

Women That Make a Difference

by Elisabeth Elliot

Elisabeth Elliot encourages women to be receptacles of God's power, trusting in His strength to make a difference in the world despite their weaknesses and excuses.

Duration: 39:43

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Mark 16:15, Romans 8:29, 2 Corinthians 4:7, 2 Corinthians 4:11, Philippians 3:10, Revelation 5:9

Topics: "Women"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the challenges and responsibilities of being a mother. She shares anecdotes of her own experiences, highlighting the constant demands and interruptions that come with motherhood. Despite the difficulties, she emphasizes that God has called all of us to share in the work of redemption and that we are not qualified in ourselves. The speaker also encourages listeners to trust in God's plan, even when they cannot see how certain situations could possibly be for their good. She concludes by mentioning a letter she received from someone who wanted to hear about how God met her through a time of heartache in South America.

Transcript

As you know the theme for today is women who make a difference and in my first talk I would like to talk about receptacles of power. What does it mean to make a difference? We're not going to make any difference in Atlanta or anywhere else on our own steam, our own power. I have no doubt that there are many women here today with heavy hearts, many of you broken, confused, perplexed, discouraged, and bewildered.

And I'm sure that many of you are very happy today and feeling very brisk and very well and hoping that we won't have nothing but sob stories and talking about suffering. But it's very interesting to see what the Bible says about power and it says some very startling and radical things. When I was a senior in college I came home for Christmas vacation and walked into the kitchen and bent over the sink was a little old humpbacked lady.

I had never seen her before but I had heard a lot about her because my mother had been writing in her family letters about Mrs. Kershaw. And Mrs. Kershaw was standing there washing dishes. My sister was standing on the other side of the kitchen and I said hello to Mrs. Kershaw and she didn't move, she didn't turn around.

And my sister said to me, she's deaf. And I said, you mean she can't hear anything? And she said, nothing at all. And I said, not even if you shout? And Ginny said, not even if you shout.

And so I went over and I touched Mrs. Kershaw on the shoulder and she turned this radiant face to me with the biggest smile and spoke in the rather odd way that she had because she couldn't hear her own voice and said, oh it's the daughter. And she had heard about me, of course. Well, when I think of Mrs. Kershaw, I think of women who make a difference.

She was poor. She was widowed. She lived in a miserable, huge, empty, rackety-packety old house with very little furniture in it.

She lived alone. She had a card on the door that said, please find me. I am home.

You couldn't knock on the door, you couldn't ring the doorbell, you couldn't phone. And so you would have to walk in and find her. And of course, anybody could have walked in and found her and done anything they wanted.

But in those days, we didn't worry too much about those things and she simply trusted the Lord. And she was just a beacon of light in our home. She had come to help my mother and she came every day.

She lived not too far away, but somebody would pick her up and bring her over to the house. And all day long, she would wash dishes and bake cookies and talk to my step-grandmother who was also very deaf, so you can imagine that some of those conversations were hilarious. And just poured out her life for our family for very little pay.

She never stopped smiling. She never complained about anything. Never once did we ever hear a word of complaint.

And I think of women who make a difference and I think of how Jesus said, he that would be greatest in the kingdom of heaven must be the servant of all. And she was just that to us and blessed us in ways that only God can ever reward. It's not my purpose here this morning to make you think like Elizabeth Eliot, but to lead you to a master who will show you as much as you are willing to obey of his truth.

I really believe that the Holy Spirit is given to guide us into all truth, but he can only guide us into that which we are willing to obey. And I don't know what truth God has for you today, what area of obedience he may be putting his finger on in your life, but I trust that today will be balm for some of your wounds and comfort for your sorrows and maybe light for some of your perplexities. And for those of you who are note takers, let me ask three questions that you can put down.

This is not part of the question, this is introductory. Every Christian woman I believe is called to share in Christ's glorious work of redemption. Every Christian woman is called and every Christian man of course is called to share in God's glorious work of redemption.

First question, are you qualified? Second question, because I shall assume that very many of you have thought to yourselves, no, I'm not. Second question then, what are your excuses, disclaimers and objections? Excuses, disclaimers, objections. And third, do you want to learn the power of Christ? Do you want to learn the power of Christ? Now, I had a letter from Mississippi Mrs. Daniel, Francis Daniel, saying that as she was inviting people to come here today, that so many of them said, oh, I hope she will tell us the story of how God met her through that time of great heartache in South America.

There will be so many who have never heard about that part of your life. And I tell you that Mrs. Daniel wrote me that letter because as I do tell you a little bit about that story, it's not because I want to tell my story one more time. I'm always very diffident about telling it because I suppose pride enters into my hesitations because I don't want people to be saying, is that all that lady has got to talk about after all these years? And when I heard that Corrie Ten Boom was coming to our town a few years ago, I was thrilled and hoped immediately that she would talk about her prison experience.

And then immediately I thought to myself, why should I expect that? It's been more than 30 years since she had that experience. And so to my great joy, I had an opportunity to talk with her not very long after that. And I asked her this question.

I said, do you ever feel hesitant to go over that story that is so fascinating to other people? And she said, yes. There were times when I said to the Lord, I must have something fresh. And she said, the Lord said to me, I gave you that story.

You tell that story. So because there have been requests, I do want to tell you a little bit about it by way not of making doctrines out of my experience, but by way of illustrating the doctrines by my experience. And your illustrations will be different, of course.

We women were created obviously and unarguably to be receivers. That is what the female body signals, isn't it? We are receivers, bearers, carriers, nurturers. Whether God gives us children in the physical sense or not, that is still our nature.

That is the feminine nature as it was intended to be. We are not by any means in our sinful nature necessarily always willing to be receivers and bearers and carriers and nurturers and responders to those men whom God may have put over us. But that is the essence of femininity.

And Mary, who epitomized it so beautifully as Eve did not, said, behold the handmaid of the Lord, let it happen as you say. That should be the attitude of every one of us, shouldn't it? We are receivers. On February 27, 1955, I received a baby.

My daughter Valerie was born. And within a matter of a very few days or a few hours, I found myself absolutely overwhelmed with the consciousness of my total inadequacy to be a mother. I looked at that beautiful, tiny, incredible, miraculous package and I said, Lord, I can't do it.

I cannot mother this baby the way she ought to be. I don't have it in me. I am not sufficient for these things.

And I was brought to the point of tears of helplessness. And I knew that in order to give Valerie what a mother ought to give a daughter, I was going to have to receive what was needed. And as I said a moment ago, I don't have anything that I haven't been taught.

I don't have anything that I haven't received. And here was one stunning reminder of a job that God had assigned to me which I could not possibly do on my own strength. And I prayed that God would give me the power, the strength, the wisdom, the grace, the love, the mercy, the tenderness and everything else that it takes to be a good mother for Valerie.

In other words, my weakness was my very qualification to be a receptacle of power. I have entitled myself to be a receptacle of power. Whatever immediately sprang to your mind when I asked the question are you qualified, very likely some of you thought of various qualifications that the world would recognize, the

things that you would put on your resume or your dossier, and probably immediately thereafter thought, well, that's undoubtedly not what she's talking about and that is certainly not what I'm talking about.

And then we go from that to realizing that we really are very weak and very helpless and we don't have anything to give. And poor little me, you know, I was behind the door when they gave out all the gifts and when they said noses, I thought they said roses and I said give me a big red one and all those old jokes, there's about a long string of those. But we don't, we can't stand up here and lead the singing the way Cora Bell Morgan did and we can't do this as so-and-so does and we never can be the hostess with the mostest.

And so we get into a swamp of feeling very sorry for ourselves and a little bit angry with God because he didn't give us all the gifts that we think we should have had, instead of thanking God that he has given us exactly the gifts which are appropriate to the job that God has called us to do. No excuses, no disclaimers, no objections. Make a list of your weaknesses.

Make a list of all the deprivations that you have suffered in your life and all the things you think you ought to have had that you don't have. And look at each one of those as a receptacle of God's power. Whatever you think most significantly disqualifies you.

If you don't look at it from doing the thing that you believe God wants you to do, realize that in that very weakness God wants to make known his strength. He wants you to be a receiver of power because of that very weakness. So do you want to learn the power of Christ? You mothers, is there any mother who could possibly say that she is doing a really bang-up job of being a mother? I see the tears that my daughter Valerie sheds.

I think she's doing a good job, but of course a mother's estimate of her daughter's performance is probably not worth much at all. Not to mention a grandmother's estimate of the perfection of her grandchildren. But we are as mothers sharers and cooperators with God in the work of redemption.

When you are given a child in the usual physical sense of motherhood, we have been given in that assignment a calling than which there is no higher, than which there is no holier. What possibly could make a greater difference in the world than a godly family? Now I'm speaking not only to mothers who are mothers in the physical sense, but I want to speak to every single one of you as a mother in the spiritual sense because the world is desperate for women who will be receivers, receptacles of power, in order to mother the rest of the world. And the world is desperate for fathers and mothers.

People who will nurture them and guide them and provide for them and care for them and reach out to them and help them. When I watch Valerie in her work, and her oldest child is 14, she's been homeschooling all of them up until this year. The 14-year-old has just started public high school.

But I see that the job is just availability and helping. It's every minute. Mommy, can you fix this truck? Mommy, could you put this wheel back on? Mommy, may I have some juice? Mommy, could you read me a story? Mommy, could you pull my pants down? Mommy, could you pull my pants up? Mommy, would you please stop making him tease me and all of these things? And she's trying to run a smooth and ordered and peaceful and joyful household who is sufficient for these things.

And yet God has called all of us to share in the work of redemption, to share in that glorious and high calling. Are we qualified? Certainly not. Not in ourselves.

And yet if we are willing to learn, God can give us a supremely important contribution to make to this suffering, fallen, broken, distorted world. Well, that was February 27, 1955. In January of 1956, there came the time for the five men who had been participating in something that was called Operation Alka, a program of dropping gifts to a tribe of Stone Age Indians.

The time came for them to attempt to make contact with these people face to face on the ground. We knew the reputation of the Alkas, that they were Stone Age people. They wore no clothes and they killed strangers.

We didn't really know very much else about them. And they had been given an ever wider and wider berth by all the other surrounding tribes because everybody was scared to death of the Alkas. People had gone in there looking for oil and rubber and gold and nobody had ever been heard from again.

So we knew that it was dangerous. We also knew that what Jim called the categorical imperative was go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. And in the book of the Revelation, we read that every people and tribe and tongue and nation are to sing praises to God.

So the men were very, very slow and cautious in their preparations. They and we, their wives, were certainly very earnest in our prayers for wisdom, for guidance, for protection, one step at a time. In January 1956, on New Year's Day, the men met together for the last time before going into Alka territory.

They sang together a great hymn by Edith G. Cherry, We Rest on Thee, Our Shield and Our Defender. We go not forth alone against the foe, strong in thy strength, safe in thy keeping tender. We rest on thee and in thy name we go.

And they went flying in a very small plane which could only fly one man at a time because the sand strip on the Kodadai River was only 200 meters long, the very minimum in which Nate St. could land his little plane. And he took each of the men in, safe landings, another answer to prayer, and they set up a camp and they prayed that the Alkas would come to them rather than barging directly to the Alka houses which they thought might offend them. They were on the edge of Alka territory and we knew Indians well enough to know that almost like dogs, nobody could put a foot on their territory without them sensing it.

And sure enough, after five days of waiting and prayer, there was a very friendly contact. Three naked Alkas, two women and one man, all of them dressed in a regulation Alka costume which was a piece of string around the hips and maybe a piece of string around the upper arm or the knee, came bursting out of the jungle talking a language that none of the men could understand. The men tried out various Indian languages that they knew and none of those worked.

And so it was a very interesting afternoon. These Indians showed total trust in what the men were going to do to them. They ate a hamburger with mustard and ketchup on a bun, if you can imagine, never having seen anything even remotely like any of those things.

And they drank lemonade and then the man of the group indicated by gestures that he would like a ride in the airplane. And so they gave him that. Nate took him up, flew him over his own house.

He was able to let the people see that he was there. They flew low enough that he could see their faces and they could see his. And everything was just thrilling and exciting.

And they disappeared later that afternoon back into the jungle and the men radioed back to us that they were thrilled that God had answered their prayer for friendly contact and it had happened and they hoped that perhaps another delegation would come and maybe invite them to go to their houses. And on Sunday afternoon, Nate radioed that that seemed to be about to happen because he had just seen a delegation of ten Alcas on the way toward the men's camp. And he said, we'll radio you again at 4.30 this afternoon.

And at 4.30, I was not there on that, at the missionary aviation base, but Marge Saint was glued to the radio as you can imagine and there was no message. Nothing at all came and she and the other widows, women who didn't know they were widows at that point, were waiting with her. I was on my own station unaware of the contacts.

And all night long, nothing happened. The next morning, another pilot went out, flew over the area and radioed back that he had just found the plane stripped of its fabric, but there was no sign of any of the men. Well, I was in my own station and we had an ordinary morning contact, we called it the jungle contact, when each station would call in to the missionary base and Marge said to me, Johnny has just flown over and discovered that the plane has been stripped of its fabric.

We've heard nothing from the men since yesterday afternoon. And God brought to my mind immediately words from Isaiah 43, verse 2, when thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee. When thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee, for I am the Lord thy God.

And I realized that God was telling me then, not that he would bring Jim back alive, but that I was going to go through some deep water and some hot fire. When you pass through the water, I will be with you. Not Jim, but I. Now, of course, I didn't know that Jim was dead and I hoped against hope that he wasn't and I thought surely he couldn't be.

Like anybody else, things like this don't happen to us, they happen to other people. And I stood there by my radio, of course, overcome with fear. What if he doesn't come back? And we had talked about this at great length before.

When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee. What else really matters? And I thought of all the things that this might mean if I was now a widow and my daughter was going to be fatherless. I thought of the fact that I had waited for Jim Elliott for five and a half years.

We had fallen in love in college and God didn't bring us together until after we had each been a missionary for a whole year in the jungles of Ecuador. I in the western jungle, west of the Andes, Jim in the eastern jungle. And then he had proposed to me and we had been married in Quito and at this point we had been married 27 months.

You can be sure that I was not thinking at that point of all my ambitions and all the projects that Jim and I had in mind to do, the wonderful things that we were going to do for God in the jungle. We were going to make a difference among those Quito Indians. But I was thinking when I calmed down and began to think and to pray about the purpose of my life.

And one of the expressions of that purpose is in Philippians 3 where Paul talks about his qualifications, he was very blue blooded, he had a very admirable kind of a pedigree. And he says if anyone thinks to base his claims on externals I could make a stronger case for myself and he proceeds to give you some of his

claims. But, verse 7, all such assets I have written off because of Christ.

I would say more, I count everything sheer loss because all is far outweighed by the gain of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord for whose sake in fact I did lose everything. I counted so much garbage for the sake of gaining Christ and finding myself incorporated in him with no righteousness of my own, no legal rectitude but the righteousness which comes from faith in Christ given by God. In response to faith and here he defines his great ambition in life.

Verse 10 Philippians 3, all I care for is to know Christ to experience the power of his resurrection and to share his sufferings in growing conformity with his death. And I ask myself is that really what I care for more than anything else in the world? And God was saying I want you to receive this experience as a part of the answer because I had prayed when I was 12 years old that God would work out his whole will in my life at any cost. And I had been praying that I might know Christ better and better and walk with him because I really did want to make a difference in the world and in other people's lives.

And here the man who had made the biggest difference in my own life might possibly be dead. It took five days for us to learn that the five men were actually all dead. And when I got that radio message God brought to my mind then a poem, the last stanza of which I will give you.

I don't know the whole poem by heart anyway it's a long poem called Saint Paul by F. W. H. Myers and I hadn't memorized all of it but part of it I had memorized and God brought to my mind the last stanza and said this is what it says, so through life, death, through sorrow, and through sinning, Christ shall suffice me for he hath sufficed. Christ is the end for Christ was the beginning. Christ the beginning for the end is Christ.

I was a widow. My daughter was fatherless at the age of 10 months. Does that matter more than knowing Christ, experiencing his power, and sharing in his sufferings? Now that last is the deepest mystery that I know anything about.

I don't know very much about it at all and I certainly don't claim to be able to explain it but again and again in the scripture we are told that we may have a share in the sufferings of Christ but it's not going to happen except through the path of suffering. How else? How else can we possibly know him, experience his power, and share in his sufferings? There is no other way. I've had people ask me you talk so much about suffering isn't there anything else to talk about? Well of course there are many other things to talk about but there isn't any other way to know him and to experience his power and to share in his sufferings.

Do you want to know Jesus Christ? If I am going to be a receptacle of his power to reach out to make a difference at least in my home, at least in my family, at least among my relatives, perhaps also among my neighbors, my friends in my church and in my town, I won't be able to do it without knowing Christ. I won't be able to make the kind of a difference that we're here today to talk about. All kinds of other differences yes maybe but not the one that matters and those three things knowing Christ, experiencing his power, and sharing in his sufferings are absolutely inseparable and inextricable.

We must know his sufferings in order to know the power of the resurrection and we cannot know Christ without knowing the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings. So do you understand dear ladies, dear friends, that the very loss itself was the condition for the inflow of spiritual understanding. The loss of my husband was not by any means the first loss that I had experienced and I had already been given some very tough lessons in the first year of my missionary work before I wasn't even engaged to Jim

Elliot.

Some of you know that part of my story which is told in a book called These Strange Ashes. I won't go into detail but I was working in the western jungle as I mentioned with a tribe called the Colorados, people who were so named because that Spanish word means red and they painted themselves red from head to toe, bright red. When I was working with them the man who was working with me to help me to reduce that unwritten language to writing was a Christian.

He was bilingual so we were able to work in Spanish as well as in his language which was a huge advantage. He was able to interpret for me and he was willing to work at my price and he was a very patient man and it takes a very patient person to teach a stupid and apparently retarded foreigner the language which for him is the easiest language in the world. And if it's an unwritten language then the only way to learn it is to sit down and try to imitate exactly the way a baby does but trouble is after you're three years old you've lost the ability, that miraculous ability that a baby has to learn the language.

And so this man was a very patient man, qualified in every possible way for the job but he was murdered very soon after we began working together and there wasn't anybody else that spoke that language. And I said why Lord and he said trust me. And then the following summer when I had left the Colorado tribe and left all my language materials with two English women that were working there and moved over to the eastern jungle where Jim Elliott had asked me to start learning Quechua because he said I want you to be my wife and I will not marry you until you learn Quechua.

So I had to start at the bottom of a third language ladder and I had not been there very long when I got a word on the radio from Jim on his station that the entire station on which he had been working was demolished in a flood. It all went down the Amazon in one night, all five buildings. Not very long after that I had word from one of the English women who had my Colorado language materials telling me that they had all been stolen.

That was a year's work and there were no copies because there was no Xerox in those days and no tape recorders. And God was reminding me of the commitment that I had made at the age of 12. Lord I give up all my own plans and purposes, all my own desires and hopes and accept thy will for my life.

I give myself, my life, my all utterly to thee to be thine forever. Fill me and seal me with thy Holy Spirit. Use me as thou wilt.

Send me where thou wilt. Work out thy whole will in my life at any cost now and forever. And he was saying do you want to know me? Will you make this loss the receptacle of my power? Well but Lord I don't see how you're gonna do that.

And the Lord says it's none of your business how I'm going to do it. Trust me. When Jim was building a house for us in the jungle and furnishing it with some very crude, very functional furniture, I was constantly coming around hanging over his shoulder looking at what he was doing and saying now what's this thing here and why are you putting that there and why are you doing this this way and why don't you do so and so.

And Jim would say to me would you just get lost. I know what I'm doing and when I'm finished you'll understand. Isn't that what God is always saying to you and me? We know what Romans 8 28 says.

Everything that happens fits into a pattern for good to them that love God. And how many thousands of times have you heard people say but I don't see how this could possibly fit into a pattern for good. We need not know how we only know that it does.

Who's in charge of the pattern? Well the second the verse that follows Romans 8 28 verse 29 tells us one of the whys in order that we might be shaped to the image of Christ. If you and I in our experiences of loss, bereavement, helplessness become receptacles for the grace of God. Then the life of Jesus will be manifest in us in such a way that it will make a difference.

On October 8th 1958 I gave you my daughter's birth date in 55 and Jim's death in 56 on January the 8th and then on January 13th the final word that he was dead and then October 8th 1958 a very amazing thing happened. I was able to go and live with the Indians who had killed my husband and Rachel Saint the sister of Nate the pilot and I and my little daughter Valerie who was three by that time went in and lived with these people in a what they called a house. It was four and six poles with a thatched roof and if ever anybody felt helpless and useless and like a fish out of water it was I living in that place and at that time this passage from 2nd Corinthians 4 became very significant and very relevant.

We are no better than pots of earthenware to contain this treasure and this proves that such transcendent power does not come from us but is God's alone. Continually I'm skipping a few verses in 2nd Corinthians 4 verse 11 continually while still alive we are being surrendered into the hands of death for Jesus sake not just so we can be dead but listen to this so that the life of Jesus also may be revealed in this mortal body of ours. Surrendered into the hands of death so that the life of Jesus may be manifest revealed in this mortal body of ours.

The women who make a difference will be those who have received the power of Christ and the scripture makes it very plain that the way in which we receive that power is through loss. Paul says I have suffered the loss of everything and counted garbage. All I care for is to know Christ.

Emptiness, helplessness, loss, pain, transformable for the life of the world. God bless you.

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