

The Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter

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Love's Sacrifice Leads to Joy

Easter, the most joyful of all Christian feast days, follows that most sorrowful of days we remember. The joy of Easter proceeds from the Cross. Without Christ's pouring out His soul to death there would have been no resurrection. We cannot know Christ and the power of His resurrection without also entering into the fellowship of His suffering.

For years I have had on the wall of my study the lines quoted in my January/February Newsletter ("Measure thy life by loss instead of gain....Love's strength standeth in Love's sacrifice"), written by one Ugo Bassi. Those lines epitomize the central teaching of the Lord Jesus—that life springs forth from death (see John 12:24, 15:2; Matt 16:24,25, and other verses). They speak to the timeworn question, *Why, Lord?* I had no idea who Bassi was, nor had any of the people I know who read old stuff. A month or so ago my Aunt Anne turned over to me a great pile of family papers in which, to my utter delight, I discovered a thin and tattered booklet, "Sermon in the Hospital," by Ugo Bassi. Born in 1800 of an Italian father and a Greek mother he began his novitiate in the Order of St. Barnabas at the age of eighteen. On Sundays he took his turn at preaching in a hospital in Rome. Harriet E. H. King heard one of these sermons and put it into verse. I wish I could pass on to you the whole thing.

Bassi chose the Vineyard chapter, John 15, as his text, showing that the life of the Vine is "not of pleasure nor of ease." Almost before the flower fades the fruit begins to grow, but instead of being allowed to grow where it will, it is tied immediately to a stake, forced to draw out of the hard hillside its nourishment. When "the fair shoots begin to wind and wave in the blue air, and feel how sweet it is," along comes the gardener with pruning hooks and shears, "and strips it bare of all its innocent pride...and cuts deep and sure, unsparing for its tenderness and joy."

(I had written just that much when my phone rang. An unknown woman called to ask me what to do for her friend Sherrill, age thirty-three, mother of eight children, ages ten years to six weeks, whose husband Bill died of a heart attack last Friday. And so it happens, nearly always, that when I am writing or preparing talks, something occurs to jolt me with the question: do you believe what you are saying? Suppose you were in this person's shoes? Is it really true? Does it apply? O Lord, YES. You are My Father, you are Sherrill's. You are also the Gardener with the shears.)

Bassi goes on to describe the vintage, when the vine bends low with the weight of the grapes, "wrought out of the long striving of its heart." But ah! the hands are ready to tear down the treasures of the grapes; the feet are there to tread them in the wine-press, "until the blood-red rivers of the wine run over, and the land is full of joy. But the vine standeth stripped and desolate, having given all, and now its own dark time is come, and no man payeth back to it the comfort and the glory of its gift." Winter comes, and the vine is cut back to the very stem (I had not known, as John and Jesus and Bassi knew, how terribly drastic is the pruning process), "despoiled, disfigured, left a leafless stock, alone through all the dark days that shall come."

While the vine undergoes this death, the wine it has produced is gladdening the heart of man. Have you, perhaps, like the vine, given happiness to others, yet found yourself seemingly forsaken? Has it made you bitter? We need the paradigm of the vine, which is "not bitter for the torment undergone, not barren for the fulness yielded up....The Vine from every living limb bleeds wine; is it the poorer for that spirit shed? (and in this context come the lines I keep on my wall):

"Measure thy life by loss instead of gain;
Not by the wine drunk but by the wine poured forth;
For love's strength standeth in love's sacrifice,
And whoso suffers most hath most to give."

Picture the young monk, standing at the point where five long wards, lined with suffering people, converged. Even those who could not see him felt his presence as he looked down the rows of beds, heard "the sweet

voice that spoke this sermon to them tenderly."

I think you will understand why the following lines spoke especially to me, who have known very little of physical pain: "I, in the midst of those who suffer so,—who needs must somewhat share the daily pain which each of ye, Beloved, must endure, must also seek some comfort, and some strength of hope to live and suffer by;—and this hath God given me, Beloved, for your sakes, to whom I fain would pass it. Bear with me, while unto each I seem to speak,—all ye who suffer;—and I see around me none but suffers, but to whom, with reverence, these words of mine, these hopes of mine, are due."

When I wrote my book *A Path through Suffering* (published last September) I had not found this Sermon, but those words would have made a fitting opener.

Why is it that we do not seem to listen for God's voice except when we are in trouble? God speaks to us sometimes, Bassi says, through soft summer air, but we do not feel it to be God—only the wind. He speaks to us "when friends meet happily and all is merry," but we see only our friends. When a bird's song moves us to sudden rapture, do we hear God's voice or only the bird's? "But when the sharp strokes flesh and heart run through for thee and not another," then we know what no one else in all the universe can feel or know—the "hidden, tortured nerves," the "incommunicable pain,—God speaks Himself to us, as mothers speak to their own babes, upon the tender flesh with fond familiar touches close and dear;—because *He cannot choose a softer way* to make us feel that He Himself is near, and each apart His own Beloved and known" (italics mine).

Does anyone read these words who can't sleep well? Bassi writes, "He gives His angels charge of those who sleep, but He Himself watches with those who wake." He reminds us that the Son of God was made "'perfect through suffering,' our salvation's seal set in the front of His Humanity." He was the Man of Sorrows, "and the Cross of Christ is more to us than all His miracles."

"But if, impatient, thou let slip thy cross, thou wilt not find it in this world again, nor in another; here, and here alone, is given thee to *suffer* for God's sake. In other worlds we shall more perfectly serve Him and love Him, praise Him and work for Him, grow nearer and nearer Him with all delight; but then we shall not any more be called to suffer, which is our appointment here. Canst thou not suffer then one hour,—or two?"

The poem ends with lines for those who cannot feel His presence or see His face. This darkness is the one last trial. "Christ was forsaken, so must thou be too....

Thou wilt not see the face nor feel the hand. Only the cruel crushing of the feet, when through the bitter night the Lord comes down to tread the winepress.— Not by sight, but faith, endure, endure,—be faithful to the end!"

Jesus' word "remain" or "abide" (in Him, in His love), repeated ten times in John 15, means being at home in Him, living constantly in His presence and in harmony with His will. It does not at all mean unmitigated suffering (the vine isn't cut back every day!). For those of us who are not at the moment in pain, may we not let slip any cross Jesus may present to us, any little way of letting go of ourselves, any smallest task to do with gladness and humility, any disappointment accepted with grace and silence. These are His appointments. If we miss them here, we'll not find them again in this world or in any other.

Gateway to Joy

Thank you, all who have prayed for the radio program which I do five days a week. Response doubled in the second year, which we completed last October. The mail overwhelms me—not only the number of letters, but the content. Alma Griffin copes with most of the counselling asked for, but I read and pray over the piles she sends me. Such stories of pain, deep need, disaster in Christian families. Such heartcries for help. So please keep praying for all the folks at Back to the Bible offices in Lincoln who make possible our program. Pray for Alma and me, for Linda Magee, coordinator, and for Jan Wismer, my announcer, who is no longer traveling to Massachusetts for the taping because she became a mother in February. Thank God for her little Christiana Renee! Brent Matz, engineer, and Linda Magee come to do the complicated things that have to be done in the control room while I talk to a microphone in the studio. Pray that my words may be living and powerful, with the power only the Spirit of God can bestow.

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Women: The Road Ahead

That was the theme of *Time's* special issue last fall. There were pictures of women in prison with babies, an inconsolable "crack" baby with a tangle of tubes connected to machines, crying his little heart out, a mother charged with a felony: delivery of drugs to her newborn child, women in politics "sharing real rather than cosmetic power," a veiled Muslim woman, ten tough-minded women who "create individual rules for success," e.g. a police chief, a bishop, a rock climber, a baseball club owner, a rap artist, a fashion tycoon, an Indian chief, and others (not much femininity showed in their pictures). There were single mothers, lesbian mothers, divorced mothers, working (outside the home) mothers. There was a twelve-year-old who fixes supper for her sisters when Mom works late and there was a man who is a househusband. But there was not one picture of a father and mother and their children. Not one.

"A jockstrap was a parting gift when Marion Howington retired last year from the once all-male post of senior v.p. at J. Walter Thompson....For Howington, a striking 60, who began climbing the ad agency's ladder in Chicago in 1967, the key to success was to 'be aggressive' and 'think like a man.'... 'There's not a woman anywhere who made it in business who is not tough, self-centered, and enormously aggressive.' "

Readers occasionally ask me why I include horrifying stuff in the Newsletter. Well, to precipitate prayer and to remind us that we do not engage in a war against mere flesh and blood. As Ephesians 6 says, "We are up against the unseen power that controls this dark world, and spiritual agents from the headquarters of evil.... Take your stand then with truth as your belt, righteousness your breastplate, the gospel of peace firmly on your feet, salvation as your helmet and in your hand the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God."

There was at least one bright note in *Time's* special issue. Sixty-six percent of women aged 18-24 answered yes to the question, "If you had the opportunity, would you be interested in staying at home and raising children?" They are beginning to see that the corporate world is no day at the beach. There was encouragement also in a letter to Ann Landers from a former executive: "It suddenly dawned on me that I had my priorities bollixed up and my children deserve better. I had to admit getting fulfilment from my career was a pipe dream. It may elude me in motherhood as well, but I

now know what really matters. After nine years of paying someone to raise my children, I was forced to admit my family is more important to me than anything else. I wish I had known this when my first child was born. I am now thirty-six years old and happy to say we are expecting our third child.... This means cutting down on vacations, and our entertaining will be reduced to popcorn and video parties with a few old friends.... 'No success in life can compensate for failure at home.' "

I had a letter from one who made it her goal to be the godly woman of Titus 2:3-5. As usual, when one determines to obey the Lord "the enemy was there causing me to feel like my whole world is on a roller-coaster, that my family was not important, that I am worthless, lazy, because I am a homemaker. I was so tired sometimes I could barely get meals on the table. I heard remarks like, 'Oh, you aren't working at all? How do you manage to live on one income? It's hard on your husband! What do you do all day? You must be bored!'

"As my husband and I listened to your program we reaffirmed the goals we had set and committed them to the Lord once more.... Pray for me to be strong and of good courage and to remain faithful, an attitude of submission, a true handmaid of the Lord."

Women need to be prayed for. They need all the encouragement they can get. Sadly, it is not always forthcoming from other Christians. I saw a lovely girl in the market the other day with the sweetest of sweet baby girls in her grocery cart. I asked about the baby—five months old, her only child so far. "Are you able to stay home to care for her?" "Oh yes! Oh, I can't even imagine putting her in day care." I gave her my blessing. Perhaps even a brief word from a stranger can make a difference to a young mother.

Prayer lays hold of God's plan and becomes the link between His Will and its accomplishment on earth. Things happen which would not happen without prayer. Let's not forget that. Amazing things happen, and we are given the privilege of being the channels of the Holy Spirit's prayer. As we pray *against* abortion and pornography and homosexuality and divorce and drugs and *for* the strengthening of homes and families, we often feel helpless and hopeless until we remember, "We do not know how to pray worthily as sons of God, but his Spirit within us is actually praying for us in those agonizing longings which never find words."

Small Things

When I want to do only great things for You,
Make me willing to do small, unnoticed things, too.
When I want to do what the world will acclaim,
Make me willing to do what will lift up Your name.
B.J. Hoff

"Well done, my good and trusty servant!" said the master. "You have proved trustworthy in a small way; I will now put you in charge of something big. Come and share your master's delight" (Matt 25:23, NEB).

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 March - May 1991

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, (508) 865-5373.

March 19-21 taping for Gateway to Joy.

March 25 Heart to Heart TV show; CBN.

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

April 22 Wheaton, IL; Bethany Chapel; Mrs. Hawthorne, (312) 668-5533.

April 23 Arlington Heights, IL; women's luncheon, (708) 398-7005.

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

April 24 Wheaton College Chapel.

May 6 West Bridgewater, MA; New England Baptist Church.

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

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

May 18 Kingston, Ontario; radio luncheon, same as Rochester.

May 28-30 taping for Gateway to Joy.

May 31 Deerfield, IL; Allies for Faith and Renewal conference; Kevin Perrotta, (313) 761-8505.

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