

# The Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter

March/April 1990

ISSN 8756-1336

## Virginity

**M**y heart goes out to the countless women in their thirties and forties who write to me in real agony of soul because they are still single. There were two letters in this morning's mail. One said, "I am a Christian woman thirty years of age and I am facing the possibility of a life of singleness." The other: "I am forty-one years old. I never dreamed I would not be married—I've been praying for a husband ever since I was sixteen."

This phenomenon, due in part, I suppose, to what demographers are calling "the postponed generation" (the Baby Boomers, born between 1946 and 1964) has reached catastrophic proportions. Men postpone marriage ten or twenty years beyond what used to be considered the marrying age. When the mirror tells them they're fast aging they decide it's time to settle down. Feeling that a young wife will lend a certain assurance that they are not quite over the hill, they pass up women of their own age. Everywhere my husband and I go we meet lovely Christian women, beautifully dressed, deeply spiritual, thoroughly feminine—and *single*. They long for marriage and children. But what is it with the men? Are they blind to feminine pulchritude, deaf to God's call, numb to natural desire? I am reminded of the conversation I had with Gladys Aylward thirty years ago. She had been a missionary in China for six or seven years before she ever thought of wanting a husband. When a British couple came to work near her she began to watch the wonderful thing they had in marriage, and to desire it for herself. Being a woman of prayer she prayed—a straightforward request that God would call a man from England, send him straight out to China, and have him propose. She leaned toward me on the sofa on which we were sitting, her black eyes

snapping, her bony little forefinger jabbing at my face. "Elisabeth," she said, "I *believe* God answers prayer! He *called* him," then, in a whisper of keen intensity, "but he *never came*."

Where are the holy men of God willing to shoulder the full responsibility of manhood, to take the risks and make the sacrifices of courting and winning a wife, marrying her and fathering children in obedience to the command to be fruitful? While the Church has been blessed by men willing to remain single *for the sake of the Kingdom* (and I do not regard lightly such men who are seriously called), isn't it obvious that God calls most men to marriage? By not marrying, those whom He calls are disobeying Him, and thus are denying the women He meant for them to marry the privileges of being wife and mother. (See my Newsletter, "A Man Moves Toward Marriage," July/Aug '88.)

But what shall I say to the women who write to me in such sorrow and perplexity? First of all, it is not our job to set about trying to coerce the men. They must answer to God, who made *them* the initiators. But a woman must answer to God by her acceptance of singleness, seeking to know Him in it and converting it into good by a peaceful YES, LORD! rather than into real evil by a rebellious NO!

At lunch today Lars said, "I'll tell you what would change things fast—if *all* women decided they would not 'give out,' I mean give men what they're looking for but are unwilling to make a commitment for."

One young woman wrote in desperation, agreeing with what I believe is God's order, "YEAH! That's the way it should be!! Unfortunately, that's not the way it *is*!"

God's order is not changed by men's (or women's) disobedience. It stands as He ordained. In the long run we gain nothing and lose much if we take things into our own hands. A woman may "gain" a husband, of course. The more obvious she makes herself, the better her

chances seem to be in today's society. But a man who is attracted to such a woman, and a woman who is out to "get" men are not submissive to God's order, it seems to me. Let's not follow that pattern. To follow His is to lose nothing, in the long run, and to gain much—"lose your *life*," as Jesus put it, "for My sake, and you'll find it." Few seem to believe that enough to stake their all on it.

Is there a formula which will "work"? I am asked. My parents' formula "worked" for me: they prayed for spouses for us six; they taught us to pray and trust God. Mother told me, "Keep them at arm's length, don't chase them." This will not "work" in the sense of providing a surefire method of snaring a husband (I never *snares* any one of the three God has given me—He brought them to me in most astonishing and unlikely ways). But it is in keeping with a Christian woman's modesty and willingness to have what God wants for her. She is not putting hooks out, but rather doing quietly the work God has given her to do, confident that His promise can be trusted, "No good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly" (Psalm 84:11). If marriage is a good thing, God will see to it that you receive that gift. Only He knows whether it is good for you. Are you willing to be and have what He wants you to be and have, and nothing else? Will you surrender all your own hopes, dreams, and plans to Him?

"That's easy for you to say," some answer. "Look what God has given you." Yes, but I did not know that He would ever give me a husband when I gave Him my hopes, dreams, and plans. I *did not know*. I had to surrender to Him, believing that whatever He gave or did not give would be *best*.

Friends offer all sorts of advice to single women: don't be too aggressive or too backward, too friendly or too hard-to-get, too intellectual or too dumb, too earthy or too heavenly. Hang around till the bitter end of the singles barbecue—he might want to take you home. Or, don't go to the singles barbecue at all. Just stay home and read your Bible and pray. It's terribly confusing.

"Is my Father in charge here or am I supposed to take over?" He is in charge if you want Him to be. He will not invade your freedom to choose to "take over." But if you want His way, nothing

more, nothing less, and nothing *else*, you've got to leave it to Him. It's easy to be deceived here—telling ourselves we really want His will, but meaning "I want it so long as it includes marriage!"

"I don't know how to play the game," wrote one frustrated girl. Nobody does. It's chaos, frustration, confusion, and emotional devastation. It was never meant to be a game, so don't try to play it. Leave it all in the Hands that were wounded for you.

Another who was trying to take the burden onto her own slim shoulders said it was making her "just plain sick." I do not wonder at that. She is taking burdens He never meant her to bear. "Come to Me," He says, "all who are tired and overburdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart." It's all a question of utter surrender in love for God above all others. "Everything that happens fits into a pattern for good to them that love God," Romans 8:28 tells us. Loving God means a final and unreserved YES to all of His holy will, and if His holy will is singleness, that too fits the pattern and the pattern is good. Selah.

"How can a Christian single woman enter into the mystery of Christ and the Church if she never experiences marriage?" is the question of a very thoughtful young woman.

The gift of virginity, given to everyone to offer back to God for His use, is a priceless and irreplaceable gift. It can be offered in the pure sacrifice of marriage, or it can be offered in the sacrifice of a life's celibacy. Does this sound just too, too high and holy? But think for a moment—because the virgin has never known a man, she is free to concern herself wholly with the Lord's affairs, as Paul said in 1 Corinthians 7, "and her aim in life is to make herself holy, in body and spirit." She keeps her heart as the Bride of Christ in a very special sense, and offers to

---

Up to 100 copies of an article may be made for private distribution but not for resale. Please cite full credit as given below. For permission to make more than 100 copies of an article, please write to the Newsletter.

© Copyright 1989 by Elisabeth Elliot Gren

*The Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter* is published six times a year by Servant Publications. Donations to the newsletter are tax-deductible and should be sent to: The Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter, P.O. Box 7711, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48107.

the Heavenly Bridegroom alone all that she is and has. When she gives herself willingly to Him in love she has no need to justify herself to the world or to Christians who plague her with questions and suggestions. In a way not open to the married woman her daily "living sacrifice" is a powerful and humble witness, radiating love. I believe she may enter into the "mystery" more deeply than the rest of us.

"How can she enter into the mystery of the Father loving His children if she never has children?" But she *can* have children! She may be a spiritual mother, as was Amy Carmichael, by the very offering of her singleness, transformed for the good of far more children than a natural mother may produce. All is received and made holy by the One to whom it is offered.

There. I've taken nearly the whole Newsletter for this subject, but my correspondence files tell me it is a pressing subject indeed, and I do long to help in any way I can those who find no help or comfort or support whatsoever from the world, and, alas, precious little sometimes from the Church itself.

"If you had been of the world," said our Savior, "the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you" (John 15:19). Remember this, too—"The world and all its passionate desires will one day disappear, but the one who is following the will of God is part of the Permanent and cannot die" (1 John 2:17).

## Prayer Requests

- Pray for Christians in the newly-opened Eastern Bloc countries, that they may be strong to witness, in new political freedom, of the freedom Christ wants to give. Pray that God will help them to keep steady and clear their focus on Him.
- I need your prayers so very, very much. I'm aware sometimes of battle with unseen forces, tempting me to carelessness, hardness, discouragement, self-indulgence (to name only *some* of the sins).

## Child-Parent Relations

(Dan Tompkins, fourteen-year-old son of my dear friend Barb of Tucson, Arizona, wrote this for his school paper:)

One of the problems that I and many of the students come across is child-parent relations. God has told us to honor and obey our parents (Eph 6:1-3). Here are some things to keep in mind:

1. Remember that you're the child and they're the parent.
2. Realize that parents know what you are going through. They've been there.
3. Understand their side and their imperfection.
4. Cooperate (they're trying to help you!).
5. Communicate without yelling and be open and truthful.
6. Be determined to clear things up.
7. Say you love them. Accept their decision—it's for the better!

"How I hated discipline. . . I would not obey my teachers or listen to my instructors. I have come to the brink of utter ruin in the midst of the whole assembly" (Prov 5:12-14).

## Recommended Reading

Alice von Hildebrand: *By Love Refined* (Manchester NH, Sophia Institute Press, 1989, \$14.95). Warm, sympathetic letters to a young bride, packed with practical wisdom about almost every potential marital stumbling block.

## A Finished Holiness

It is the will of God that every one of us should be *holy* (see 1 Thess 4:3). Of Janet Erskine Stuart someone wrote: "Her state of suffering combined with such patience and sweetness, and such lavish spending of herself for souls was a silent but forcible witness to her finished holiness."

## Correction from September 1989

In the September/October 1989 issue I recommended the book *Creative Prayer*, from Forward Movement Publications, but the wrong address and price was given. The book may still be ordered from Forward Movement; the correct address is 412 Sycamore St., Cincinnati, OH 45202. The correct price is \$2.75, which includes postage.

## 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.

## Travel Schedule, March-May 1990

**March 8-18** Scotland.

**March 19** Cambridge, England.

**March 30-April 1** Toronto, Ontario; Alliance Women's Retreat, Louella Gould, (416) 639-9615.

**April 1** Willowdale, Ontario; Bayview Glen Church.

**April 2** Scarborough, Ontario; Dayspring Christian Fellowship, (416)752-7520.

**April 20, 21** Concord, CA; Nazarene Women's Retreat, Barbara Latter, (415)932-1202 or 935-0158 (home).

**April 23** Laguna Niguel, CA; Aliso Creek Presbyterian Church, women's retreat, Valerie Shepard, (714)951-1468.

**April 26** Atlanta, GA; Mt. Paran Church of God, Mel Holmes, (404) 261-0720.

**April 27, 28** Raleigh, NC; Providence Baptist Church, Whole Woman Event.

**April 29** Matthews, NC; Church of the Savior missions banquet, (704)882-3453.

**May 1, 2** Lincoln, NE; Back to the Bible 50th anniversary conference, (402)474-4567.

**May 7** Minneapolis, MN; Marie Sandvik Center, (612)870-9617.

**May 17, 18** Albany, GA; women's seminar, Dr. Wm. Eidenire, (912)436-6612.

**May 19** Huntsville, AL; Whitesburg Baptist Church.

**May 20** Morrow, GA; Clayton Community Church.

**May 23** Collingswood, NJ; Women Alive, Dot Worth, (609)858-6750

## *The Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter*

Servant Ministries, Inc.  
Post Office Box 7711  
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48107

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

Non-Profit  
Organization  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Permit No. 14  
Ann Arbor, MI