

The Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter

May/June 1989

ISSN 8756-1336

Humdudgeons or Contentment

The word *humdudgeon* is a new one to me and I like the sound of it. It means "a loud complaint about a trifle." Heard any of those lately around your house? One mother thought of an excellent antidote: all humdudgeons must be presented not orally but in writing, "of two hundred words or more." There was a sudden marked reduction in whining and complaining.

Parents, by example, teach their children to whine. No wonder it is so difficult to teach them not to! Listen to conversations in the elevator, at the hairdresser's, at the next table in the restaurant. Everybody's whining about everything—weather, health, the president, the IRS, the insurance mess, traffic, the kids.

Human life is full of trouble, which doesn't come from the dust, said Job's friend Eliphaz, nor does it sprout from the ground. Man is *born* to trouble. Compare your list with one famous man's:

1. he had a difficult childhood
2. less than one year of formal schooling
3. failed in business at age 31
4. defeated for legislature at 32
5. failed again in business at 33
6. elected to the legislature at 34
7. his fiancée died when he was 35
8. defeated for speaker at 38
9. defeated for electorate at 40
10. at 42 married a woman who became a burden, not a help
11. only one of four sons lived past age 18
12. defeated for congress at 43
13. elected to congress at 46
14. defeated for congress at 48
15. defeated for senate at 55
16. defeated for vice president at 56

17. defeated for senate at 58

18. finally elected president.

He was Abraham Lincoln, of course. When I look at his list of set-backs, I wonder if I've ever had a problem.

Adler said, "It is a categorical demand of the neurotic's lifespan that he should fail through the guilt of others and thus be free of responsibility." That sobered me. Is my response to failure instantly to lay the blame on somebody else? Is there always an excuse, a complaint, an inner whine? (May not the present emphasis—even in Christian circles—on delving into one's past exacerbate rather than cure neurosis? Ought we not simply to set about "forgetting those things which are behind," rather than "getting in touch" with them?)

A spirit of calm contentment always accompanies true godliness. The deep peace that comes from deep trust in God's lovingkindness is not destroyed even by the worst of circumstances, for those Everlasting Arms are still cradling us, we are always "under the Mercy." Corrie Ten Boom was "born to trouble" like the rest of us, but in a German concentration camp she jumped to her feet every morning and exuberantly sang "Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus!" She thanked the Lord for the little parade of ants that marched through her cell, bringing her company. When Paul and Silas were in prison, they prayed and sang. It isn't troubles that make saints, but their response to troubles. Even miracles can't make us holy. Paul reminded the Corinthians that the Israelites were *all* guided by the same cloud, *all* had the experience of passing through the sea, *all* ate the same supernatural food, and *all* drank the same supernatural drink. "In spite of this, most of them failed to please God and their corpses littered the desert" (1 Cor 10:5, Jerusalem Bible). The reason for His displeasure came down to a single root: discontent, which included "wicked lusts for forbidden

things" (idols and illicit sex, for which 23,000 were killed in one day) and *complaining* because they wanted things perfectly legitimate in themselves which God had not given—leeks and onions and garlic and cucumbers and fish—and stood at their tent doors, parents and children together wailing: "Here we are, wasting away, stripped of everything; there is nothing but manna for us to look at!" (Num 11:6, JB) Many were struck with a plague and died.

When Paul's flesh was tormented by a sharp thorn he naturally wanted it removed. He made this request known to God, but the answer was No. God didn't change Paul's physical condition, He changed his spiritual one. He gave him what he needed more than healing. He gave him the high ministry of heaven called grace. Paul not only accepted the answer, he learned even to be very thankful for weakness itself, for "power comes to its full strength in weakness."

Everything about which we are tempted to complain may be the very instrument whereby the Potter intends to shape His clay into the image of His Son—a headache, an insult, a long line at the check-out, someone's rudeness or failure to say thank you, misunderstanding, disappointment, interruption. As Amy Carmichael said, "See in it a chance to die," meaning a chance to leave self behind and say YES to the will of God, to be "comformable unto His death." Not a morbid martyr-complex but a peaceful and happy contentment in the assurance that goodness and mercy follow us all the days of our lives. Wouldn't our children learn godliness if they saw the example of contentment instead of complaint? acceptance instead of rebellion? peace instead of frustration?

May ours be the spirit of the seventeen-year-old Lady Jane Grey who prayed this prayer in her prison cell before she was beheaded in 1554:

O merciful God, be Thou unto me
A strong Tower of defence,
I humbly entreat Thee.
Give me grace to await thy leisure,
And patiently to bear
What Thou doest unto me;
Nothing doubting or mistrusting
Thy goodness towards me;
For Thou knowest what is good for me
Better than I do.
Therefore do with me in all things

What Thou wilt;
Only arm me, I beseech Thee,
With Thine armor,
That I may stand fast;
Above all things taking to me
The shield of faith;
Praying always that I may
Refer myself wholly to Thy will,
Abiding Thy pleasure, and comforting myself
In those troubles which it shall please Thee
To send me, seeing such troubles are
Profitable for me; and I am
Assuredly persuaded that all Thou doest
Cannot but be well; and unto Thee
Be all honor and glory. Amen.

For practical help teaching children not to whine and complain, see Chapter 7 of *The Obedient Child* by Ken Wilson. (Can be ordered for \$9.20 from Servant Publications, P.O. Box 8617, Ann Arbor, MI 48107. *Please do NOT order from the Newsletter.*)

Do It at Once

"No unwelcome tasks become any the less unwelcome by putting them off till tomorrow. It is only when they are behind us and done, that we begin to find that there is a sweetness to be tasted afterwards, and that the remembrance of unwelcome duties unhesitatingly done is welcome and pleasant. Accomplished, they are full of blessing, and there is a smile on their faces as they leave us. Undone, they stand threatening and disturbing our tranquility, and hindering our communion with God. If there be lying before you any bit of work from which you shrink, go straight up to it, and do it at once. The only way to get rid of it is to do it." (Alexander Maclaren)

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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.

Letter to a Missionary

When my father and mother were newly married they sailed for Belgium where they were to work with the Belgian Gospel Mission. They were twenty-four and twenty-three. Recently my brother Jim Howard unearthed a letter written to them by an older missionary of the China Inland Mission dated July 21, 1922. It spoke to me freshly and powerfully when I received it yesterday, so I give it to you:

"My dear Philip:

As this comes into your hands you will be aboard your steamer, and perhaps a bit of a ways on your journey towards Belgium. I do hope that both Katharine and yourself will prove to be excellent sailors, and that the journey will be a very happy and helpful time for you. See all you can, on board ship, everywhere. If conditions permit of it, make the acquaintance of the Chief Engineer, and see the 'works' of the boat! They are worth seeing! Never join the ranks of those who think sanctification means shutting your eyes to everything!!

"My love and esteem for you both says how nice it would be if I could only go with you, and be with you in your service, helping, suggesting, warning, etc. as the case might demand. But how foolish would such a procedure be, if it were possible!! We shall serve you best as we pray for you, daily asking God to do for you in His way, which will be infinitely richer and fuller and better than our best. God's way of speaking to you, and of getting at you, will be through His Word. Dwell in it, therefore. Begin each day with a portion of it. Pray for grace to see when He is speaking to you; and for grace to adjust yourself to what He thus shows you! Do that and you will be a successful Christian and Missionary wherever you are.

"There is one thing, however, I want to mention in particular, and feel sure you won't mind my doing so. If it has not already been done, somewhere in the mid-Atlantic, just dump overboard all the supposed superiority we Americans think we have over most other folks! Enter Belgium merely as a Sinner-Saved-by-Grace, and not as an American! Of course, in one sense, we must never forget our nationality, and must carry ourselves in a way to honor our

native land—but you know what I mean. Don't be going around with a chip on your shoulder looking for your rights. I do not say this because I have seen anything in you which leads me to think it necessary, for, so far as I have observed, you are free from it all. I do know human nature a bit, though, and you will need to keep close to your Lord to prevent this sort of thing coming into your life. Mr. Hoste (a leader of the China Inland Mission) once said to me as I was about to take up a new and responsible post, 'Mr. Whittlesey, you may expect all the honor and esteem you are worthy of receiving, and no more!!' A good text is 'Let your yieldingness be known unto all men.' Phil 4:5 (margin).

"We shall love to hear from you from time to time, and will reply every time. We shall not forget to pray for you all the time, and feel sure you are going to be much used of your Lord in the place He has placed you. With heartiest greetings and love from us all, Roger D. Whittlesey."

Lars's Eyes

Some of you have been praying for my husband Lars since he learned three years ago that he has glaucoma. There are three kinds, all of which lead to blindness if not treated. His is "the kind you *don't* want," his doctor said. He must put drops in his eyes six times per day, including setting an alarm to get up at night. Last December he had laser surgery on the right eye, which did what the drops hadn't adequately done: brought the pressure down where it belongs. Neither drops nor surgery can cure the condition. They merely arrest it. But we can pray for the Touch that "hath still its ancient power," if that would be for the greater glory of God.

Gateway to Joy

This is the name of my radio program, broadcast Monday through Friday for fifteen minutes on more than one hundred stations. If you don't get it in your area, phone your local station and tell them you'd like to. They can obtain it by writing to GATEWAY TO JOY, Box 82500, Lincoln, NE 68501.

Study Guide for Passion and Purity

Joyce Holmes has written a very good study guide to accompany my book (the love story of Jim Elliot and me, framing scriptural principles for bringing one's desires under the authority of Christ). You may obtain it from her for \$4.00. Her address: 216 NE Azala, Corvallis, OR 97330. *Please do NOT order from the Newsletter.*

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 May-August 1989

May 3 Chula Vista, CA; Evangelical Free Church, (619)421-7733.

May 4 Bellflower, CA; Bellflower Christian School, Mrs. Laura Williams, (213)925-6491 or 2950.

May 6 Big Bear, CA, PCA women's conference (same contact as above).

May 7 Laguna Niguel, CA; Aliso Creek Presbyterian Church, The Rev. Walter Shepard.

May 15 Liberty Corner, PA; Women's day, (215)332-1676.

June Belgium, Germany, Austria, Hungary, Vienna, Switzerland.

July 24-29 Tuxedo, NC; Camp Greystone (704)693-3182.

August 15, 16 Orlando, FL; SPRINT (407) 425-5552.

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