

GOD'S AGING CHILDREN MUST NOT BE FORGOTTEN

What do we do when those we love are no longer able to care for themselves? How are we to face the brokenness and suffering of those to whom we once looked for strength?

Elisabeth Elliot wrestled with these difficult questions while watching the steady erosion of her mother's memory—an erosion that seemed to devour every strong and noble attribute that made her mother who she was. This giftbook contains insights Elisabeth gained as she struggled to find perspective. She writes: "The Shepherd still cares for His sheep—cares even more for the helpless ones, carries them in His bosom, and makes them lie down when they need to lie down, although it was green pastures they hoped for when what they got was a nursing home. The green pastures are still to come."



Elisabeth Elliot is an internationally known speaker and the author of a number of books, in addition to being heard daily on the radio program *Gateway To Joy*. Her books include *Shadow of the Almighty*, *Passion and Purity*, *A Path Through Suffering*, *The Shaping of a Christian Family*, *Keep a Quiet*

Heart and *A Quest for Love*. Elisabeth and her husband, Lars Gren, make their home north of Boston, Massachusetts. Her own life is evidence that a life offered to God can be one's gateway to joy.



Family/Aging

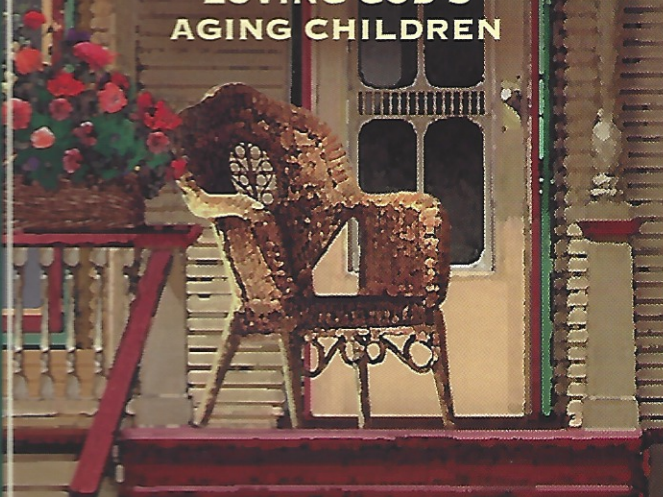
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Forget Me Not

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Elisabeth Elliot

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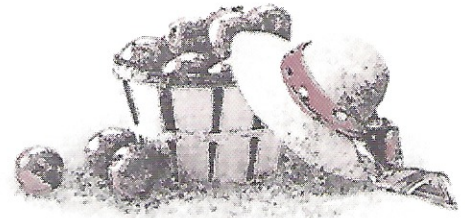


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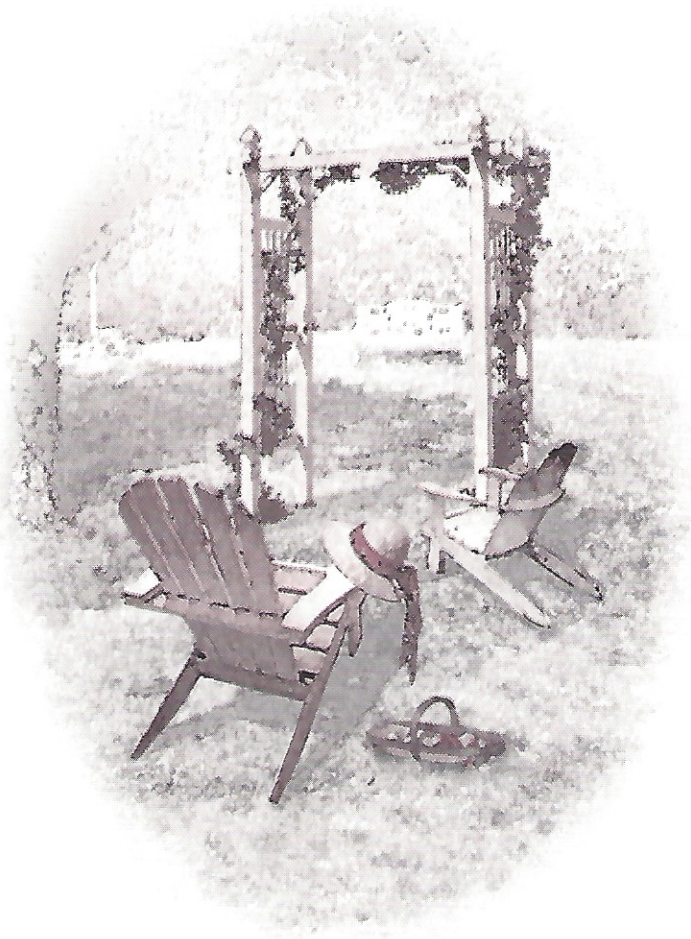
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The setting is pleasant indeed—the billowing fields and meadows of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. From the upper windows of the neat brick buildings, you can see a few farmhouses, a pond, a herd of cows. The sound of traffic is rare and distant, so that you may occasionally hear a rooster crow.

In the retirement center we visit the two aunts in their homey, comfortable rooms, furnished with family antiques, bone china and silver, pictures of people and places we all love. They are cheerful and always welcoming, not minding that we burst in upon them at odd times and consume all the ice cream and pretzels they have in their tiny kitchenette. We hear the news and fortify ourselves for the other visit.



Mother is not in the retirement part anymore. She lives in what is tactfully called the “convalescent” part. To get to her room we pass through a lobby filled with old women wrapped in afghans sitting in wheelchairs. Some bang on trays, some moan, sob, cry, or shout. Some of them, with jaws dropped, are sleeping in spite of the noise. We try to smile at them, touch a hand or two, then hurry on to another floor where we find Mother, tiny but erect in her wheelchair, with perhaps a book or a letter in her lap. The expression of perplexed sadness on her face gives way instantly to astonishment and delight when she sees us. Up go the arms—so unbelievably thin you think they will snap if you hug her.

We hug her—as well as we can with her in a wheelchair.

“Where have you been? I’ve been here a week and not one of my six children has been to see me. Nobody comes near me. Oh, please, get me out.”

We explain that we have been to see her, many times. And the other children? So have they. She does not believe us. We explain that we all live a long way away.

“Why did you move so far away from me?”

We tell her she moved away from us. She lived first with one son and then with another. Mother denies this, then concedes that perhaps we are telling her the truth; she hopes we are, but she does not remember. It was her choice to move, to be near her dear sisters-in-law, our aunts, but that, too, she has forgotten. It sounded like a good idea to us when she firmly decided she wanted that, so we consented.

Conversation is almost impossible. We try asking questions—what did she have for lunch? They didn’t give her any lunch, she says. We try to tell her about her great-grandchildren. It is all news to her. The names of even her grandchildren are strange—“Why, I had no idea she had children! I didn’t even know she was married! Why didn’t you tell me?”

She asks why our father has not been to see her, not even once, since she came to the “hospital.” We remind her that he has been with the Lord for twenty-three years. “Why, nobody told me!” she says, bewildered at our carelessness.

We read a few words from the Bible, ask if she remembers about the Everlasting Arms (she says she does), and pray with her. She prays, too. Sometimes we sing. It is amazing how well she remembers the old hymns, though her voice (we remember how clear and strong it was in family prayers at home) won’t do what she wants it to do anymore.

How shall we think of such men and women? Shall we visit them when we can and try not to think at all between times? Leave them entirely to those who are paid to keep them alive, or, as in the case of many who work in Mother’s place, those who serve the Lord Christ by caring for these, His pitiful children? Is this all we can do?



I wanted to care for her myself. All six of us wanted to. It did not work. The time came when she was manifestly miserable in any of our homes and begged to be allowed to go where she is. We talked about it, prayed about it, laid ourselves and our plans and that most beloved mother before God. We thought we did the right thing. Now we can do no more than pray; but how shall we pray, how shall we even think?

When I have asked the Lord those painful questions, a few answers seem to have been given that I share with those whose lives are closely bound to people like Mother.

1. She is still a member of the body of Christ, although she can no longer fathom what that means. When she suffers she does not suffer alone. The whole body suffers, and Christ suffers in and with her.

2. In some mysterious way, because she belongs to Him, she is completing (literally "filling up," according to Colossians 1:24) His sufferings. There is far more here than I can begin to grasp, but it is written and I believe it.

3. Her warfare will not be accomplished until this part of it, this battle, is over. (Lord, may it be soon?)

4. If she “groans,” may it not be that the Holy Spirit is making intercession “in those agonizing longings which never find words” (Romans 8:22-27, JBP)?

5. All efforts to do what she thinks she wants have come to nothing. Is this not simply evidence (for our hope and comfort) that it is something else—Christ and heaven and nothing short of that—that will “solve her problem”? Earthly comforts have been exhausted and, like the child who knocks his cup from his mother’s hand and cries for he-doesn’t-know-what, she does not know (she has forgotten) the Source of the Living Water. In our helplessness, we cast Mother and ourselves on Him who loves her and us more than we can dream.

6. She was made in the image of Christ. Although that image is now, as Mother Teresa observed of the poor refuse of humanity she lifts from the streets, “in such distressing disguise,” it is His image still.

7. The chief end for which Mother was made was to glorify God. Has He left her without any

means whatever for fulfilling that end, just because she does not remember? I don’t think He has.

8. Her suffering (loneliness, feeling of total abandonment, confusion) is, because of the Cross, capable of transfiguration. It is not meaningless. It is not for nothing. If I ask the Lord how can this be, what meaning it can have, He reminds me of the clay in the Potter’s hand. Even of the marred vessel His hands can make something.

9. “An enemy has done this” (Matthew 13:28). Mother suffers—that is, she experiences evil in several forms. But the final victory will not belong to the author of that evil. Her Lord promised tribulation, but added, “Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

10. The stripping of all human powers, mental as well as physical, is for some a part of the process that George MacDonald calls “undressing for the last sweet bed.” We have no permanent claim on any of those “clothes.” Soon, I trust, Mother will be “clothed with” immortality, “swallowed up by life” (2 Corinthians 5:2-4).



11. The Shepherd still cares for His sheep—cares even more for the helpless ones, carries them in His bosom, and makes them lie down when they need to lie down, although it was green pastures they hoped for when what they got was a nursing home. The green pastures are still to come.

*B*ut the promise is that this frail little body of Mother's that is sown in corruption will be raised in incorruption; sown in dishonor, raised in glory; sown in weakness, raised in power. "So when the perishable is lost in the imperishable, the mortal lost in the immortal, this scripture will come true: Death is swallowed up in victory" (1 Corinthians 15:54, JBP).

We are going to keep on loving her and praying for her, writing, calling, and visiting whenever we can, which of course can never slake her longings. And there is one other thing we will do because of those glorious promises: instead of sinking into guilt and despair, we are going to keep on singing.



