

Elisabeth Elliot



The Mark of a Man

Following Christ's Example of Masculinity

Books by Elisabeth Elliot

A Lamp Unto My Feet

Be Still My Soul

Guided by God's Promises

The Journals of Jim Elliot

Joyful Surrender

Keep a Quiet Heart

The Mark of a Man

Passion and Purity

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The Path of Loneliness

A Path through Suffering

On Asking God Why

Secure in the Everlasting Arms

Seeking God's Guidance

The Shaping of a Christian Family

These Strange Ashes

A Chance to Die: The Life and Legacy of Amy Carmichael

The
MARK
of a
MAN

Following Christ's Example
of Masculinity

ELISABETH ELLIOT

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In this book, Elisabeth Elliot brings into focus the separate functions that God assigned to Adam and Eve, which show that the sexes are “gloriously and radically unequal.” Written as personal advice to her nephew Pete, her convictions on manliness will help you to see the glory and purpose of true masculinity—and reassure you as you shape your own Christian sexual identity.

Elisabeth Elliot (1926-2015) was one of the most perceptive and popular Christian writers of the last century. The author of more than twenty books, including *Passion and Purity*, *The Journals of Jim Elliot*, and *These Strange Ashes*, Elliot offered guidance and encouragement to millions of readers worldwide. For more information about Elisabeth's books, visit ElisabethElliot.org.

For Peter Henry deVries

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Introduction

You would be surprised, Pete, at how often you are in my thoughts. And as often as you are in my thoughts, you are in my prayers—you and my other two highly marriageable nephews, Gene and Steve. I pray that God will make you real men and give you for wives—if He wants you to marry—real women.

You are in my thoughts on this dark, winter afternoon. The sea, on which I look out through the window near my typewriter, is battleship gray, running in long swells before a northeast wind. Three little coots ride the swells, vanishing altogether beneath the surface, from time to time, only to pop up again, like corks. The waves churn and foam and slap against the great rocks below the bluff, praising God. “Let them praise the name of the Lord! For he commanded and they were created. And he established them for ever and ever; he fixed their bounds which cannot be passed. Praise the Lord . . . you sea monster and all deeps.”

It was just over a week ago that you drove Lars and me to the airport, in the little black car that needs new seats so badly—the car that gave you what you called a Saab story when you first bought it, thinking you were getting

a bargain. I remember your troubles that school year—just the sort of troubles one would expect a young man to have: your car, your grades at the university, your girl friend(s!). And, when you called to ask advice, I said, “You know what I’m going to say, don’t you, Pete?”

“Yup. that’s why I called. I needed to hear it again.”

So we talked about learning to know God. Faith has to be exercised in the midst of ordinary, down-to-earth living. Ordinary living includes trouble. When things are going as we would like, faith doesn’t often seem necessary. It’s when things get messed up that we look around for answers or for help. Where, exactly would you expect the tests for a young man’s faith to come, if not in the three areas where you were having trouble?

“Right!” you said.

Then there was the question about participating in a campus Christian group. Not many of us are much good at being Christians all by ourselves—we’re supposed to be a flock or a body. We’ve got to have help: somebody to study the Bible with, somebody to pray with, somebody to lift us up when we’re down. You promised to look for a Christian friend.

Of course my prayers were intensified for you after each phone call or letter.

Last week I thought of you again, at a student convention where I was speaking on—among other things—the married woman on the mission field. I was surprised to find in my audience, besides married women, several hundred men and single women. I realized how badly things have gotten twisted in the past decade or so, when—apropos of my thesis that there *is* a difference between men and women, that they’re not interchangeable—I called for a show of hands of the men who would like to be asked for

a date. I was quite unprepared for the response. Hundreds of hands went up. I should have asked then to see the hands of those who would *not* want to be asked (I wonder if there would have been any), but I was too startled and confused. When I suggested that we post a sign-up sheet at the back of the auditorium, the clapping, cheering, and shrieking (loudest, I suppose, from the single women) was tumultuous. Everybody but me was amused. Children of their time, so accustomed to hearing about *equality* and *rights* and *personhood*, they no longer know what the difference is between the sexes. They even wonder whether it is legitimate to notice any difference or whether it might not be better to pretend there is none.

Well, Pete, there is one.

“Come off it!” I hear you saying, “Think I don’t know?”

Of course you know. Everybody knows. The biological difference is—so far, at least—an undeniable datum. There is a certain “unbudgeableness” about simple facts. They won’t go away. But science is working hard to change all that. God help us if it succeeds!

But in this era of ERA we’ve been trying our best to erase, ignore, overcome, or at least smudge the physical facts. Sometimes we hope that if we become truly civilized and “freed up,” we’ll be above all that and that perhaps, if we get terribly “spiritual,” we’ll manage to transcend it. The transcendence, however, is not that of real Christian vision at all, but rather of a thoroughly worldly compulsion to rearrange things to fit our humanism. Feminists are busy rewriting all of history, psychology, mythology, sociology, and even theology to suit the spirit of the age, and, if you dare say, “Hey, wait a second!” you know what you’ll be called.

There *is* a difference besides the biological one.

“You mean all those tired old stereotypes: Men are supposed to do this; women are supposed to do that? Nothing but conditioning! Knee-jerk stuff!”

I’ve heard that answer, too. Rosemary Radford Reuther, professor of historical theology, in *From Machismo to Mutuality*, speaks of “exposing” masculinity and femininity as “social ideologies.” Alas. Christians have lost their bearings when they accept a label like that.

No, Pete. I’m not talking about biology or stereotypes or social ideologies. I’m talking about what sexuality (masculinity and femininity) *means*. Ever stop to wonder if the physiology means anything?

I’m asking you to stop and wonder. There is a great deal more here than meets the eye. There is more than can be explained by custom or culture.

There is a mystery. It’s this mystery that I wanted to write about for you. You are a man, Pete, and I know it when I see you. I thank God for your manliness.

I have to catch my breath sometimes, too, remembering the little boy I knew such a short time ago. You hated carrots. But you were obedient, and, if your mother said, “Eat your carrots!” you stuffed them into your mouth. They didn’t always get much farther, as we found one day in Quito, Ecuador. Your family and I had been invited to a missionary’s home for lunch. You were about four, I think, and took a nap in the missionary’s bedroom while we chatted after the meal. On the way home, an hour or so later, you mumbled, “Do I have to finish these carrots?” They were still stashed away in your fat little cheek.

I have a photograph of you and your cousin Valerie chasing pigeons on the Atlantic City boardwalk. It calls up memories of how she would tiptoe ever so delicately, trying to get as close as she could, and you would clump

heavily in your tiny Buster Brown shoes and be so disappointed when the pigeons flew off with a whoosh.

You grew up in a few days, it seemed. You lived in the Philippines, where I visited you only once. There you were at the Puerto Princesa airport, which wasn't much more than a lemonade stand, waving a huge banner, WELCOME, AUNT BETTY AND UNCLE ADD! You were about thirteen, I think, but knew how to maneuver a motorboat, water-ski, skin-dive, run a diesel generator, man a shortwave radio, and beautifully play a violin.

You've added many skills to the list in the years that have intervened. You installed a fluorescent light for me in the kitchen during one Christmas vacation. You've learned to ski and ride horses, and you have a master's degree in concert violin.

The world cries for men who are strong: strong in conviction, strong to lead, to stand, to suffer. I pray that you will be that kind of man, Pete, glad that God made you a man, glad to shoulder the burden of manliness in a time when to do so will often bring contempt. I say to you what Paul said in his letter to the Ephesian Christians:

Live life, then, with a due sense of responsibility, not as men who do not know the meaning and purpose of life but as those who do. Make the best use of your time, despite all the difficulties of these days. Don't be vague but firmly grasp what you know to be the will of the Lord.

This is a book about the things that mark such men. I trust you will find it sufficiently well documented to prove that it is not simply an interesting or merely quaint point of view, but, in fact, truth that saves.

The Way Things Are

Some months ago a scientist named Freeman Dyson described, in a magazine article, some early experiences in the laboratory. He was delighted to be turned loose with crystals and magnets and prisms and spectroscopes to work through some famous old experiments, knowing beforehand how things were supposed to behave. It seemed like a miracle to him when he measured the electric voltage produced by light of various colors falling on a metal surface and found Einstein's law of the photoelectric effect to be really true. But it was in the Millikan oil-drop experiment that he had a revelation. Robert Millikan, a physicist at the University of Chicago, was the one who first measured the electric charge of individual electrons. He made a mist of tiny drops of oil and watched them float around under his microscope while he pulled and pushed them with strong electric fields. Dyson, following Millikan's rules, had got-

ten the drops floating nicely when he grabbed the wrong knob to adjust the electric field. They found him stretched out on the floor.

This brief and nearly fatal exposure to an immutable law revealed to him what Einstein had meant when he said, “The eternal mystery of the world is its comprehensibility.” Dyson realized that his most elaborate and sophisticated calculations about how an electron *ought* to behave would do nothing more than show how it *would* behave, regardless of whether or not he ever bothered calculating its actions. The electrons in the oil drop knew exactly what they were supposed to do and did it—to his peril, when he took hold of the wrong knob.

We’re living in a dangerous time. People are tampering with God’s arrangements, grabbing the wrong knobs. The results are not always so dramatic and so instantaneous as they were for Dyson, but they are equally inexorable: Sow the wind; reap the whirlwind.

During the past few months I have been in close touch with several married couples who are in deep difficulty because, I believe, they have been infected with the theory that masculinity and femininity are not very important. They have “tampered with the wrong knobs,” so to speak, by denying God-given gifts, trying to make husband and wife “equal” and/or interchangeable. Rhetoric about liberation and mutual submission and egalitarianism sound harmless enough, even enlightened; but it is perilous in the extreme, and people are ending up “on the floor,” as it were. There *is*, in fact, an arrangement for men and women, just as surely as there is one for electrons. No matter who’s paying attention, no matter how carefully or carelessly the scientist in the laboratory may conduct his experiments, the electrons are bound to do certain things. They’re bound to

do them because they were made to do them. This is the way things are.

Einstein saw the world as “comprehensible”—that is, he recognized its design and predictability, which were, in themselves, its very mystery. Shall we who acknowledge the world’s Creator deny that most tremendous of human mysteries: the design for sexuality? Shall we focus instead on something attenuated and poor, something legally or (worse!) sociologically defined?