

The Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter

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Give Yourself Away

When Jesus began to explain to His disciples that He was to go to Jerusalem where He would be killed, they could not fathom the *necessity* of His suffering—that He *must* go, and He *must* be killed (Matthew 16:21). Furthermore, His suffering was to be at the hands of the religious leaders. It was an outrage, and Peter took Him aside and said so. Jesus then pierced their hearts, as He pierces ours, with the categorical imperatives of true discipleship: three seemingly very dangerous and impossible demands: deny self, take up the cross, follow.

To deny oneself means, quite simply (though it may frighten us), to give oneself away. That was precisely what Jesus Himself had been doing all during the three years when the disciples walked with Him, saw His miracles, received His teaching, heard Him pray. It was a daily, unstinting pouring out of Himself for the life of the world. It was an unequivocal lesson in the meaning of LOVE.

Can we follow Him in this—in the *twentieth century*? Is not self-denial an unhealthy concept? Jesus asserted Himself “only, solely, altogether, in an infinite sacrifice of devotion” (George MacDonald). That is what He asks of us who want to be His disciples. The student must be as the teacher, the child as the father. The father requires of him nothing that he *is* not or *does* not himself.

Angus Kinnear, in his biography of Watchman Nee (out of print), tells of a Chinese farmer, who as a new believer experienced a real crisis of faith. He found that his neighbor had breached his retaining bank and was running the farmer’s water onto his own land. What to do?

He went to the elders of his church. “It is not righteous!” he said. “It is unjust! What is a Christian to do?” They knelt together in prayer. The answer came from Jesus’ own words in Matthew 5:19ff, “I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well.” We usually skip words like that,

sure that in our own case they cannot apply. Not so the Chinese convert. “If we do only the *right* thing,” said the elders, “we are unprofitable servants. We must go beyond what is merely right.” The next day the farmer toiled all morning at his treadmill, pumping water for his neighbor’s two strips of wet land below. Then, in the afternoon he worked to pump the water he needed for his own land. The neighbor, of course, was dumbfounded, but it was not long before he himself was drinking of the Water of Life. That is Christianity. That is the costly obedience Jesus asks of us: Give yourself away. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.

Being incorrigibly utilitarian in our thinking we will probably ask, “But will this work in *my* case?” If we are listening carefully to the Master instead of to the pragmatists we may hear the still, small voice: “Did it ‘work’ in My case?” Strong food for thought! Daily He is asking us, “Will you give yourself away [perhaps in some small preference quietly relinquished] and leave the results with Me? Will you take up this particular cross which is presented to you today [a distasteful duty which can’t be evaded; an honest confession, long postponed; an act of reconciliation] and trust Me to give you strength to do it? Do you truly desire to be a child of my Father?” He will require of us nothing but what He is and does Himself. He is “the one prime unconditioned sacrificer and sacrifice.”

Remember Ugo Bassi’s word (which, I am told, is inscribed on the war memorial in Edinburgh):

“Measure thy life by loss and not by gain;
Not by the wine drunk but by the wine poured forth,
For love’s strength standeth in love’s sacrifice,
And he that suffereth most hath most to give.”

See Christ in His Little Children

In the November/December 1994 newsletter I told of a family in Greer, South Carolina, who had two biological children and sixteen adopted ones of whom *ten* were handicapped. Why do they do this? “Oh, Elisabeth!” said Debbie, the mother. “There are so

many children out there that nobody wants. *We want them! We love them!*" In January of this year following a speaking engagement I suddenly found myself surrounded with a most delightful group of children. They were some of the Rettews, begging Lars and me to come to breakfast next morning.

We went. I don't know when we've seen a happier family. There was Debbie in the kitchen, whipping up a sausage/egg/cheese casserole, blueberry muffins, and grits. There were children all over the place (three more have been added since 1994 and one is with Jesus). A sweet little girl of ten was very quietly and carefully tending to a whole tableful of handicapped brothers and sisters, dishing out their food, pouring milk. There were four in wheelchairs, one of them a boy of twenty who never stopped smiling. In an infant seat in a corner was Travis, a tiny boy of sixteen years who cannot see, hear, or speak. He will not grow. He is one of two who must be fed with a tube. Eight will always wear diapers, three are blind, three are black or biracial. Debbie usually does eight loads of washing per day.

"When we drive by the churches that have little white crosses in the yard we explain to the children that those represent babies who are killed before they are born because the parents don't want them. 'But Mama,' they say, 'Don't they know about us? Don't they know we'll take their babies?'"

The children sang for us, loudly and exuberantly, "I'm adopted, I'm adopted!" They recited Scripture and asked me for stories of jungle Indians. They showed us their rooms—three or four beds in each, neatly made. There were two empty cribs—"just in case," Debbie said. "We never know when the Lord will want to give us another but we're hoping!"

Bill, the father of the family, was as calm and cheerful as Debbie. He was giving a bottle to a tiny girl in his arms whom they had named Anna Elisabeth. Doctors had planned to let her die because of a serious brain anomaly.

I asked if the children ever squabble. Debbie had to stop and think. "Sometimes they can get pretty loud," she said. What is the secret of this peaceful home? The answer is love, sacrificial love, self-abandoning love. The healthy children, surrounded by suffering, learn this by example. Their home is a visible example of Jesus' words in Matthew 25:40: "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me." And *He will not forget*.

The Rettews are servants of all. In the letters they send out there is not a word about money. They ask,

"Let us know how we can help you." 3616 Brushy Creek Road, Greer, SC 29650; Phone (864)877-9327.

At Evening

In the story of my upbringing, *The Shaping of a Christian Family*, I described "The Cottage" where we had vacations in New Hampshire. My grandfather wrote of a scene just across Gale River from that cottage. This exquisite piece has taken on new meaning for me now that I've reached the biblical quotient for old age ("threescore years and ten"):

"There is a little wooded hill, overlooking a broad and open valley in the northern New England country, from which the sunset view is very wonderful. Some who are privileged to live close to the foot of that knoll in the summer call it Goodbye Hill because it is their custom to let the afternoon outlook from this hill close their summer days just before leaving for home, a picture that lingers in the memory. The clearing on the brow of the hill faces the southeast. On the right is a village, and as one's gaze sweeps the horizon at sunset, shadows of a great hill to the west steal over the village and river, touching all with the grey of evening. Turning to the left follow the rim of the valley along the mountain summits glowing with light, and beneath them the broad farms and sheltered white houses with glittering touches of streams in the meadows. The eyes sweep that horizon, but they rest inevitably upon Mt. Lafayette, lifting its brown peaks high against the sky to the east.

"The shadow upon the village mellows all the lines of nestling homes. The level rays of the sun, streaming forth beneath the bank of clouds in the west, tinge the foothills of Lafayette, and reach more and more with their marvelous artistry up and up the wooded slopes, until the craggy peaks themselves are arrayed in royal purple. It is a strange and wonderful revelation of titanic handiwork that upon the face of the mountain not far from the summit is a cross formed by upright and transverse ravines in the rock; and often in the early summer

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it is clearly outlined by the snows still lingering after the winter's storms when the rest of the mountain is clad in brown and grey and green. The sunset light reveals the cross as you gaze from Goodbye Hill.

"As you turn from the scene to take your way to the valley once more, the peaks of Lafayette fade into the broad shadow of twilight, while above them in the deepening blue of the sky a single star appears, shining in lonely splendor. The vision of evening as one sees it from Goodbye Hill does not easily fade.

"We need the evening light upon life in order to understand life at all. The blaze of day is often blinding. When shadows fall and light flows eastward along our own levels we see much that we never could see until then. A preacher-warrior, not long since gone to his rest, said to some friends who were asking him to record some of his reminiscences, 'Yes, I shall be glad to do it. It is evening now, and the light is mellow.' Life needs the mellow light for its interpretation, and it needs the Cross and the Star."

**Philip E. Howard, *The Many Sided David*
(out of print)**

Do Not Brood Over the Past

A poem by Annie Johnson Flint, "I Look Not Back" ("God knows the fruitless efforts, the wasted toil, the sinning, the regrets," etc.) has been one of my spiritual treasures for years, helping me to *forget those things which are behind*. Brenda Foltz (remember her story of the lost contact lens?) has done this poem in beautiful calligraphy. She will be glad to send you a copy if you'll send her a self-addressed, stamped envelope with a *suggested* donation of one dollar (she doesn't want the cost to be a deterrent). Her address: 7910 335th Ave. NW, Princeton, MN 55371.

Praise of the Lamb

Revelation 5 speaks of everything created joining in praise of the Lamb. Their voices will be quite a chorus of bleating, quacking, roaring, squeaking, growling, chirping, whistling, grunting, cackling, mooing, mewing, trumpeting, snarling, peeping, hissing, chattering, cawing, trilling, ratcheting, squealing, humming, cooing, screeching, howling, baying, neighing, whinnying, whickering, braying, bellowing, gobbling, crowing, singing, barking, and croaking. (I wonder how Noah's wife put up with all that?) But at last, when everything that has breath shall praise the Lord, I think the noise

will be interpreted as "Holy, holy, holy! Worthy is the Lamb!"

I went to a Florida beach early one morning. Starlight. Warm tropical breeze. Solitude. Sighing of a gentle surf, low tide. Sat on a sand dune to watch the sun rise, read the Bible, and pray. Listened to ground-doves, mockingbirds, a cardinal. Watched tiny crabs, looking like delicate stagecoaches with two footmen atop. A grey heron stalked solemnly on the sand, gobbling them. A pelican crash-landed in the waves. A fishing boat went by. A jet plane headed north. Found a strange dead fish—18" long, like a thick bag with "tire treads" on its underside, a big rubbery mouth, huge eyes.

"How many are your works, O Lord! In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures. There is the sea, vast and spacious, teeming with creatures beyond number—living things both large and small" (Psalm 104:24-26, NIV).

I came upon many turtle tracks. When the sea turtle makes her way out of the sea up onto the dry sand to lay her eggs, she is alone. She chooses the exact time and tide, the right distance from the high water mark, the depth she must dig. No one instructs her—no one, that is, but her Maker. And what communion do they hold there in the moonlight? Who gives her strength to bear the load of up to 250 eggs while at the same time she is digging a deep hole to deposit them? Who teaches her that she must cover the eggs with sand and smooth it so that the nest is not easily detectable? Who leads her back into the deeps? She obeys Him, thus joining the throng who glorify Him day and night.

Came home to nothing but bad news on TV—many things to tempt me to worry. But then I remembered that we are always under "the blessed controller of *all* things" (1 Timothy 6:15, PHILLIPS). He has clearly told us that we are not to worry about anything whatever. We are to remember the birds—ground-doves, mockingbirds, cardinals, pelicans, and herons, among countless others—fed by a heavenly Father, the lilies that toil not, even the grass which is clothed by God. Often I have been comforted by the reminder that my heavenly Father knows exactly what I need, and He has told me to seek His kingdom and His righteousness, "and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own" (Matthew 6:33-34).

In the midst of deep sorrow I have found great peace in washing dishes or ironing—the ordinary work given by my Father. Instead of moaning, "I can't handle this"

(referring to my sorrow), I proceed to handle the day's tasks. They are props, given by God Himself. *Do the next thing!*

Prayer

O Thou, whose name is Love, Who never turnest away from the cry of Thy needy children, give ear to my prayer this morning. Make this a day of blessing to me, and make me a blessing to others. Keep all evil away from me. Preserve me from outward transgression and from secret sin. Help me to control my temper. May I check the first risings of anger or sullenness. If I meet with unkindness or ill-treatment, give me that charity which suffereth long and beareth all things. Make me kind and gentle towards all, loving even those who love me not. Let me live this day as if it were to be my last. O my God, show me the path that Thou wouldst have me to follow. May I take no step that is not ordered by Thee, and go nowhere except Thou, Lord, go with me. Amen.

Aston Drenden (dates unknown)

Prayer Requests

Pray for the staff of my daily broadcast, *Gateway to Joy*. I am so grateful for all those who make it possible—producer-director, announcer, counselors, transcribers, editors, secretaries, packers, those who handle mail and those who answer it—all of them indispensable. Pray that they may find joy in doing this work for God.

Thank God for the near-perfect health He has given to Lars and me. Not once in thirty-three years have I had to cancel a speaking engagement because of health problems. May we never take any of God's good gifts for granted.

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ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

Travel Schedule June - September 1997

June 5, 6 Beijing, China.

June 7-8 Ulaan Baatar, Mongolia.

June 14 Grenville Christian College, Brockton, Ontario, (613)345-5521.

June 15-21 (Family reunion at "The Cottage.")

June 30 Taichung, Taiwan Missionary Fellowship, Walter McConnell, 886 (7) 363-8364.

July 1-5 Taichung.

August 24-30 Bermuda, Willowbank, (809)234-1616, FAX (809)234-3373.

September 6 Milwaukee, VCY America Inc., Jim Schneider, (414)935-3000; (800)729-9829.

September 13 Naples, Maine, Cornerstone Gospel Church, Myra Marstaller, (207)693-6102.

September 23 Dallas, First Baptist Church banquet.

Keep in Touch

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