quite free to pursue money, status, prestige, fulfillment in any way they like. I'm afraid we're sowing the wind, and will one day reap the whirlwind.

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Travel Schedule March/April 1985

March 22-24 Los Gatos, California, Los Gatos Christian Church, Ruth Rohrbaugh, 408-268-1411

March 26-28 Wheaton, Illinois, Wheaton College, Dennis K. Massaro, 312-260-5076

April 6 Eugene, Oregon, Oregon Pacific District Women's Ministry, Mrs. Judy Bauer, 503-341-3460

April 17-21 Alberta, Canada, Prairie Bible Institute, Missions Conference, Ted S. Rendall, 403-443-5511

April 23 Ann Arbor, Michigan, Michigan Christian Association, 313-994-3286

May 1 Rockport, Massachusetts, Pigeon Cove Chapel, Patricia Fife, 617-546-2277

May 15 Lancaster, Pennsylvania, Manor Brethren in Christ Church, Darlene Sands, 717-393-6174

May 17-19 Seattle, Washington, Bethany Community Church, Bruce Howell, 206-524-9000

June 10-14 Hickory Corners, Michigan, Gull Lake Bible and Missionary Conference, Mrs. Eunice B. Slightly, 616-671-5155

June 16 Millersburg, Pennsylvania, David's United Church of Christ, W. Richard Solberg, 717-692-4407

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