

JOYFUL SURRENDER

7 Disciplines
for the
Believer's Life

ELISABETH ELLIOT



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*Strive to choose, not that which is easiest,
but that which is most difficult.
Do not deprive your soul of the agility
which it needs to mount up to Him.*

SAINT JOHN OF THE CROSS

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One



Created, Cared for, Called

Early in the morning I sit on a window seat in a beautiful stone cottage on a remote hilltop in south Texas. It is springtime. There is no telephone or television and no human being within sight or sound, except my husband, Lars, who is reading up in the loft. The silence is total, except for the chatter of squirrels and the calls of birds—cardinals, scrub jays, a house finch, a wild turkey, and a black, crested titmouse—some of which have allowed us to see them at the feeder or have given us glimpses as they flash through the live oaks and gnarled junipers that completely surround us.

Out from the shadowed grove of trees comes a solitary ewe. She walks delicately among sharp stones, nibbling sparse new grass, not minding the gentle rain, which is easily shed by her oiled wool. Is she lost? Where is the rest of the flock? She seems to be at peace. After a short time she disappears over the ridge.

Next a little wild pig, a javelina, comes. He snuffles the ground, finding tidbits here and there, even among these rocks. I notice that he limps lightly, favoring the left front hoof, which seems to be

swollen. Suddenly he lifts his button nose, tipping it like a radar-scanning saucer toward the bird feeder, from which he receives tidings of something edible. He trembles for a moment, sniffing ecstatically, then springs from the ground in a neat arc, but not nearly high enough, not even close to the feeder. Landing painfully on the hurt foot, he makes no sound of complaint and zigzags off into the trees again. I wish I could bind up the hoof, comfort him somehow. That is beyond my powers, but I have recourse to another kind of succor, better than any bandage. I pray for him. "Here is your pig, Lord. Please heal his foot." It is possible that he was brought to my window this morning (the javelina is normally a timid nocturnal creature) precisely in order to be prayed for.

The closer one comes to the center of things, the better able he is to observe the connections. Everything created is connected, for everything is produced by the same mind, the same love, and is dependent on the same Creator. He who masterminded the universe, the Lord God Omnipotent, is the One who called the stars into being, commanded light, spoke the Word that brought about the existence of time and space and every form of matter: salt and stone, rose and redwood, feather and fur, and fin and flesh. The titmouse and the turkey answer to Him. The sheep, the pig, and the finch are His, at His disposal, possessed and known by Him.

We too are created, owned, possessed, known. We are dependent as the javelina is dependent. As I look at the ewe, peaceful, dependent, finding her food provided by the Lord, I think of how He provides for me as well.

My father was an amateur ornithologist who, as a young man, had taken an interest in birds long before bird-watching became a popular pastime. He would walk in the woods and imitate the calls and songs of birds, often drawing them near, in the branches over his head. He gave lectures, illustrated with colored slides, in which he talked about the habits of the birds and beautifully imitated their songs. He nearly always closed his lecture with these lines:

Said the Robin to the Sparrow,
“I should really like to know
Why these anxious human beings
Rush about and worry so.”

Said the Sparrow to the Robin,
“Friend, I think that it must be
That they have no heavenly Father
Such as cares for you and me.”

Have we no such loving Father? We have, of course.

Thou hast made all by thy wisdom; and the earth is full of thy creatures. . . . All of them look expectantly to thee to give them their food at the proper time; what thou givest them they gather up . . . when thou takest away their breath, they fail . . . but when thou breathest into them, they recover. . . .

Cast all your cares on him, for you are his charge.

Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store in barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. You are worth more than the birds!



I am back home in Massachusetts now.

Last evening as the sun went down a thick fog rolled in off the sea. I could see the dim shapes of the seagulls in the midst of it, winging their way unerringly west to Kettle Island, where they roost at night, guided by what the world calls “instinct,” which is probably scientists’ way of saying that they have no idea what guides them. I believe God guides them. Are they aware of it? Do the robin and the sparrow know they are cared for? We do not know. We do know there is a profound difference between them and us.

We say “free as a bird,” but the truth is God meant us to be freer than birds. He made us in His image, which means He gave us things He did not give them: reason and will and the power to choose.

God calls me. In a deeper sense than any other species of earth-bound creature, I am called. And in a deeper sense I am free, for I can ignore the call. I can turn a deaf ear. I can say that no call came. I can deny that God called or even that God exists. What a gift of amazing grace—that the One who made me allows me to deny His existence! God created me with the power to disobey, for the freedom to obey would be nothing at all without the corresponding freedom to disobey. I can answer no, or I can answer yes. My fulfillment as a human being depends on my answer, for it is a loving Lord who calls me through the world’s fog to His island of peace. If I trust Him, I will obey Him gladly.