

The Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter

September/October 2003

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Restlessness and Worry

The book of Ecclesiastes was written by a very restless man. He was fed up with his life and everything had become meaningless to him. He wrote, “I hated life.... All of it is meaningless, a chasing after the wind. I hated all the things I had toiled for under the sun (Ecclesiastes 2:17-18).

Do you find yourself in the same boat? Is there some work that seems so pointless to you that you find yourself doing it distractedly because you are fed up with doing it and you wish you were somewhere else?

We quote St. Augustine: “Our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee.” But do we live it out? Do we not tend instead to live, like the godless world around us, as if our perpetual restlessness is more or less normal, assuming that our lives are supposed to be a series of struggles to achieve “closure”? Subconsciously, we rephrase the quote: “My heart is restless until it rests at the end of this current effort. Until then, naturally I will be agitated.”

Think back over yesterday. Did somebody upset you? (your spouse or your children or the driver in front of you on the highway, perhaps?) Did you become frustrated about your own failure to accomplish some work? Were you disgusted with your boss? Were you worried about a medical problem?

What were you worried about last Wednesday? Did the worrying do you any good? You know it didn't. Worrying is forbidden (read Matthew 6:25, Philippians 4:6, Psalm 37). It is useless, a colossal waste of time. Still, we carry on as if it's unavoidable.

Rest is a divine gift. But entering into rest is

a lesson that all of us must learn. Can you accept this moment, just this one, trusting Him and becoming still before Him? Can you do it when you are in a traffic jam, becoming tardier by the minute for an appointment? It is God's appointment for you—sitting there breathing exhaust fumes, learning to calm your soul by acknowledging that He is in charge of every detail of your life and that everything that happens to you has come through the hedge of His love.

There is always time enough to do the will of God. The great thing is to make our planning subject to God's perfect plan, laying our agendas at His feet and asking Him to help us choose wisely. All of us have duties. How gratefully and calmly we carry them out will indicate how we have obeyed Him.

Someone I love was going through a divorce. When she heard that her husband had gone to court, it was next to impossible for her to rest in the Lord and wait patiently for the outcome. Over and over, she realized that she was fretting anew, losing her peace. With God's grace she was able, moment by moment, to lay her burden at His feet. Step by step, asking for God's help, putting her trust in Him over and over, she proved that He Himself is the road to peace and the gateway to joy.

“I have put my trust in You” (Psalm 143:8). *Put* is an active verb and *trust* is a purposeful, not passive, choice. I may have to combine active trusting with taking myself by the scruff of the neck to undertake an unpleasant task. I may have to decide to terminate a

pleasant activity to which I resorted in my agitation. (“I just need a break.”) I may have to re-do a project that I ruined in my restless haste. I may have to apologize for words spoken out of anxiety.

Eventually, the restless Teacher who wrote Ecclesiastes discovered how to be happy. “It is good and proper for a man to find satisfaction in his toilsome labor under the sun during the few days of life. . . . God enables him to enjoy them, to accept his lot and be happy in his work—this is a gift of God” (Ecclesiastes 5:18-19).

Diminishment

(This was taken from a message to his congregation from Dr. Charles McLain of Blue Valley Baptist Church in Olathe, Kansas. It was sent to me by a friend.)

Do you trust God? We in the church spend a great deal of time speaking about trusting God in all things, but do we really trust Him to provide for our needs, help us to solve problems, supply the strength to face daily trials, face our fears, overcome our weaknesses and handicaps? Do we simply believe that no matter what comes into our lives, God is with us and can be fully trusted? The great thinker and writer Pierre Teilhard de Chardin had a different way of stating his trust in God. He speaks of “communion through diminishment”:

“When the signs of age begin to mark my body
(and still more when they touch my mind);
when the ill this is to diminish me or carry
me off
strikes from without or is born within me;
when the painful moment comes in which
I suddenly awaken to the fact
that I am ill or growing old,
and above all at that last moment,

when I feel I am losing hold of myself
and am absolutely passive within the hands
of the great unknown forces that have formed
me,
in all those dark moments, O God,
grant that I may understand that it is You
who are painfully parting the fibers of my
being
in order to penetrate to the very marrow of my
substance
and bear me away within Yourself.”

When life throws you a curve, when problems seem to have no answer, when fear gains the upper hand, what are we to do? We must trust, holding on to the unchanging truth that God is absolutely faithful. In my moments of weakness I cling to Psalm 56:3, which reads, “What time I am afraid, I will trust in Thee.”

John Quincy Adams

When John Quincy Adams was well past the usual span of life, a young friend met him on the street and asked, “How is John Quincy Adams today?”

Adams replied: “John Quincy Adams is very well, thank you. But the house he lives in is sadly dilapidated. It is tottering on its foundations. The walls are badly shattered and the roof

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is worn. The building trembles with every wind, and I think John Quincy Adams will have to move out before long. But he himself is very well, thank you.”

Teaching Thoughtfulness

Good parents teach their children that it is not enough to claim that you’re being “good” merely because you haven’t punched anybody today or run off with anybody else’s toys or cookies, haven’t teased your little brother or argued with your mother. Parents must also teach positive acts of thoughtfulness such as doing obvious things without having to be asked: Feed the baby his applesauce, pick up the garbage the dogs strewed around the yard, help your sister clean up her room, replace the paper and pencil that someone else took from near the telephone. In short, parents model and teach that Love is thoughtful of others. Love sees what ought to be done and goes ahead and does it.

From my Journals (1973)

“The great Shepherd of the sheep brings His flock slowly and carefully as they are ready for it to the dark valleys and the ravines. One of these valleys is where a sheep may find himself apparently cut off from the rest of the flock. Lonely, perhaps ostracized because of misunderstanding or isolated for another reason, he must then learn that the Shepherd is all that he needs.”

A Great Need

For very little money, a great need can be met for The Mossyfoot Project, which I have mentioned before in this newsletter. It was orga-

nized by Dr. Nathan Barlow to help Ethiopians who have a disease very much like elephantiasis. Dr. Barlow, who is now in his 90s, has worked for years with these people, offering a simple remedy, that of wearing socks and shoes.

The shoes are made in Ethiopia by the patients themselves, who have been taught to make them by hand. But there is a need for socks, and it happens that a shipment can be sent to Ethiopia with a doctor who is going there in September.

If you care to donate socks (top of sock unbanded, men’s sizes only, cotton-synthetic blend only, any color except white, best if new), please send them to Dr. Nathan Barlow, 1411 Sweetbriar Circle, Carlsbad, CA 92009.

Lars’ Ramblings From the Cove

She sure nailed me. No, we don’t remember to pray before our meal 100 percent of the time. The mind slips. Still, it is not often we miss doing it, whether at home or out for a meal. I can’t remember where it happened—at home at the kitchen table or at a one-fork restaurant (as opposed to a two- or three-fork type with real napkins). Suffice it to say, I had already sampled the food when Elisabeth said, “Aren’t we going to pray?” “Sure, just forgot.” I put my fork down, closed my eyes, said a few words, then “amen,” and picked up my fork again, whereupon Elisabeth said, “Did you *mean* that?” I was nailed—real good—by the truth of her statement. To whom and for whom did I pray?

That happened fairly recently. It reminded me of a vivid memory from the distant past, forty years ago or so, a different prayer for a different meal. It was on one of my trips home to see Far (my grandfather) in Norway. We had walked to town from his apartment and it was

about lunch time. Near the town square was a very small shop called *melkemeieriet*. Far asked if I would care for a plate of *flatbröd-soll*. It is sour milk, or we might say buttermilk, with the cream still in it. On top of the skin of cream you crunch up *flatbröt* (a very thin, flat cracker) and sprinkle sugar on it. Delicious. The little place was crowded with workmen who had come to get something “to go” or to sit down to eat. It wasn’t long before the waitress placed the two dishes before us.

Have you ever seen the print of the old man sitting at a wooden table with a knife and a loaf of bread on it, his head on his folded hands resting on the table? That was Far that noon in Kristiansand. He pushed his plate toward me to make room for his folded hands and bowed for an audible prayer, a visible sign of an invisible reality. No haste, no sense of obligation, no self-consciousness, just gratitude to the One who had filled his every need for over eighty years. A sense of presence, a short interval of communion.

What’s the difference, one might say? It’s hard to brush off the difference when one reads Jesus’ word, “This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as

doctrines the precepts of men.” Or, “Do not heap up empty phrases.”

Whether I heard it or read it somewhere, I recall the thought that animals give thanks to their Creator in their sigh of contentment when they lie down and are at peace. A meaningful sigh in response to Elisabeth’s “aren’t we going to pray?” may have been truer than my few words spoken in haste. I should add some thought to the next time I thank God for our daily bread.

That’s it from the Cove.

Travel Schedule September-October 2003

Check for last-minute engagements online at www.elisabethelliott.org

October 4 Fellowship Deaconry, 3575 Valley Road, Liberty Corner, N.J. 07938, (908)647-1777.

October 23 Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, North Carolina., (919)761-2305.

October 25 Kempsville Presbyterian Church, Virginia Beach, Virginia, (757)495-1913.

November 1 Ockenga Institute, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. (800)294-2774.

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