

The Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter

November/December 1987

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A New Thanksgiving

Those who call Thanksgiving "Turkey Day," I suppose, take some such view as this: Unless we have Someone to thank and something to thank Him for, what's the point of using a name that calls up pictures of religious people in funny hats and Indians bringing corn and squash? Christians, I hope, focus on something other than a roasted bird. We do have Someone to thank and a long list of things to thank Him for, but sometimes we limit our thanksgiving merely to things that look good to us. As our faith in the character of God grows deeper we see that heavenly light is shed on everything—even on suffering—so that we are enabled to thank Him for things we would never have thought of before. The apostle Paul, for example, saw even suffering itself as a happiness (Col 1:24, NEB).

I have been thinking of something that stifles thanksgiving. It is the spirit of greed—the greed of doing, being, and having.

When Satan came to tempt Jesus in the wilderness, his bait was intended to inspire the lust to do more than the Father meant for Him to do—to go farther, demonstrate more power, act more dramatically. So the enemy comes to us in these days of frantic *doing*. We are ceaselessly summoned to activities: social, political, educational, athletic, and—yes—spiritual. Our "self-image" (deplorable word!) is dependent not on the quiet and hidden "Do this for My sake," but on the list the world hands us of what is "important." It is a long list, and it is both foolish and impossible. If we fall for it, we neglect the short list. Only a few things are really important, and for those we have the promise of divine help: sitting in silence with the Master in order to hear His word and obey it in the ordinary line of *duty*—for example, in being a good husband,

wife, father, mother, son, daughter, or *spiritual* father or mother to those nearby who need protection and care—humble work which is never on the world's list because it leads to nothing impressive on one's resume. As Washington Gladden wrote in 1879, "O Master, let me walk with Thee/ In lowly paths of service free. . . ."

Temptation comes also in the form of *being*. The snake in the garden struck at Eve with the promise of being something which had not been given. If she would eat the fruit forbidden to her, she could "upgrade her lifestyle" and become like God. She inferred that this was her right, and that God meant to cheat her of this. The way to get her rights was to disobey Him.

No new temptation ever comes to any of us. Satan needs no new tricks. The old ones have worked well ever since the Garden of Eden, although sometimes under different guises. When there is a deep restlessness for which we find no explanation, it may be due to the greed of *being*—what our loving Father never meant us to be. Peace lies in the trusting acceptance of His design, His gifts, His appointment of place, position, capacity. It was thus that the Son of Man came to earth—embracing all that the Father willed Him to be, usurping nothing—no work, not even a *word*—that the Father had not given Him.

Then there is the greed of *having*. When "a mixed company of strangers" joined the Israelites, the people began to be greedy for better things (Num 11:4, NEB). God had given them exactly what they needed in the wilderness: manna. It was always enough, always fresh, always good (sounds good to me, anyway, "like butter-cakes"). But the people lusted for variety. These strangers put ideas into their heads. "There's more to life than this stuff. Is *this* all you've got? You can have more. You gotta live a little!"

So the insistence to have it all took hold on God's people and they began to wail, "all of them in their families at the opening of their tents." There is no end to the spending, getting, having. We are insatiable consumers, dead set on competing, upgrading, showing off ("If you've got it, flaunt it"). We simply cannot bear to miss something others deem necessary. So the world ruins the peace and simplicity God would give us. Contentment with what He has chosen for us dissolves, along with godliness, while, instead of giving thanks, we lust and wail, teaching our children to lust and wail too. (Children of the jungle tribes I knew years ago did not complain *because they had not been taught to.*)

Lord, we give You thanks for all that You in Your mercy have given us to be and to do and to have. Deliver us, Lord, from all greed to be and to do and to have anything not in accord with Your holy purposes. Teach us to rest quietly in Your promise to supply, recognizing that if we don't have it we don't need it. Teach us to desire Your will—nothing more, nothing less, and nothing else. For Jesus' sake, Amen.

Splendor in the Ordinary

For the encouragement of those whose work seems humdrum, here is what St. Francis DeSales said: "The King of Glory rewards His servants not according to the dignity of their office, but according to the love and humility with which they carry it out."

In the same spirit are these paragraphs from the book *Splendor in the Ordinary* (out of print, alas), by Thomas Howard (who has taught me many things, even though he is my brother):

"[In households] the idea is that in our daily routines we are playing out the Drama of Charity, which eludes politics and its calculations. The commonplaces of household life are parts of the rite in which we celebrate the mystery of Charity—and it is indeed a mystery, full of outrageous absurdities like obedience being a form of liberty, and self-denial a form of self-discovery, and giving a form of receiving, and service a form of exaltation. Politics boggles at mysteries like this; but in Christian households the hunch is that they are all clues to what the Real Drama is about.

"For when the Drama of Charity was played out on the stage of our history, we saw these absurdities disclosed in their true colors. Here we saw Love incarnate in the form of a servant; here we heard the disquieting doctrine of exchanged life proclaimed all over the hills of Judaea; here we witnessed the humility of the virgin mother exalted high above the station of patriarchs and prophets, and the heroic silence of her spouse lauded for all time. Here we saw a gibbet transfigured into a throne, defeat into victory, death into life, and submission into sovereignty. And here we learned of the Holy Ghost himself whose service is to glorify, not himself, dread and mighty as he is, but this incarnate Love humbled below the meanest of men. A riot of self-giving and glory, humiliation and exaltation, service and majesty. Nonsense by any political calculating; but the mystery of Charity before our eyes.

"It is this nonsense that we come upon in our kitchens. For the service in this room is either pointless thralldom, or it is as close to the center of the Real Drama as any rite in the whole household. For it is, precisely, service; and service, occurring as it does always for the sake of something else, is a form of humility and self-giving; and humility and self-giving have been disclosed in the Christian Drama as being at the heart of the matter."

Those Christmas Letters

Somebody wrote to Ann Landers, begging her to print his complaints about those "unbearable Christmas letters" which he found "boring as hell." Many of you probably feel the same, even though you might use different terms to describe it.

It is a bit much to be regaled at Christmastime with the details of Uncle Herman's hemorrhoid operation and the family white-water vacation which turned into a non-event. I lose track of who's getting what degree where, or whether it

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was Don, Dan, or Dean who made Little League last year. If you tell me the year has been a "stretching" experience, I suspect you're suppressing a lot of data which would have been much more interesting than what you told me.

I'll read your Family Times if you'll solemnly promise NOT to:

1. Omit your surname. I get four letters signed "Gary, Linda, and the kids."

2. Omit your address. *Please* put it on the *letterhead*. Envelopes get thrown away.

3. Write in the third person. "Gary got sacked last February." Fine. I know now that it's Linda who's writing. Uh-oh. In the next paragraph I read, "Linda's mid-life crisis hasn't been as bad as we expected." So did you hire somebody to write this personal letter? If it's the family dog who takes pen in paw, say so, as J.I. Packer does.

4. Send a picture of the children which doesn't include the parents. The children are adorable in their matching red pajamas, but it's the parents I know. I'd like to see everybody, preferably in daytime clothes—please?

A Spiritual Spanking

A woman from Bremerton, Washington, writes: "Thank you for the fine spanking you delivered to my spiritual behind. Some of my friends think your standards are too high, you are too demanding of us *as women*, you were raised knowing what self-discipline is all about, and therefore you don't struggle as we do, etc. Whether this is true or not, I only know that God speaks to me . . . cuts through the garbage and sentiment. Please don't ever soften the message, no matter how great the temptation. There are more than enough people who deliver the bad news wrapped in cotton wool. We need to know there are awful consequences to disobedience. Like the prophets of old, choose the hard road; tell us what we need to hear. And keep telling us over and over until we heed."

That letter gave me a great lift, Holly. Pray that I may always speak the truth, but speak it in love, with grace, and seasoned with salt. Pray above all that I may *act* what I talk and write.

When Does a Calf Start Being a Calf?

There is a lot of woolly thinking about the question of when life begins. Calves, it seems, start being live creatures a lot sooner than babies do. A new tax law requires cattle breeders to record all costs associated with raising a cow—beginning with *conception*. As Kimberly Sheets of Iowa writes in *Focus on the Family*, "Do you realize that the same government that tells us a calf is a calf at conception also makes abortion legal?! What does this say about the value of human life?" (Reprinted with permission from *Focus on the Family*, copyright © July 1987.)

Prayer Requests

The volume of mail I receive on the following subjects leads me to ask that you:

- Pray for young men in their late twenties and thirties who seem unable to come to a decision to accept masculine responsibility as husbands and fathers. I meet them everywhere I go—of marriageable age, most of them have had a succession of "relationships," and have broken more than one woman's heart. Pray that God will show them their responsibility to get down to business with *Him* as to whether marriage is a part of His plan.
- Pray for young women who are hoping for marriage, many of whom have been brought to the brink and then abandoned. Ask God to help them to trust His love to give them what is best, and to wait quietly while faithfully carrying out each day's duty.
- Pray for those who preach and teach the Word of God, that they may have courage and forthrightness in presenting the crystal-clear truth about sexual purity, beginning with the significance even of "small" liberties which nowadays are so casually indulged in. I Corinthians 6 and I Thessalonians 4:2-8 are crucial passages, not heard often enough.

A Book on Tape

A two-tape album of my reading of *These Strange Ashes*, the story of my first year as a missionary. Make check for \$9 (includes postage) payable to Lars Gren, 10 Strawberry Cove, Magnolia, MA 01930.

A Note from Lars

"Oh no. Not the annual note from the Man at headquarters? Harry—here comes the pitch. We're about to get pinched. Watch this. Capital letters. Double exclamations. Underlined in red, white, and blue. Harry, this'll make you weep at the end. Oh no, Harry. It's not that at all. What? He's just thanking us for the past year's contributions and for helping to make this an easy year for him? Well, Harry, that's nice. Maybe we'll do something for him next year, too." Sure do appreciate you subscribers and contributors, and so do a whole lot of folks who get the Newsletter *gratis*, especially those overseas and in Canada where the exchange is still poor. The Lord's best for you in the coming year. Lars Gren (Mr. Elliot III)

November/December 1987/ January 1988

November 6 Lynchburg, VA; Liberty University, Mrs. Sue Forbus, (804) 237-5961.

November 7 Illinois (town indefinite); Winning Women, Mrs. Peg Emmons, R.R. 2, Box 18, Saybrook, IL, 61770.

November 16, 17 Toccoa Falls, GA; Toccoa Falls College, (404) 886-6831.

November 22 Auburn, AL; Lakeview Baptist Church.

December 4 and 6 Long Beach, CA; Parkcrest Christian Church, (213) 421-9374.

December 5 Palm Desert, CA; Evangelical Free Church.

January 22-26 Auburn, AL; Covenant Presbyterian Church, (205) 821-7062.

January 28 Grantham, PA; Messiah College, (717) 766-2511.

January 29 Gettysburg, PA; Mid-eastern Leadership Conference, Mrs. John Metcalf, (301) 262-0884.

January 30 Boston, MA; Evangelistic Association of New England, Miss Laurel Breton, (617) 523-3579.

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