

# The Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter

September/October 1987

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## The Gospel According to Sloat

Psychologist Donald Sloat, author of *The Dangers of Growing Up in a Christian Home*, made some breathtaking assertions in an interview for *InterVarsity* magazine last spring. I scurried to my typewriter to protest to the powers that be, but I can't leave it at that. I met a couple who were badly confused by Sloat's statements, which they had studied earnestly, hoping to find some light for a dark time they are having with a defiant fifteen-year-old.

God has promised that for the upright (those whose lives are characterized by obedience) light will arise out of darkness. The world, however, is continually coming at us with notions utterly at variance with God's light. We must test every notion by the straightedge of Scripture.

I think I know what Dr. Sloat meant, and I am terribly aware of the great gulfs fixed between what one believes, what one actually says, and what an interviewer may record (not to mention what the reader or hearer may *think* was said). I can only take the words of the interview as it appeared.

Sloat's remarks confuse the nature of the *true* Christian home with its sad imitations, *true* Christian faith with a vague and often Pharisaical travesty. He has discarded the baby with the bathwater. This is a serious mistake for one who is taken for a godly counselor. False premises lead to false conclusions in diagnosis and false prescriptions. Note the following:

Christian faith, he says, can be dangerous to family stability. By Christian faith does he really mean the genuine article or a man-made farrago? Faith, according to Scripture, means obedience, and that, Jesus says, is the secret of stability.

The man who hears His words and acts upon them builds his house on a rock. Rain, floods, and wind will not destroy it (Mt 7:25).

Christian parents "push ideas onto their kids," says Sloat. God says, "These commandments which I give you this day are to be kept in your heart; you shall repeat them to your sons, and speak of them indoors and out of doors, when you lie down and when you rise" (Dt 6:6, 7; NEB). I'm deeply thankful to God that my parents did just this. They "pushed" a lot of things on us—spinach and courtesy and bedtime and the Bible.

Self-denial, Sloat tells us, represented by such slogans as "Jesus first, others second, yourself last," hinders the development of self-esteem. I wonder what revision of that order he might suggest? Jesus plainly said, "If anyone wishes to be a follower of mine, he must leave self behind; he must take up his cross and come with me. . . . if a man will let himself be lost for my sake, he will find his true self" (Mt 16:24, 25; NEB). There are appropriate ways (first by the example of self-giving love in the parents) to begin to teach this crucial truth even to a little child—pass the butter to Daddy before you help yourself; let your brother have a turn on your new bike; don't grab the last cookie.

"Parents sometimes use another person, or even God, to shame their youngsters," Sloat warns, "making it sound as though the child is displeasing someone else." Throughout Scripture we find godly people (the psalmist, for example, and the apostle Paul) stating that their supreme desire is to please the Lord. Jesus Himself had no aim other than to please His Father. A child *wants* to please his parents, and knows very well that deliberate wrongdoing displeases them. If he is encouraged to obey what they say he will be ready for the next lesson—if you love God, you do what *He* says, too. The lesson that love means obedience

begins here—"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right" (Eph 6:1; RSV). My own parents' faithfulness in this helped immeasurably in my learning to obey God.

The next question is a real zinger. The interviewer asks if it's better to be raised in an open, non-Christian home than in a strict Christian one.

"From primarily a psychological point of view, the house that is more open and understanding probably has the environment a child needs," is Sloat's stunning reply. He goes on to say that since a child is going to sin no matter what the parents do, it is artificial to make a list of rules. One wonders why God bothered with the Ten Commandments, long after man had proved that he was going to do what he wanted to do anyway. Would Sloat feel that Ten Suggestions would have been psychologically healthier?

"Parents can help their children by not setting up conditions where the kids think they are being perfect or self-righteous"—a very confused line of thought. If there are no limits imposed, kids (or any of the rest of us) will have no trouble being "perfect." You can't break laws if there aren't any. Theologically speaking, the law reveals sin. Practically speaking, carefully thought-out household rules (and who would defend any other kind?) are guidelines for living thoughtfully and unselfishly. All of us, precisely because we are human and imperfect, need to know where the lines are drawn.

Sloat believes that one must get rid of hurt before he can truly forgive. If we follow that advice, most of us will never get around to obeying what Jesus said: "... if you do not forgive others, then the wrongs you have done will not be forgiven by your Father." (Mt 6:15; NEB). I have learned (through having tried it backwards) that forgiveness is the prerequisite for getting rid of the hurt.

Other highly dubious tenets of Sloat's Gospel: the wildly rebellious child may be better off than the sensitive one. Therefore, parents ought to encourage "some forms of" rebellion, even though my Bible tells me it is like witchcraft (1 Sm 15:23). His suggestion in this context reveals his confusion: let them choose their own socks. If what parents are to encourage is freedom in mere matters of taste, such as the color of a pair

of socks, rebellion doesn't enter the picture. Disobedience to house rules is a matter of principle—something else altogether.

"Don't make a rule you can't enforce." We need not bother, then, to teach our children the meaning of honor and trust? Are they to obey only when under surveillance?

Sloat believes that "legal and moral issues," which he does not define, are enforceable. Some rules, in his view, are not: a child's choice of friends, rules about smoking and church attendance. Confusion again. What he meant to say, surely, is that some rules are *worth* enforcing, others aren't. Parents differ on which is which. The principle remains: if it's one of those carefully thought-out rules, the parents must require obedience, no matter how stubbornly the child opposes them. They're in trouble if they start taking opinion polls.

Referring to the possibility of his teenage daughter's sleeping with her boyfriend, this father says, "As much as I would *maybe* want to try and stop her, I don't know if I could. . . . The best thing to do with teenagers is to not *try* to control behavior" (*italics mine*). This one took my breath away. The *best* thing to do? Not *try* to control them? Alas. And then Sloat cites the prodigal son as his proof-text—the father financed his son's rebellion. He forgets that the son was of age and could therefore legally claim his inheritance. Parents are responsible for their children's behavior—as long as they are children. There comes a time, however, when they must turn the adult son or daughter over to God.

Sloat's "best piece of advice": become a whole person. What, exactly, does *that* mean? It's a catch phrase which few bother to define. I wonder if his definition of a whole person would be in line with 1 John 2:17 (J.B. Phillips), "... the man who is following God's will is part of the permanent and cannot die," or with Matthew 16:25, "... if a man will let himself be lost for my sake, he will find his true self."

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I'm afraid the doctor has dug up a good many more snakes than he can kill. He's going to have to spend a long time answering people's questions. I daresay he'll be saying he "didn't mean it that way." If people can't say what they mean, then they either don't understand it or they don't believe it. Too many psychologists today take refuge in psychobabble, calculated to snow us ordinary folks. From a Christian we hope for conviction and clarity, a vision of life which takes its shape from the Word who was made flesh and dwelt among us, and a fearless willingness to swim against the strong tides of secularism.

## Gratitude—Even in Death

Eileen Longo, of Warren, New Jersey, writes of her marriage to a man with leukemia who was given two years to live. For ten healthy years after that prognosis "he lived for God radically—there couldn't be a shadow of grasping this life, since it was all so obviously a daily gift from the Lord." When their daughters were five, three, and nine months, the leukemia returned. On the evening of the fourth day Eileen left the hospital, "full of joy and excitement, caught up in a work of God. I knew either he would be healed or taken to Glory, either one a tremendous miracle. So I wasn't shocked when I got the call at 1 A.M. Bill was gone. I simply threw myself into the arms of my Father in Heaven, in gratitude for all the years and the rich life He had given us, so undeserved. God's mercy and love have filled me from that moment. It is nearly one and a half years, and there still is no room for anything but gratitude because of how good God is. To Him be the glory!"

Sometimes we puzzle over how on earth we are supposed to obey the command, "In everything give thanks." Eileen's testimony may show the answer. She wasn't thankful for leukemia—that's the work of the enemy—but she found far greater things to thank God for.

## What to Do When Your Children Grow Up

Thoughts from my mother's little red Quiet Time notebook: "Job 1:5—'When a round of feasts was finished, Job sent for his children and sanctified them, rising early in the morning and sacrificing a whole-offering for each of them; for he thought that they might . . . have . . . committed blasphemy in their hearts. This he always did.'

"When one's children are adults, what is the role of the parent?

"They seldom come to us for help or advice. It is wonderful if they do. Then, out of our experience and perhaps the spiritual wisdom God may give us, we may be able to give wise counsel. Seldom, if ever, do they ask advice concerning the training of children. It is a blessing when they ask for prayer for themselves or their children, and this is usually the sole recourse of the grandparent, except for one *tremendous* duty: we can do as Job did. We have the One great Sacrifice to plead—the blood of Jesus Christ! May we be faithful in this duty and privilege for those we love!"

### Prayer

Loving Lord and Heavenly Father, I offer up today all that I am, all that I have, all that I do, to be Yours today and Yours forever. Give me grace, Lord, to do all that I know of Your holy will. Purify my heart, sanctify my thinking, correct my desires. Teach me, in all of today's work and trouble and joy, to respond with honest praise, simple trust, and instant obedience, that my life may be in truth a living sacrifice, by the power of Your Holy Spirit and in the name of Your Son Jesus Christ, my Master and my all. Amen.

## What Money Can't Buy

Dale Wayne Slusser is an architectural draftsman who, when he told his boss he was giving up his job to work for a mission, was offered more than double his salary if he'd stay. He wrote, "All he can offer me is money, prestige, and comfort—but he can't offer me joy! How can he?" Dale is no fool. He gives up what he can't keep to gain what he can't lose.

## Please Write

I'd love to know what you want less of or more of in the Newsletter. Just send a postcard (and please don't expect a personal reply) to my home address: 10 Strawberry Cove, Magnolia, MA 01930. Thank you.

### *September/October/ November/December 1987*

**September 25-27** Los Gatos, CA; Los Gatos Christian Church.

**September 29** Merrillville, IN; World Home Bible League women's retreat, Mrs. Leona Botting, (616) 669-5977.

**October 2** Providence, RI; Brown University IVCF, Kevin Offner, (401) 521-4258.

**October 3** Wenham, MA; Gordon College, Writer's Seminar, Lars Gren, (617) 525-3653.

**October 15** Lancaster, PA; Calvary Independent Church women's conference.

**October 16-18** Livonia, MI; Winning Women Inc., (313) 474-7271.

**October 19** Pittsburgh, PA; Faith Christian Community School and Beverly Heights U.P. Church, (412) 561-5100.

**October 23** Elgin, IL; Judson College Founders Day, (312) 695-2500.

**October 29** Nyack, NY; Women's seminar, Dan Rinker, (914) 358-1710.

**October 30, 31** Indianapolis, IN; Brown County Women's Retreat, (317) 849-5049.

**November 1** Indianapolis, IN; (see October 30, 31).

**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, Alabama; Lakeview Baptist Church.

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

**December 5** Palm Desert, CA; Evangelical Free Church.

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