

The Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter

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A Call to Older Women

In 1948 when I had been at Prairie Bible Institute (a very stark set of wooden buildings on a very bleak prairie in Alberta) for only a few weeks, I was feeling a bit displaced and lonesome one afternoon when there came a knock on my door. I opened it to find a beautiful rosy-cheeked face framed by white hair. She spoke with a charming Scottish burr:

"You don't know me, but I know you. I've been praying forr you, Betty dearr. I'm Mrs. Cunningham. If evertt you'd like a cup of tea and a Scottish scone, just pop down to my little appartment."

She told me where she lived and went on to say that my name had been mentioned in a staff meeting (she never said how—was I thought of as a misfit at PBI? I wonder) and the Lord had given her a burden for me. Many were the wintry afternoons when I availed myself of her gracious offer and we sat together in her tiny but very cozy basement apartment while she poured tea for me and I poured my soul out to her. Her radiant face was full of sympathy, love, and understanding as she listened. She would be quiet for a little, then she would pray and, looking up, cheer and strengthen me with words from God. During and after my missionary years she wrote to me until she died. Only God knows what I owe to "the four Katharines"—Katharine Cunningham, Katharine Gillingham Howard (my own mother), Katherine Cumming (my house

mother when I was in college), and Katherine Morgan, the widowed missionary of Colombia who gave me the push that sent me to Ecuador. These and several others have not only shown me what godliness looks like (many have done that), but have significantly graced my life by obeying God's special call to older women.

The Apostle Paul tells Titus that older women ought to "school the younger women to be loving wives and mothers, temperate, chaste, and kind, busy at home, respecting the authority of their own husbands" (Titus 2:4,5 NEB). My dear "Mom Cunningham" schooled me—not in a class or seminar, or even primarily by her words. It was what she *was* that taught me. It was her availability to God when He sent her to my door. It was the surrender of her *time*, an offering to Him for my sake. It was her readiness to "get involved," to lay down her life for one anxious Bible school girl. Above all, she herself, a simple Scottish woman, *was the message*.

I think of the vast number of older women today. The Statistical Abstract of the United States for this year says that in 1980, 19.5% of the population was between ages 45-65, but by 2000 it will be 22.9%. Assuming that half of those people are women, what a pool of energy and power for God they might be. We live longer now than we did forty years ago (the same volume says that the over-sixty-fives will increase from 11.3% to 13%). There is more mobility, more money around, more leisure, more health and strength—resources which, if put at God's disposal, might bless younger women. But there are also many more ways to *spend* those resources, so we find it very easy to occupy ourselves selfishly. Where are the women, single or married, willing to hear God's

call to spiritual motherhood, taking spiritual daughters under their wings to school them as Mom Cunningham did me? She had no training the world would recognize. She had no thought of such. She simply loved God and was willing to be broken bread and poured-out wine for His sake. *Retirement* never crossed her mind.

If some of my readers are willing to hear this call but hardly know how to begin, may I suggest to you:

1. Pray about it. Ask God to show you whom, what, how.
2. Consider writing notes to or telephoning some younger woman who needs encouragement in the areas Paul mentioned.
3. Ask a young mother if you may do her ironing, take the children out, babysit so she can go out, make a cake or a casserole for her.
4. Do what Mom C. did for me—invite somebody to tea, find out what she'd like you to pray for (I asked her to pray that God would bring Jim Elliot and me together!)—and *pray* with her.
5. Start a little prayer group of two or three whom you can cheer and help. You'll be cheered and helped too!
6. Organize a volunteer housecleaning pool to go out every other week or once a month to somebody who needs you.
7. Have a lending library of books of real spiritual food.
8. Be the first of a group in your church to be known as the WOTTs (Women of Titus Two), and see what happens (something will).

"Say not you cannot gladden, elevate, and set free; that you have nothing of the grace of influence; that all you have to give is at the most only common bread and water. Give yourself to your Lord for the service of men with what you have. Cannot He change water into wine? Cannot He make stammering words to be instinct [imbued, filled, charged] with saving power? Cannot He change trembling efforts to help into deeds of strength? Cannot He still, as of old, enable you in all your personal poverty 'to make many rich'? God has need of thee for the service of thy fellow men. He has a work for thee to do. To find out what it is, and then to do it, is at once thy supremist duty and thy highest wisdom. 'Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it.'" (Canon George Body, b. 1840)

Letters

Here is one who has, in an unusual way, answered God's call.

"After four long years of unexplainable, puzzling infertility, God surprised us with joy in pregnancy. During those years of yielding to God my heart's desire for more children, I knew that in His withholding, God is wise above my finite thinking, and loves me with an everlasting love. Yet each time my period came, I cried in surrender and began sewing for other children besides my own. The aides in my grandma's nursing home so needed the touch of God's love, so I sewed for their children and told them of the personal God who loves them and compels His own to give. Our rich Heavenly Father always provided enough for my own and enough to give. God blessed and honored my staying within my husband's budget of \$100 per child per year for physical needs and \$220 per month for fabric, food, and gas. I prayed, 'Lord, just provide enough for our necessities and plenty to pour into the love of others.' Often I sent clothes anonymously to those who might be offended, with a note of God's care to encourage. . . . It is His love that brings wholeness into my once fragmented life. I will never forget from what and how He has saved me."

Recommended Reading

E. Herman: *Creative Prayer*. A spiritual classic, written before World War I. Forward Movement Publications, 3024 Springboro St., Cincinnati, OH 45202, paperback \$2.00.

Darlene Rose: *Evidence Not Seen*. The riveting true story of the difference Christ made in a World War II prison camp. Harper and Row, \$13.95.

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Many thanks to all who responded to my uncertainty about continuing the Newsletter. I'll keep it up as long as I can. One young woman wrote:

"My parents died years ago and I think I depend on you for the same straight talk that I used to get from my mother. . . . I suspect you have two groups of readers: the first, spiritually strong women who read every word you write, nodding in agreement with every paragraph, and who then say, 'Amen, Sister!' and the second, spiritually wavering women who need constant roadsigns to guide them to the Celestial City. Of course our Lord is all sufficient in this regard, but I firmly believe He uses you (and others) to help."

The Solace

Kathleen R. Lewis

I am waiting, Lord, on Thee,
Show me what You want for me.
I am resting; Thou art doing.
I am listening; Thou art wooing.
In the beauty of Thy will,
Draw me close, my being still.

I am trusting, Lord, in Thee,
Show the path I cannot see.
I am foll'wing; Thou art leading.
I am hung'ring; Thou are feeding.
While I yield, though through my tears,
Pour Your comfort, calm my fears.

I am resting, Lord, in Thee,
Keep my eyes on Calvary.
I am praying; Thou art giving.
I am dying; thou art living.
Not my will, but Thine instead,
Poured-out wine, and broken bread.

Do Not Forecast Grief

Sitting one still and sunny afternoon in a tiny chapel on an island in the South I thought I heard someone enter. A young woman was

weeping quietly. After a little time I asked if I could help. She confided her fears for the future—what if her husband should die? Or one of her children? What if money ran out?

All our fears represent in some form, I believe, the fear of death, common to all of us. But is it our business to pry into what may happen tomorrow? It is a difficult and painful exercise which saps the strength and uses up the time given us *today*. Once we give ourselves up to God shall we attempt to get hold of what can never belong to us—*tomorrow*? Our lives are His, our times in His hand, He is Lord over what *will* happen, never mind what *may* happen. When we prayed "Thy will be done," did we suppose He did not hear us? He heard indeed, and daily makes our business His, and partakes of our lives. If my life is once surrendered, all is well. Let me not grab it back, as though it were in peril in *His* hand but would be safer in *mine*!

Today is mine. Tomorrow is none of my business. If I peer anxiously into the fog of the future I will strain my spiritual eyes so that I will not see clearly what is required of me now.

"Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof"—and the work thereof. The evil is not a part of the yoke Jesus asks us to take. Our work is, and He takes it with us. I will overextend myself if I assume anything more.

God chains the dog till night; wilt loose the
chain
And wake thy sorrow?
Wilt thou forestall it, and now grieve
tomorrow,
And then again
Grieve over freshly all thy pain?

Either grief will not come, or if it must,
Do not forecast;
And while it cometh, it is almost past.
Away, distrust;
My God hath promis'd; He is just.

(George Herbert, from "The Discharge")

Travel Schedule: September-December 1989

September 23, 24 Lexington, SC; Presbyterian Church, (803)359-9501.

September 28-30 Del City, OK; First Southern Baptist Church, (405)732-1300.

October 5, 6 San Bernardino, CA; Campus Crusade staff women.

October 21 Spokane, WA; Moody Bible Institute seminar, (312)329-4000.

October 26 Grand Rapids, MI; Calvary Church, (616)956-9377.

October 27-29 Madison, WI; Buckeye Evangelical Free Church, 222-8586.

November 4 Charlotte, NC; Glad Tidings radio ministry banquet, (704) 536-7062.

November 7 S. Hamilton, MA; Gordon-Conwell Seminary, pastors and wives workshop, (617)468-7111.

November 10 Quakertown, PA; Crisis Pregnancy Center, (215)538-3180.

November 11 Princeton, NJ; Presbyterian Church, (609)443-7484.

November 18 Nashua, NH; women's breakfast, Vilma Zuliani, (603)883-5192.

December 29, 30 Hamilton, Ontario; Student Mission Advance, (416)523-0682.

Prayer

- For my radio talks, and each speaking engagement on the itinerary, that my words may be His words, spoken faithfully and with grace.
- For women to hear the call of God to offer themselves, their time, their strength to other women who need their help.

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.*

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