

The Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter

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The Heavenliness of a Little Child

(The following is from an article by Walter D. Shepard Jr. in *The Covenanter*, monthly bulletin of Covenant Presbyterian Church in Laurel, Mississippi.)

Andrew Murray's book *How to Raise Your Children for Christ* comments on Matthew 18:4-5. The disciples had come to Jesus with a question: Who is greatest in the kingdom of heaven? In answer, Jesus called a little child and set him in the midst of them. In the kingdom, the humblest and most childlike would be the highest.

In creating a family, God sets a little child in the midst of husband and wife and in that little child opens to them the mystery of the kingdom of heaven and the spiritual world. If that couple wants to know about heaven and what will prove their fitness for its highest place, they must study the child nature. On earth we'll find nothing so heavenlike as a little child, and no surer way to the highest enjoyments of heavenly dignity than in receiving little children in His name.

Let's look at what Andrew Murray calls "the heavenliness of the little child." Our Lord Jesus uses one word: "Whoever then *humbles* himself as this child. . . ." The greatest will be those who think least of being greatest because they lose sight of themselves while seeking God and His kingdom. Have you noticed the great charm of childlikeness? It's the absence of self-consciousness. The true child knows how to lose himself in that which is around him. On the other hand,

the older the child grows the more we see the curse of sin: it makes a person (every one of us) his own center.

Parents have the means at their disposal of gratifying the tastes and pleasures of their children. Thus they are in danger of destroying the simplicity and tenderness of the child by stimulating the desires which belong merely to this world. "In the midst of a great deal of Bible teaching and hymn singing, the very heart of true religion may be eaten out by the artificial and unchildlike spirit of the homes in which the children are reared."

Will we have the courage to shut down some of the pointless activities as we realize our children's tender susceptibility to impressions? Will a haggard dad and a breathless mom be alert to the fact that the child is alive and alert to what surrounds him—to the influence of the heavenly life or the withering effect of a worldly life?

"If we are to watch over the heavenliness of our children, then we must ourselves be childlike and heavenly-minded." As our Lord put a little child as a visual aid in the midst of strong men, we ought to remind ourselves of how often our children teach us more than we see ourselves teaching them. The key is our commitment to making the atmosphere of our homes different from the world's homes. We should evidence simple, happy, and trustful living in the Father's presence.

Lord, give us this grace to make our homes the havens they can be, not only for the children's sake but for the sake of Christ.

Let's spend less time exclusively with grown-ups and learn to set a child, lots of children, in our midst and enjoy them. Yes, it's o.k. to take notes!

A Few Swipes at the Glory of Homemaking

Even the gift catalogues are peddling some not-so-subtle anti-housework propaganda:

- a doormat that says DULL WOMEN HAVE IMMACULATE HOMES!
- a cross-stich motto, A CLEAN HOUSE IS A SIGN OF A WASTED LIFE.

Put those maxims against 1 Peter 4:7, "The end of all things is upon us, so you must lead an ordered life."

Prayer

"Order your private devotions so that they become not arguments and causes of tediousness by their indiscreet length, but reduce your words into a narrow compass, still keeping all the matter; and what is cut off in the length of your prayers, supply in the earnestness of your spirit; for nothing is lost while the words are changed into matter, and length of time into fervency of devotion. Break your office and devotion into fragments and make frequent returnings." Jeremy Taylor (seventeenth century).

Please pray for me as I write a small booklet (perhaps eight to ten pages) for children, ages ten to seventeen, about prizing "the gift you give only once," virginity. This is one thing I must do to try to reduce the appalling statistics of teenage pregnancy and promiscuity. Ask God to help me to make it readable, simple, truthful, and helpful, for His name's sake. Pray about an illustrator and publisher for the booklet. (No, I haven't finished Amy Carmichael's biography. I need prayer for that, too.)

Pray for those who suffer because of the sins of people they love. Ask the Lord to teach them in this experience that He suffers with them (compassion means "to suffer with"); that they are thus given a chance to share *His* suffering (1 Pt 4:13; Col 1:24; Phil 1:29), to bear His yoke (Matt 11:29), and to know Him in a way not otherwise possible (Phil 3:10). (All of these describe the opportunities offered to us in any kind of suffering, but perhaps it is more difficult to be willing to learn when suffering comes through those we love.)

Teaching Children

How many times between the ages of three and ten do children have to answer the only two questions adults can think of to ask them: How old are you? and What are you going to be when you grow up?

The second question may seem innocuous, but is it? In the first place, many children may be distressed at being required to make a choice which is far beyond them. In the second place, it implies that the choice is theirs. This can lead to great confusion later on. The child will grow up physically, but spiritually he will not have begun until he learns that Jesus died not only to save him from sin but in order that he should live not for himself but for Him who died (see 2 Corinthians 5:15 and 1 John 3:16). If a young person has been taught from childhood that he ought to "be something" without at the same time being shown that nothing is better than being God's servant, he may be preoccupied with ambitions and ideals he has gotten solely from the world. If his conception of "where it's at" has nothing to do with the Kingdom of God, he is in for trouble when it comes time to discern the Will of God. He will be setting limits to his obedience, defining the terms of his service. "For My sake" is a concept children can grasp much earlier than we generally suppose. A little boy wrote to me that he was learning to lay down his life for others. To him this meant that sometimes when he would rather play he lay down beside his little sister to help her go to sleep.

Pray that God will show you how to teach your children that life is meant to be lived for God. "You are not the owner of your own body. You have been bought, and at a price! Therefore bring glory to God in your body" (1 Cor 6:20; JBP). Help your child to understand that the Lord is his Shepherd, and he is a little lamb. The Shepherd will gladly show him the right path-way if he is willing to follow.

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Question and Answer

Q. Is it a sin to ask God why?

A. It is always best to go first for our answers to Jesus Himself. He cried out on the cross, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?" It was a human cry, a cry of desperation, springing from his heart's agony at the prospect of being put into the hands of wicked men and actually *becoming sin* for you and me. We can never suffer anything like that, yet we do at times feel forsaken and cry, WHY, LORD?

The psalmist asked why. Job, a blameless man, suffering horrible torments on an ash heap, asked why. It does not seem to me to be sinful to ask the question. What is sinful is resentment against God and His dealings with us. When we begin to doubt His love and imagine that He is cheating us of something we have a right to, we are guilty as Adam and Eve were guilty. They took the snake at his word rather than God. The same snake comes to us repeatedly with the same suggestions: Does God love you? Does He really want the best for you? Is His word trustworthy? Isn't He cheating you? Forget His promises. You'd be better off if you do it your way.

I have often asked why. Many things have happened which I didn't plan on and which human rationality could not explain. In the darkness of my perplexity and sorrow I have heard Him say quietly, TRUST ME. He knew that my question was not the challenge of unbelief or resentment. I have never doubted that He loves me, but I have sometimes felt like St. Teresa who said, "If this is the way You treat Your friends, no wonder You have so few!" Job was not, it seems to me, a very patient man. But he never gave up his conviction that he was in God's hands. God was big enough to take whatever Job dished out (see Job 16 for a sample). Do not be afraid to tell Him exactly how you feel (He's already read your thoughts anyway). Don't tell the whole world. God can take it—others can't. Then listen for His answer. In the Newsletters of 1984 there were six scriptural answers to the question WHY—from 1 Peter 4:12-13; Romans 5:3-4; 2 Corinthians 12:9; John 14:31; Romans 8:17; Colossians 1:24. There is mystery, but it is not all mystery. Here are clear reasons.

A Stone with a Broken Heart

"Do you know the lovely fact about the opal? That, in the first place, it is made only of desert dust, sand silica, and owes its beauty and preciousness to a defect. It is a stone with a broken heart. It is full of minute fissures which admit air, and the air refracts the light. Hence its lovely hues, and that sweet lamp of fire that ever burns at its heart, for the breath of the Lord God is in it.

"You are only conscious of the cracks and desert dust, but so He makes His precious opal. We must be broken in ourselves before we can give back the lovely hues of His light, and the lamp in the temple can burn in us and never go out." Ellice Hopkins.

He Is Able

For more than a century thousands of Christians have used a little book called *Daily Light*, a collection of scripture verses arranged for morning and evening reading, without commentary. The story of how it was put together perhaps gives us a clue as to why so many can testify to the amazing relevance of the selected passages to the needs of the very days for which they are given. The Bagster family of London collected the scripture passages and "prayed them into" the dates. Sometimes it did not seem clear which passages were to be used on a given date, so they proceeded to the next and later returned to fill in the page in question. The evening selection for March 8 is this:

- I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able.
- Able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think.
- Able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work.
- Able to succour them that are tempted.
- Able . . . to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.
- Able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy.

Able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.

Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.

"Believe ye that I am able to do this?" . . . Yea, Lord. "According to your faith be it unto you."

(2 Tm 1:12; Eph 3:20; 2 Cor 9:8; Heb 2:18; Heb 7:25; Jude 24; 2 Tim 1:12; Phil 3:21; Matt 9:28-29)

Passion and Purity

A twenty-six-year-old man preparing to be a missionary writes, "I wish someone had given me this book about six months ago because it would have saved me a lot of pain and anguish of heart. The principles you wrote about spoke to me about more than just boy-girl relationships. God used this book to turn me from a very dangerous and persistent habit I've gotten into." He goes on to say he'd been dating many different girls, but deep down he had a real aversion to the whole dating scene. "I didn't like the feeling of having many girlfriends but really having no one. My heart was aching and lonely. I could feel Jesus asking me if He could have some time with me, please, so that He could comfort me, but it was always easier to call a

friend (guy or girl) and spill out my problems to that person. . . . This last week I picked up your book and began to read it. God hit me so hard with the fact that I have been searching in the wrong place for my fulfillment. Jesus did not have first place, so how could I ever enjoy a marriage relationship?"

A Dieter's Prayer

A reader who was "stuck with nineteen pounds of fat" after the birth of her second baby writes, "The Lord showed me that I'd made Him Lord of all my life—every area except eating. Such a simple thing it may seem. Now when I sit down to a meal I say, 'Lord, how much of this? How much of that?' It works for me unless out of habit I sit down and forget my new commitment and just follow my fleshly desires."

Travel Schedule May/June 1986

May 2-4 Mt. Hermon, CA; women's conference, Jayne Price, 408-335-4580.

June 20-21 Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian Church of America, 404-292-5715.

June 23-24 Colorado Springs, CO; Music Evangelism Foundation, 303-632-7337.

June 25-26 Philadelphia, PA; PCA women, Susan Hunt, 404-292-6102.

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