

The Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter

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The Gift of Loneliness

I was not a wife anymore. I was a widow. Another assignment. Another gift.

Don't imagine for a moment that that was the thought that occurred to me the instant the word came. *O Lord* was probably all I could think, stunned as we all were.

One step at a time over the years, as I sought to plumb the mystery of suffering (which cannot be plumbed), I began to see that there is a sense in which everything is a gift, even my widowhood. I hope I can explain.

There would be no widowhood if there were no death. The Bible calls death an enemy. There would be no divorce if there were no sin. Sin is enmity against God. When sin entered the world through what theologians call the Fall of Man, death and all kinds of suffering followed.

But God still loves us. This we know, for the Bible tells us. C.S. Lewis wrote, "You asked for a loving God: you have one. The great spirit you so lightly invoked, the 'lord of terrible aspect,' is present: not a senile benevolence that drowsily wishes you to be happy in your own way, not the cold philanthropy of a conscientious magistrate, nor the care of a host who feels responsible for the comfort of his guests, but the consuming fire Himself, the Love that made the worlds" (*The Problem of Pain*, New York, Macmillan, 1965, p.35).

That inexorable Love had allowed me to become a widow. But "allowed me to become" is not adequate. It even seems feeble to me now, for the Lord of Hosts is absolutely sovereign. He holds power over the universe, He holds

authority over my life—not because He usurps the rights with which He endowed me in creation, but because I had specifically asked Him to be Lord of my life. I had prayed as earnestly as a child and a teenager and a woman can pray, *Thy will be done*. The coming of this transcendent authority into one's life is bound to be an active thing, an immense disruption at times.

This was one of those times. He had done more than merely "allow" a thing to "happen" to me. I do not know any more accurate way of putting it than to say that He had given me something. He had given me a gift—widowhood.

How can I say such a thing?

He does not whisk us at once to Glory. We go on living in a fractured world, suffering in one way or another the effects of sin—sometimes our own, sometimes others'. Yet I have come to understand even suffering, through the transforming power of the Cross, as a gift, for in this broken world, *in our sorrow*, He gives us Himself; *in our loneliness* He comes to meet us.

In His death Jesus Christ gave us life. The willingness of the Son of God to commit Himself into the hands of criminals became the greatest gift ever given—the Bread of the world, in mercy broken. Thus the worst thing that ever happened became the best thing that ever happened.

—Excerpt from my book *Loneliness*

(Small note from the Man Behind the Scene: Are there people out there who might be lonely—single, married, widowed, divorced, male or female? Elisabeth's book is available from me, *NOT from the Newsletter*, at \$11 postpaid. Lars Gren, 10 Strawberry Cove, Magnolia, MA 01930.)

What's a Nice Girl Like You . . .

Young people have the crazy notion nowadays that the only way to *really* "get to know" somebody is to get intimate. That's what's important. No it isn't. What's important is what that person lives for and how much they'd be willing to risk for it. The following is reprinted from *The Pilot*, the Catholic weekly of the Archdiocese of Boston, March 31, 1989, with the permission of author John Mallon:

"One of the few remaining places where a single Catholic male can meet a nice Catholic girl these days is in jail—after being on the sidewalk blocking the entrance to an abortion mill. You can pretty well assume that she takes her faith—and The Faith—seriously and probably doesn't scoff at things like virginity, purity, chastity, and love, or view motherhood as a male plot to oppress women. She will know what she believes—and why—perhaps from bitter experience. She will have a light shining through her. Pro-life women may be the last hope for American womanhood.

"These are the people our society is starting to arrest these days. It is hard to meet such a woman at the Catholic [or Protestant, I might add—EE] universities, which have no shortage of pro-abortion feminists, and others hell-bent on liberating women from the 'oppressive' shackles of Catholicism into the freedom of being 'sexually active'—complete with the right to prevent or dispose of any possible result from that activity.

"With the assault on femininity in full force, what is a simple Catholic boy to do in his search for female companionship except to join the fight for the restoration of womanhood (among other things) by stopping the socially sanctioned killing of babies? What else but get in the way of law-abiding folks who kill babies for a living? Try to rescue the women and children who will suffer from this legalized carnage.

"Could the pro-life movement be the last bastion of feminine loveliness and strength? Young male Christian friends of mine have commented to me on the lovely qualities and virtue of the women they meet at Operation Rescue demonstrations. This is not to trivialize the solemn business of saving children from death and their mothers from trauma. . . .

"It cannot be ignored that modernism's all-out assault on love, family, femininity, masculinity, womanhood, manhood, motherhood, fatherhood, sex, child conceiving, bearing, and rearing has necessarily played havoc with youthful romance. And it is indeed about the business of banishing romance down the same road that it has already driven genteel courtship. What The World takes for romance is really seduction—a race to bed rather than a gentle dance of mutual discovery. A good woman is as hard to find as a good man used to be—a good man perhaps even harder than ever. . . .

"So where can you go to meet a good and faithful young Catholic woman in this day and age? In jail. Where else?"

Prayer

"Always maintain the habit of prayer, be both alert and thankful as you pray. Include us in your prayers, please, that God may open for us a door for the entrance of the gospel. Pray that we may talk freely of the mystery of Christ. . . and that I may make that mystery plain" (Colossians 4:2-4, JBP).

Thank you, all of you who have been praying for Lars and me. The radio program, Gateway to Joy, now reaches over a hundred stations in the U.S. and has just gone into Canada (for information, call 1-800-7284 JOY). Station HCJB in Ecuador carries it overseas by shortwave. We are thankful for this, but awed by the responsibility, aware of Jesus' words, "Without Me you can do *nothing*."

Pray for all who work against the appalling evil of abortion: crisis pregnancy centers, those who open their homes to shepherd pregnant single women, doctors and nurses who refuse to participate in any way in abortions, Operation

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Rescue, Christian Action Council, Right to Life, and all others who stand with Christ against this kind of murder.

Pray for Supreme Court judges who will work to change Roe vs. Wade.

Another Small Note from Lars

Some of you don't know who in the world Lars is. He's my husband (a.k.a. "Mr. Elliot III," he says). He wants you to know that if you received the "Thank You" tape entitled "The Shape of Godliness," the back side has a Question and Answer session that didn't quite fill it up. He hates to waste an inch of tape, so he filled it from other talks. Because it was mastered from a tape rather than live, the quality is not the best. You may notice a voice- or speed-change. "Stay alert," he says, "it's understandable, at least—but maybe blank tape would have been more enjoyable." I join him in thanking you for your help to the Newsletter.

But I Have a Graduate Degree!

A woman was asked to speak to the women students of a seminary about job opportunities for those with seminary degrees. She writes, "I talked to them first principally about being, doing, and going as God wills (not who am I, but whose am I). Then I listed both traditional and creative ways to fulfill needs in the Kingdom of God. Three feminists were offended especially that I should mention a nanny among the 70+ jobs. But Aristotle was a 'nanny' to Alexander the Great! These women had bought into the values of the world and were ready to fight for their ten years of executive computer programming. They said my talk had 'put them down more than any man's.'"

Theology means the study of God, but if an earned degree in that field confers a position in life which makes servanthood "beneath us" (three women felt "put down"), something is badly amiss. "The servant is not greater than his master," Jesus said. "Once you have realized these things, you will find your happiness in doing them" (John 13:16, 17; JBP).

Happiness—never mind the "status" of the job. The disciples had been occupied with petty rivalries and questions about greatness. Jesus, "with the full knowledge that the Father had put everything into His hands" (John 13:3, JBP), took into those hands the dusty, calloused feet of each of the twelve, washed them, and dried them with a towel. It was His happiness to do the will of His Father, but it was a shock to those rugged men. The washing of feet hadn't occurred to them as coming under that heading, I suppose, even though they had heard the principle before. I can imagine the bewilderment on their faces. Can't you just hear Peter's tone as he says, "You, Lord, washing my feet?" (vs. 6, NEB).

Values get skewed so easily nowadays, don't they? *Time* (Nov. 7, 1988) carried the testimony of one man who, according to the world's measurement of success, had hit the top. He was playwright Eugene O'Neill and if it's success that makes people happy he should have been the happiest of men. He sounds like the most miserable: "I'm fed to the teeth with the damned theatre. . . . The game isn't worth the candle. If I got any real spiritual satisfaction out of success in the theatre it might compensate. But I don't. Success is as flat, spiritually speaking, as failure. After the unprecedented critical acclaim to *Mourning Becomes Electra* I was in bed nearly a week, overcome by the profoundest gloom and nervous exhaustion."

Lay O'Neill's words alongside Jesus.' *Once you have realized* these things you will find your happiness in doing them. It's hard for us earth-bound mortals to realize them. It's easy to be beguiled by temporal rewards, short-lived promises of fulfilment. The brighter the prospects the world offers, the more obscure become the principles of the Kingdom in which, as Janet Erskine Stuart said, "humility and service are the only expression and measure of greatness."

Guardian Angels

The angels assigned to children, we are told, "always behold the face of the Father." Last March Valerie went into the bathroom where she had left two-year-old Colleen brushing her teeth. The child was flat on her back on the

floor, unconscious, not breathing, eyes rolled back, slightly stiff and beginning to turn blue. She grabbed her up, prayed, "O Lord, HELP ME!", ran downstairs calling to Elisabeth to dial 911, and trying the Heimlich Maneuvre, thinking perhaps Colleen had swallowed something. While Elisabeth dialed Val then tried CPR. By the time the emergency squad arrived Colleen was breathing but not conscious. They took her to the hospital, did a CAT scan, found nothing abnormal. Next day, they sent her home, perfectly well. "In His hand is the breath of every living thing." We are so thankful for that confidence, and for those ministering spirits, the angels, who do His bidding.

Recommended Reading

D.M. M'Intyre: *The Hidden Life of Prayer*, Bethany Fellowship Inc. Recently out of print, I'm told, but if you run to your bookstore you might find a copy before they run out. The duty, necessity and obligation of prayer; the equipment; the direction of the mind; worship. Reasons for praying—God instructs us to pray; we are dependents; we need communion and He desires it; we are cooperators with God as we pray. The icing on this very nourishing cake is the abundance of illustrations and quotations, e.g. "God does not delay to hear our prayers because He has no mind to give; but that, by enlarging our desires, He may give us the more largely" (Anselm of Canterbury).

Travel Schedule July-September 1989

July 22-28 Tuxedo, NC; Camp Greystone, (704)693-3182.

July 28 Steubenville, OH; Franciscan University, (614)283-3771.

August 13 Worcester, MA; Booksellers' Convention.

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

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.

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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