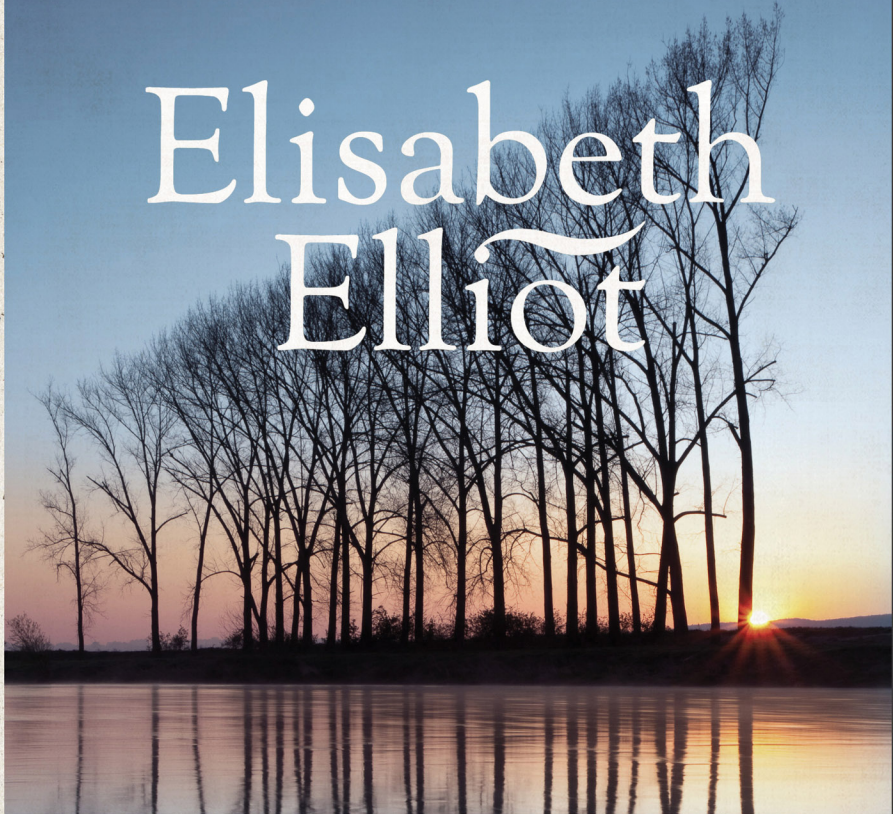


Elisabeth Elliot



Keep a Quiet Heart

100 Devotional Readings

Keep a Quiet Heart

Elisabeth Elliot



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Contents

Introduction / II

Section One: Faith for the Unexplained

A Quiet Heart / 17

The Angel in the Cell / 21

A Small Section of the Visible Course / 23

A Lesson in Things Temporal / 25

Nevertheless We Must Run Aground / 28

There Are No Accidents / 29

Learning the Father's Love / 32

A Lighthouse in Brooklyn / 34

Does God Allow His Children to Be Poor? / 38

Why Is God Doing This to Me? / 40

Ever Been Bitter? / 44

Lord, Please Remove the Dilemma / 46

Maybe This Year... ? / 49

Do Not Forecast Grief / 53

How Long Is God's Arm? / 55

There Is No Other Way / 56

Moonless Trust / 57

Don't Forfeit Your Peace / 58

A Tiny Treasure in Heaven / 60

What's Out There? / 62

Love's Sacrifice Leads to Joy / 64

The Incarnation Is a Thing Too Wonderful / 69

The Supremacy of Christ / 72

Lord of All Seasons / 74

The Ultimate Contradiction / 75

Section Two: God's Curriculum

- God's Curriculum / 81
- Little Things / 83
- What Do You Mean by Submission? / 85
- Where Will Complaining Get You? / 87
- Humdudgeons or Contentment / 89
- Several Ways to Make Yourself Miserable / 93
- Indecision / 94
- The Fear of Man or Woman / 96
- Spiritual Opposition / 98
- The Gift of Work / 100
- The Universal Thump / 102
- But I Have a Graduate Degree / 104
- The Key to Supernatural Power / 106
- The Weapon of Prayer / 110
- Why Bother to Pray? / 111
- Prayer Is Conflict / 113
- Be Honest with God / 116
- An Old Prayer / 117
- Lost and Found / 118
- Thanksgiving for What Is Given / 122
- A New Thanksgiving / 124
- An Overflowing Cup / 127
- Hints for Quiet Time / 130
- Chronicle of a Soul / 131
- Waiting / 134
- God's Sheep-Dogs / 137
- Common Courtesy / 138
- Interruptions, Delays, Inconveniences / 139
- My Life for Yours / 141
- A Visit to Dohnavur / 144

Regrets / 148

Stillness / 150

Section Three: Called and Committed

Discerning the Call of God / 155

How to Discover What God Wants / 157

Ungodly Counsel / 159

A Man Moves Toward Marriage / 161

Virginity / 165

Self-Pity / 170

The Childless Man or Woman / 172

Church Troubles / 175

My Spiritual Mother / 178

A Call to Older Women / 180

Starting a WOTTS Group / 183

Women of Like Passions / 185

Nothing Is Lost / 187

The Unseen Company / 189

The World Must Be Shown / 191

Section Four: Our Culture in Controversy

Two Views / 194

I'm Dysfunctional, You're Dysfunctional / 197

The Taking of Human Life / 199

Give Them Parking Space but Let Them Starve to Death / 202

What Is Happening / 205

Can Birth Be Wrong? / 207

An Unaborted Gift / 208

Disposable Children / 209

A New Medical Breakthrough / 210

Women: The Road Ahead / 213

Section Five: The Christian Home

Contexts / 219

My Mother / 221

Family Prayers / 223

Drudgery / 225

Sunday Morning / 227

A Word for Fathers / 229

What Is a Wife to Do? / 231

Response from a Seminar / 235

A Child's Obedience / 236

Teaching Children / 239

Working Mothers / 241

Women in the Work World / 244

Homeschooling / 245

Too Many Children? / 247

A Child Learns Self-Denial / 249

Serious Play, Careless Work / 252

How Much Should Children Work? / 257

"...with All Your Mind" / 259

Teach Your Child to Choose / 261

Matthew Henry on Child Training / 263

A Note to Fathers / 265

The Mother of the Lord / 266

Do Not Rush.
Trust.
And Keep a Quiet Heart.



I think I find most help in trying to look on all the interruptions and hindrances to work that one has planned out for oneself as discipline, trials sent by God to help one against getting selfish over one's work. Then one can feel that perhaps one's true work—one's work for God—consists in doing some trifling haphazard thing that has been thrown into one's day. It is not a waste of time, as one is tempted to think, it is the most important part of the work of the day—the part one can best offer to God. After such a hindrance, do not rush after the planned work; trust that the time to finish it will be given sometime, and keep a quiet heart about it.

Annie Keary, 1825-1879



Introduction

For about a dozen years I have been writing, every other month, what I called a newsletter. It is not a very good title. It's simply a letter meant to cheer and encourage—once in a while perhaps to nettle or amuse—those who want it. There isn't much "news." I include an itinerary of the places where I am to speak, and from time to time I announce the arrival of another grandchild. Sometimes I recommend books.

This book is a compilation of lead articles culled from the newsletter. Mostly they are about learning to know God. Nothing else, I believe, comes close to being as important in life as that. It's what we are here for. We are created to glorify Him as long as we live on this planet, and to enjoy Him for the rest of eternity.

Our task is simply to trust and obey. This is what it means to love and worship Him. Jesus came to show us how that can be done. In the Gospel of John, He is called "the Word."

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.

Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it....

He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all

who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John 1:1-14 NIV

It is reasonable to believe that the One who made the worlds, including this one and us who live in it, is willing to teach us how to live. He "became flesh" in order to *show* us, day by day as He walked the lanes of Galilee and the streets of Jerusalem, how to live in company with God.

The following pages are the musings of a slow learner. It has been well over half a century since I welcomed Christ as my Redeemer and asked Him to be Lord of my life. You will find much repetition of elementary lessons, for I have written as I would to my family and close friends, putting down rather chattily the things by which I was being encouraged, convicted, and strengthened by the Spirit of God.

One rainy afternoon at Wheaton College in 1947 my friend Sarah Spiro and I were at the piano in Williston Hall. I had written down a few lines of a prayer which I hoped was poetry. Sarah studied them for a minute and then set them to music. I haven't a copy of the music, but here are the words:

Lord, give to me a quiet heart
That does not ask to understand,
But confident steps forward in
The darkness guided by Thy hand.

This was my heart's desire then. It is the same today. A willing acceptance of all that God assigns and a glad surrender of all that I am and have constitute the key to receiving the gift of a quiet heart. Whenever I have balked, the quietness goes. It is restored,

and life immeasurably simplified, when I have trusted and obeyed.

God loves us with an everlasting love. He is unutterably merciful and kind, and sees to it that not a day passes without the opportunity for new applications of the old truth of *becoming* a child of God. This, to me, sums up the meaning of life.

Magnolia, Massachusetts
October, 1994

Section One



Faith for the Unexplained



*Thou art the Lord who slept upon the pillow,
Thou art the Lord who soothed the furious sea,
What matter beating wind and tossing billow.
If only we are in the boat with Thee!*

*Hold us in quiet through the age-long minute
While Thou art silent, and the wind is shrill:
Can the boat sink while Thou, dear Lord, art in it?
Can the heart faint that waiteth on Thy will?*

Amy Carmichael
Toward Jerusalem





A Quiet Heart

Jesus slept on a pillow in the midst of a raging storm. How could He? The terrified disciples, sure that the next wave would send them straight to the bottom, shook Him awake with rebuke. How could He be so careless of their fate?

He could because He slept in the calm assurance that His Father was in control. His was a quiet heart. We see Him move serenely through all the events of His life—when He was reviled, He did not revile in return. When He knew that He would suffer many things and be killed in Jerusalem, He never deviated from His course. He had set His face like flint. He sat at supper with one who would deny Him and another who would betray Him, yet He was able to eat with them, willing even to wash their feet. Jesus in the unbroken intimacy of His Father's love, kept a quiet heart.

None of us possesses a heart so perfectly at rest, for none lives in such divine unity, but we can learn a little more each day of what Jesus knew—what one writer called the *negligence* of that trust which carries God with it. Who would think of using the word negligence in regard to our Lord Jesus? To be negligent is to omit to do what a reasonable man would do. Would Jesus omit that? Yes, on occasion, when faith pierced beyond reason.

This “negligent” trust—is it careless, inattentive, indolent? No, not in His case. Jesus, because His will was one with His Father's, could be free from care. He had the blessed assurance of knowing that His Father would do the caring, would be attentive to His

Son's need. Was Jesus indolent? No, never lazy, sluggish, or slothful, but He knew when to take action and when to leave things up to His Father. He taught us to work and watch but never to worry, to do gladly whatever we are given to do, and to leave all else with God.

Purity of heart, said Kierkegaard, is *to will one thing*. The Son willed only one thing: the will of His Father. That's what He came to earth to do. Nothing else. One whose aim is as pure as that can have a completely quiet heart, knowing what the psalmist knew: "Lord, You have assigned me my portion and my cup, and have made my lot secure" (Psalm 16:5 NIV). I know of no greater *simplifier* for all of life. Whatever happens is assigned. Does the intellect balk at that? Can we say that there are things which happen to us which do not belong to our lovingly assigned "portion" ("This belongs to it, that does not")? Are some things, then, out of the control of the Almighty?

Every assignment is measured and controlled for my eternal good. As I accept the given portion other options are cancelled. Decisions become much easier, directions clearer, and hence my heart becomes inexpressibly quieter.

What do we really want in life? Sometimes I have the chance to ask this question of high school or college students. I am surprised at how few have a ready answer. Oh, they could come up with quite a long list of *things*, but is there *one* thing above all others that they desire? "*One* thing have I desired of the Lord," said David, "this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life..." (Psalm 27:4 KJV). To the rich young man who wanted eternal life Jesus said, "*One* thing you lack. Go, sell everything" (Mark 10:21 NIV). In the Parable of the Sower, Jesus tells us that the seed which is choked by thorns has fallen into a heart full of the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desire for *other things*. The apostle Paul said, "*One* thing I do: forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus" (Phil 3:13-14 NIV).

A quiet heart is content with what God gives. It is enough. All is grace. One morning my computer simply would not obey me. What a nuisance. I had my work laid out, my timing figured, my mind all set. My work was delayed, my timing thrown off, my thinking interrupted. Then I remembered. It was not for nothing. This was part of the Plan (not mine, His). "Lord, You have assigned me my portion and my cup."

Now if the interruption had been a human being instead of an infuriating mechanism, it would not have been so hard to see it as the most important part of the work of the day. But *all* is under my Father's control: yes, recalcitrant computers, faulty transmissions, drawbridges which happen to be *up* when one is in a hurry. My portion. My cup. My lot is secure. My heart can be at peace. My Father is in charge. How simple!

My assignment entails my willing acceptance of my portion—in matters far beyond comparison with the trivialities just mentioned, such as the death of a precious baby. A mother wrote to me of losing her son when he was just one month old. A widow writes of the long agony of watching her husband die. The number of years given them in marriage seemed too few. We can only know that Eternal Love is wiser than we, and we bow in adoration of that loving wisdom.

Response is what matters. Remember that our forefathers were all guided by the pillar of cloud, all passed through the sea, all ate and drank the same spiritual food and drink, but God was not pleased with most of them. Their response was all wrong. Bitter about the portions allotted they indulged in idolatry, gluttony, and sexual sin. And God killed them by snakes and by a destroying angel.

The same almighty God apportioned their experience. All events serve His will. Some responded in faith. Most did not.

"No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it" (1 Corinthians 10:13 NIV).

Think of that promise and keep a quiet heart! Our enemy delights in disquieting us. Our Savior and Helper delights in quieting us. "As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you" is His promise (Is 66:13, NIV). The choice is ours. It depends on our willingness to see everything in God, receive all from His hand, accept with gratitude just the portion and the cup He offers. Shall I charge Him with a mistake in His measurements or with misjudging the sphere in which I can best learn to trust Him? Has He misplaced me? Is He ignorant of things or people which, in my view, hinder my doing His will?

God came down and lived in this same world as a man. He showed us how to live in this world, subject to its vicissitudes and necessities, that we might be changed—not into an angel or a story-book princess, not wafted into another world, but changed into saints in *this* world. The secret is *Christ in me*, not me in a different set of circumstances.

He whose heart is kind beyond all measure
Gives unto each day what He deems best,
Lovingly its part of pain and pleasure,
Mingling toil with peace and rest.

Lina Sandell, Swedish



The Angel in the Cell

My brother Dave Howard does a lot of traveling and comes back with wonderful stories. One summer when the six of us Howards with our spouses got together for a reunion, Dave told us this one, heard from the son of the man in the story.

A man whom we'll call Ivan, prisoner in an unnamed country, was taken from his cell, interrogated, tortured, and beaten nearly to a pulp. The one comfort in his life was a blanket. As he staggered back to his cell, ready to collapse into that meager comfort, he saw to his dismay that someone was wrapped up in it—an informer, he supposed. He fell on the filthy floor, crying out, "I can't take any more!" whereupon a voice came from the blanket: "Ivan, what do you mean, you can't take any more?" Thinking the man was trying to get information to be used against him, Ivan didn't explain. He merely repeated what he had said.

"Ivan," came the voice, "Have you forgotten that Jesus is with you?"

Then the figure in the blanket was gone. Ivan, unable to walk a minute before, now leaped to his feet and danced round the cell praising the Lord. In the morning the guard who had starved and beaten him asked who had given him food. No one, said Ivan.

"But why do you look so different?"

"Because my Lord was with me last night."

"Oh, is that so? And where is your Lord now?"

Ivan opened his shirt, pointed to his heart—"Here."

"OK. I'm going to shoot you and your Lord right now," said the guard, pointing a pistol at Ivan's chest.

"Shoot me if you wish. I'll go to be with my Lord."

The guard returned his pistol to its holster, shaking his head in bewilderment.

Later Ivan learned that his wife and children had been praying for him on that same night as they read Isaiah 51:14: "The cowering prisoners will soon be set free; they will not die in their dungeon, nor will they lack bread" (NIV).

Ivan was released shortly thereafter and continued faithfully to preach the gospel until he died in his eighties.



A Small Section of the Visible Course

The house where I was born, at 52 Rue Ernest Laude in Brussels, looks exactly as it does in the picture in my mother's photo album. The old snapshot is a study in grays. The one my husband Lars took much more recently is in color. The cobblestone street is the same in both. The bricks of which the house is built turn out to be rather pink; the white marble facade of the second and third stories has not changed. They have put new shades in the two first-floor windows, and the people in the pictures are different. In the first, on the second-floor wrought-iron balcony in sunshine, stands my mother, twenty-four years old, slim and straight, with a wonderful pile of dark satiny hair. She is wearing a dark ankle-length dress with a wide white cape-collar. In the colored picture there are two cars, and near the front door, very wind-blown, stand I. How I longed to ask the present tenants to allow me to go up to the balcony, even into the kitchen where I was born.

Over sixty years have passed since I was last there. My mother had locked the front door when she turned to the Dutch lady who was her helper.

"I feel as though I've forgotten something."

Adri knew very well what it was and wondered how far my mother would get before realizing that the five-month-old baby was still upstairs, wrapped in her bunting, ready for the ocean voyage.

There was something wondrously comforting about knowing, as I stood before that unremembered house, that this is where my parents lived, where they loved, where they welcomed into their small cold-water flat the newborn sister of their son Philip. They were missionaries, working with what was then the Belgian Gospel Mission. Lars and I visited the old buildings; the little Flemish chapel where my father taught Sunday School and probably played the Steinway piano that stands there—bought by Mrs. Norton, wife of the founder of the mission (she sold her jewels to pay for it). We looked at an old photo album there with pictures of my grandparents, my great uncle, and my parents.

All of the past, I believe, is a part of God's story of each child of His—a mystery of love and sovereignty, written before the foundation of the world, never a hindrance to the task He has designed for us, but rather the very preparation suited to our particular personality's need.

"How can that be?" ask those whose heritage has not been a godly one as mine was, whose lives have not been peaceful. "It is the glory of God to conceal a matter" (Proverbs 25:2, NIV). God conceals much that we do not need to know, yet we do know that He calls His own sheep by name and leads them out. When does that begin? Does the Shepherd overlook anything that the sheep need?

William Kay, who translated the Psalms in 1870, gives this note on Psalm 73:22: "Though I was supported by Thee and living 'with Thee' as thy guest, yet I was insensible to Thy presence;—intent only on a small section of the visible course of things;—like the irrational animals that are ever looking down at the ground they are grazing.

"Yet I am perpetually with Thee, Thou hast laid hold on my right hand," wrote the psalmist. "Thou wilt guide me with Thy counsel and afterwards receive me in glory.... And as for me, nearness to God is my good; I have put my trust in the Lord God" (vv. 23, 24, 28, WK).



A Lesson in Things Temporal

I am upset when things are lost. Even small things. I like to know that things have places and are in them. It's much worse when something like a manuscript is lost. I had worked for a number of weeks on a certain piece, and when I went to do the final rewriting it was gone. It just wasn't anywhere. I looked, then Lars looked, then we both looked. In all the likely and all the unlikely places. We prayed about it, of course, together and separately, but we could not find it. At last I told the Lord that if I did not find it today I would begin again from scratch, as the deadline was closing in. That day Uncle Tom, who was eighty-nine and was staying with us, became very ill. There was no time to think of manuscripts.

The next day we happened to move a piece of furniture and discovered that moths were doing their dastardly work underneath it. Lars went out and bought a can of moth spray and proceeded to fumigate every nook and cranny. The manuscript was behind a desk. It had fallen down and lodged standing up on the baseboard. If Uncle Tom had not gotten sick I would have done a day's unnecessary work on that piece that I was so worried about. If the moths had not taken it into their tiny heads to chew my carpet, we probably would not have turned up that sheaf of papers until next spring. It was not for nothing that the collect in my church that Sunday (the eighth after Pentecost) was: "O God, the protector of all who trust in you, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is

holy: Increase and multiply upon us your mercy, that, with you as our ruler and guide, we may so pass through things temporal, that we lose not the things eternal; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen."