

JIM ELLIOT

a Seeking Life

Excerpt from Portraits of Great Christians

“Wherever you are, be all there. Live to the hilt every situation you believe to be the will of God.”

The life and death of Jim Elliot was a testimony of a man committed to the will of God. He sought God’s will, pleaded for it, waited for it, and—most importantly—obeyed it.

His martyrdom at age twenty-eight and subsequent books on his life by his former wife, Elisabeth Elliot, have been the catalyst for sending thousands into the mission fields and stoking the fires of a heart for God. He was an intense Christian, bent on pleasing God alone and not man.

“[He makes] His ministers a flame of fire,” Elliot wrote while a student at Wheaton College. “**Am I ignitable?** God deliver me from the dread asbestos of ‘other things.’ Saturate me with the oil of the Spirit that I may be aflame. But flame is transient, often short-lived. Canst thou bear this my soul—short life? In me there dwells the spirit of the **Great Short-Lived**, whose zeal for God’s house consumed Him.”

Many Aucas eventually came to receive Christ as Saviour when Elisabeth Elliot bravely returned to share Christ with those who killed her husband. □



BE Still.

T H O U G H T S A N D R E A D I N G S F O R M E D I T A T I O N

Quotes from

Shadow of the Almighty

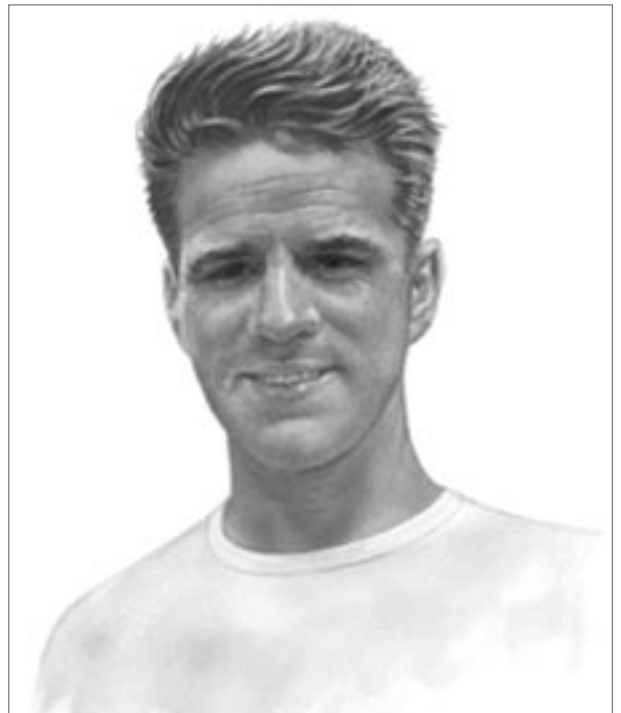
by Elisabeth Elliot • PART ONE

Preface

It is only when we obey God’s laws that we can be quite sure that we really know Him. The man who claims to know God but does not obey His laws is not only a liar, he lives in self-delusion. In practice, the more a man learns to obey God’s laws, the more truly and fully does he express his love for Him. Obedience is the test of whether we really live “in God” or not. The life of a man who professes to be living in God must bear the stamp of Christ.

1 John 2:3-6 (JBP)

These words in the first epistle of John, embody the radicals of Jim Elliot’s life. Obedience leads to knowledge and is the expression of love to God. Obedience means that we live in God. And if we live in Him, our lives bear the stamp of Christ. Jim’s aim was to know God. His course, obedience—the only course that could lead to the fulfilment of his aim. His end was what some would call an extraordinary death, although in facing death he had quietly pointed out that many have died because of obedience to God.



“The joy of holiness is often sweeter than the joy of forgiveness, for the joy of holiness implies fellowship with God.”

“I WILL COMMUNE WITH THEE FROM ABOVE THE MERCY-SEAT” EXOD. 25: 22

He and the other men with whom he died were hailed as heroes, 'martyrs'. I do not approve. Nor would they have approved. **Is the distinction between living for Christ and dying for Him, after all, so great?** Is not the second the logical conclusion of the first? Furthermore, to live for God is to die, 'daily', as the apostle Paul put it. It is to lose everything that we may gain Christ. It is in thus laying down our lives that we find them.

The relationship between man and God is a very practical one. It finds its sphere of operation in the common life. Let us not forget than any relationship whatever between God and man rests today on the fact that *God* lived the life of a common man—was born in a stable, sweated in a carpenter shop, preached from a little fishing-boat, sat down tired beside a well and conversed with a courtesan, ate and drank and walked with ordinary men, and submitted to an ignoble death—in order that we could recognise Him. Nobody called Him a hero or a martyr. He was simply doing what His Father told Him to do, and doing it with *delight*.

Those who want to know Him must walk the same path as Him. *These* are the 'martyrs' in the Scriptural sense, which simply means 'witnesses'. In life, as well as in death, we are called to be 'witnesses'—to 'bear the stamp of Christ'. I believe that Jim Elliot was one of these, and his letters and journals are the tangible ground for this belief. They are the story of a man in his relation to the Almighty.

When Jim was twenty, he prayed, 'Lord, make me prosperous, not that I achieve high station, but that my life may be an exhibit to the value of knowing God.' Was his life extraordinary? If your answer is yes, what shall we say of the state of Christendom?

Prologue

When Jim was a college student in 1949 he wrote these words:

"He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."

Seven years later, on a hot Sunday afternoon, far from the dormitory room where those lines were written, he and four other young men were finishing a dinner of baked beans and carrot sticks. They sat together on a strip of white sand on the Curaray River, deep in Ecuador's Rain Forest, waiting for the arrival of a group of men whom they loved, but had never met—savage Stone Age killers, known to the world as Aucas. Two days before, the hope of years had been partially fulfilled. Three of these Indians had met them on the beach where they now sat. The first friendly contact, long anticipated and carefully prepared for, had been completely successful. At first the naked tribespeople were distrustful and with reason. They had known of white men who flew in great birds similar to that which now stood beside them on the sand, who had proved that they could not be trusted. But somehow they had sensed, throughout the long weeks when these five men had attempted to show them their friendship, that there was no 'catch' here.

Before four thirty the next afternoon, the quiet

waters of the Curaray flowed over the bodies of the five comrades, slain by the men they had come to win for Christ, whose banner they had borne. The world called it a nightmare of tragedy, for it did not recognise the truth of the second clause in Jim Elliot's credo: "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."

Strong Roots

Fred Elliot read the Scriptures daily to his children, seeking to show them the glory of Christ above all else, striving always to avoid legalisms or a list of 'don'ts'. 'I prayed *with* them as well as for them,' he says. And each of the children at an early age heard the call of Jesus and set his face to follow.

High School & College

Werner Durtschi recalls:

'One day near Jim's last year in high school I saw him running around the outdoor track, training. I asked him what he was doing that for. He said, "Bodily exercise is profitable for a little." He was building his body for the rigors of missionary life.'

Jim wrote at the close of his freshman year:

'It has been a profitable year, drawing closer to my Saviour and discovering gems in His Word. How wonderful to know that Christianity is more than a padded pew or a dim cathedral, but that it is a real, living, daily experience which goes on from grace to grace. And its goal—sometimes seemingly distant, but bright and unfading, lit up and glowing with the beauties of the Sun of Righteousness.

From the last letter of his sophomore year:

'What a brutish master sin is, taking the joy from one's life, stealing money and health, giving promise of tomorrow's pleasures and finally leading one onto the rotten planking that overlies the mouth of the pit. It is with honest praise to God I can look up tonight and rejoice in His loving-kindness in delivering me from a life of useless frustration and the ultimate agonies of the gnawing, undying worms of remorse and regret.'

It was sometime during these first two years at college that Jim became conscious of the direct, personal implications of the Lord Jesus' command to go and preach the gospel. He decided that the command was directed to him. There is no record of the exact time when this decision was made, but a small black loose-leaf notebook, his companion in college days, contains evidence of his concern for the millions who had not had the chance to hear what God had done to bring man to Himself. This notebook was found on the Curaray beach after Jim's death, its pages scattered along the sand, some washed clean of ink, others stained with mud and rain but still legible [containing] the names of hundreds of people for whom Jim prayed.

Straight for the Goal

No ascetic, Jim enjoyed to the full all that he believed God had given him to enjoy, but he

felt it wisest to exclude from the sphere of activity anything which had the power to distract him from the pursuit of the Will. He believed Christ to be utterly sufficient for the entire fulfilment of the personality, and was ready to trust Him literally for this. Jim wrote in his journal: 'To that soul which has tasted of Christ, the jaunty laugh, the tempting music of mingled voices, the haunting appeal of smiling eyes—all these lack flavour. And I would drink deeply of Him. Fill me, O Spirit of Christ, with all the fullness of God.'

It was Marcus Aurelius who said, 'A man's thoughts dye his soul.' Constant dwelling in the words of the Lord dyed Jim's soul, and its colour was not hidden from fellow students.

To those accustomed to the shibboleths of 'Fundamentalism' Jim's ideas sometimes seemed startling. Often someone would say, "Where in the world did you get an idea like that, Elliot?" The answer is found in his notebook:

'2 Timothy 2:9 says. "The word of God is not bound." Systematic theology—be careful how you tie down the Word to fit your set and final creeds, systems, dogmas, and organised theistic philosophies! The Word of God is not bound! It's free to say what it will to the individual, and no one can outline it into dispensations which cannot be broken. Don't get it down 'cold', but let it live—fresh, warm, and vibrant—so that the world is not binding ponderous books about it, but rather is shackling you for having allowed it to have free course in your life. That's the apostolic pattern... And those who are arguing about foreknowledge, election, and such, read those verses 14-26, and then look how the apostle is willing to leave it a paradox. Yes, yes, I'm naïve, and glad to be so in such a case.'

Jim studied the Word for himself, and if what he understood it to mean was not in conformity with what is commonly understood, his standard did not shift.

'The pattern of my behaviour is not set in the activities of those about me. Don't follow the example of those you left in the world, nor those you find in the Church. Rather, the law of God, found in His Word, shall be my standard, and as I see it, there are few examples of this sort of living anywhere.'

Even his birthday greetings were not run-of-the-mill, as this to his brother Bert illustrates:

'For you, brother, I pray that the Lord might crown this year with His goodness and in the coming one give you a hallowed dare-devil spirit in lifting the biting sword of Truth, consuming you with a passion that is called by the cultured citizen of Christendom 'fanaticism', but known to God as that saintly madness that led His Son through bloody sweat and hot tears to agony on a rude Cross—and Glory!'

He was a member of the Student Foreign Missions fellowship, and attended its prayer meetings in the early morning. He often worked late at night, making up packages for relief in Europe. But his vision of world need included those at his own doorstep as well, and Sunday afternoons found him travelling into Chicago

to talk of Christ to those waiting for trains:

'No fruit yet. Why is it I'm so unproductive? I cannot recall leading more than one or two into the kingdom. Surely this is not the manifestation of the power of the Resurrection. I feel, as Rachel, "Give me children or else I die." "The rod of the man I choose shall bud." If Thou has chosen me, Father, then I should be budding, blossoming, bearing fruit for Thee.'

His desire does not seem to have been visibly fulfilled, but the exercise of soul that it cost Jim did something at least to preserve him from what, for the average college student, is often a life of unmitigated selfishness.

He sought the help of older Christians in learning to live for God, and there were occasions when he asked them to pray with him.

'God, light these idle sticks of my life and may I burn up for You. Consume my life, my God, for it is Yours. I seek not a long life but a full one, like you, Lord Jesus. Save me from a life of barrenness, following a pattern of ethics, and give instead that vital contact of soul with Your divine life that fruit may be produced, and Life—abundant living—may be known again as the final proof for Christ's message and work.'

...April 16. It was on this day that Jim and several others were travelling as a gospel team. As they crossed a railroad track, the car stalled and was wrecked by an oncoming freight train only a few seconds after they leaped to safety. Jim sent a clipping from the newspaper to his parents with the following comment:

'The details are fairly accurate, but newspapermen know nothing about the ministering spirits sent by the Ruler of the Universe to be ministers for them who are to be heirs of salvation. It sobers me considerably to think that the Lord kept me from harm in this. Certainly He has a work that He wants me in somewhere.'

The school year was nearly over when Jim stopped me in the hall one day between classes. It had only been in the last few weeks that I had had any idea that Jim was interested in me. We took a walk one evening, discussing what seemed to us a strange path in which the Lord had led us. We had dated only once. We had spent much time in study and conversation together, but neither had acknowledged anything beyond a very worthwhile friendship. Now we faced the simple truth—we loved each other.

Hardly aware of our direction, we wandered into a gateway and found ourselves in a cemetery. Seated on a stone slab, Jim told me that he had committed me to God, much as Abraham had done his son, Isaac. This came almost as a shock—for it was exactly the figure which had been in my mind for several days as I had pondered our relationship. We agreed that God was directing. Our lives belonged wholly

to Him, and should He choose to accept the 'sacrifice' and consume it, we determined not to lay a hand on it to retrieve it for ourselves. There was nothing more to be said. We sat in silence. Suddenly we were aware that the moon, which had risen behind us, was casting the shadow of a great stone cross between us.

The date of that night is marked in Jim's hymn-book, beside the following lines:

*"If Thou shouldst call me to resign
What most I prize, it ne'er was mine:
I only yield Thee what is Thine:
Thy will be done!"*

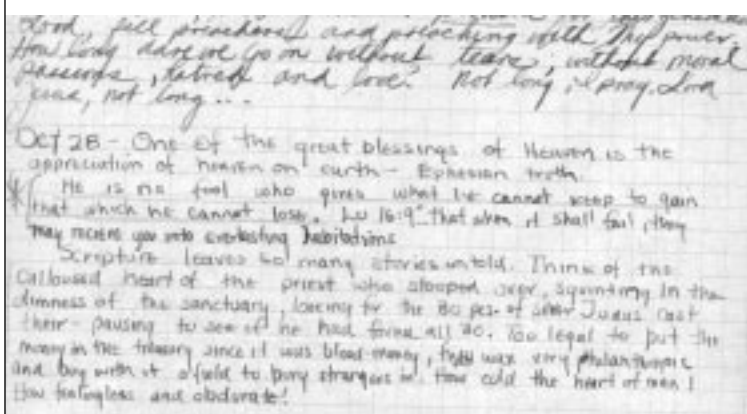
—CHARLOTTE ELLIOT

Flame of Fire

Excerpts from his journal:

'Father, let me be weak that I might loose my clutch on everything temporal. My life, my reputation, my possessions. Let me loose the tension of the grasping hand. Even, Father, would I lose the love of fondling. How often I have released a grasp only to retain what I

Below is a reproduction of the actual entry for October 28, 1949 in its entirety from Jim's journal. The underlining, the bracket and the asterisk were probably added after his death.



prized by "harmless" longing, the fondling touch. Rather, open my hand to receive the nail of Calvary, as Christ's was opened—that I, releasing all, might be released, unleashed from all that binds me now. He thought Heaven, yea, equality with God, not a thing to be clutched at. So let me release my grasp. Have had much struggle of soul lately—doubts as to the truth of God's care for the world, springing I think from so little evidence of His power in the gospel. Comforted mightily yesterday morning by realising that the rest of faith is upon fact, and that especially in the Resurrection of Christ. If he be not raised from the dead, my faith is vain.

Father, make of me a crisis man. Bring those I contact to decision. Let me not be a milepost on a single road; make me a fork, that men must turn one way or another on facing Christ in me.'

'I write on board the train, having just finished *The Growth of a Soul* by Hudson Taylor. The month's trip is over and I trust Eternity will reveal fruit for the effort. I have not known before such freedom in ministering. Surely prayer has been heard and answered. What a mystery of grace that God should allow me to

take up the Sword to battle, being such a child. And this childishness today's soul-twistings well demonstrate. Boarded at Billings about 5.30am and slept fitfully till nine. Woke with the realisation that I am in Satan's realm still. One woman near me seemed to encourage the red-eyed imp Desire, and oh, how base and hateful I think of myself now having prayed and read some of the Word. What *will* Hell be like, enraged by unslaked Lust and made seven times hotter with the vengeance of an outraged God? Oh to think of these men and women, these happy boys and girls going there. Father, save them, I pray; only grace makes me differ. When will the Spirit's power make me a witness of the things which I have seen and heard?'

From a letter to his brother Bert:

'Saturday is at its peak here at home. The girls are arguing in the kitchen over where they will each bake their cookies so that they will not be in each other's way. I cannot say that I understand just why so much worry is expended over such menials, but the women say that eats are an absolute essential, so there is no use talking. How I wish we could enter into the Saviour's meaning when He spoke of meat which they knew not of. Notice, he was actually *refusing* food which they brought from the city because he had an opportunity to do His Father's will. But this, of course, if carried to any sort of conclusion would make us all very hungry for meat which perishes, and the discomfort would doubtless stumble some. I have come to

believe a little in the apostolic principle of fasting, though I cannot say that I have entered into it with much fervour. But we must remember that "good eating" was as much taught against in the New Testament as was idolatry or physical violence. Ministry of this sort would bring a man into disrepute and gain for him the term 'fanatic' so we can shy away from preaching it, I suppose! Oh, what vacillating, half-way slovens, dolts, and boors we are when it comes to careful and practical application of the more delicate demands of our Christianity. I have found that fasting is a tool for use as a "pry" on the Great Inscrutable's heart; when He sees one earnest enough in his pursuit of holiness that he neglects his daily food for prayer, He must be amazed and cannot help but honour such simple sacrifice. Hmmm—long enough on this—and all from cookies in the kitchen, too.'

Behold Obscurity

'Much impressed lately with the blessing of being called to battle on the Winner's side. Think of it, sister—you and I shall one day share with Him the promised triumph when

He comes with blood-bathed garments and eye of flame, mocking at twentieth-century wisecracks. Exulting we shall follow and wonder then that we ever disbelieved. Does He seem slow? Let not the counsel and spirit of a clod whose life is vapour cause us to think anything but that a "little while" is just that! Not only is He sure to come, but suddenly and soon!... As soon as we believe, He will do. "The hour is coming," He says, but there's the rub—mustard seed is rare stuff today.'

Wine of Bewilderment

From the journal:

"...all the days of his vain life he spendeth as a shadow." (Song 1:6) I find now the literal truth of these words in my daily round. How few, how short these hours my heart must beat, then on—into the real world where the unseen becomes important. O my soul—what

shall it be for you in that Day when you stand before the God who breathed you?"

From a letter to his parents:

'I am more convinced than ever that God deals with individuals as they individually respond to his Word, *regardless* of their Church association. So that I am beginning to think that the thing to be stressed is not the form of assembly worship, but eager searching and obedience to the Scriptures. Nothing else will make the man of God "thoroughly furnished", fruitful in every good work.

Discouragement is a Satanic tool that seems to fit my disposition and the Enemy knows it. When I look at the work in the assembly, and realise that I've been there almost four years but have not seen a single soul led to Christ, my increasing tendency is to throw in the sponge and call it quits. Gospel meeting after gospel meeting, with no one strange coming

out—and worse yet, none of the saints seem very deeply exercised about it. "How long, Lord, when wilt Thou come unto me?" Why does he wait till the fourth watch to come to us instead of in the evening? Well, all my doubts and fears (hinges on which swing the gates of Hell) cannot prevail to take Him from His throne nor stop Him from the building of His Church.'

From a letter to Betty:

'God has blessed me with a queer twist that makes me laugh at almost anything, though sometimes it gets way out of hand. This may not be valid, but what do you think of translating *μακάριος* as "happy"? If this will pass the lexicographers I suggest it for I Timothy 1:11, "the gospel of the happy God". Whenever I get downcast, the Lord feeds me pills of praise.'

TO BE CONTINUED

A Tale of Two Brothers

by Colin Phelps

There can be few people who know anything about missions in the 20th Century who have not heard the story of the five young men who died, January 8th, 1956, in their attempt to reach the Woarani¹ Indians of Ecuador. Jim Elliot, Nate Saint, Ed McCully, Pete Fleming, and Roger Youderian were cut down in the prime of their lives as they waited on a sand bar in the Ecuadorian jungle; waited for further contact with a people unreached with the Gospel and hostile to anyone from the outside world. The Christian world, particularly in the West reeled as it tried to make sense of this incredible tragedy. "Why would God allow such potential to be destroyed?" Even the secular press couldn't ignore this tale. LIFE magazine ran a 10 page article featuring journal entries from the men themselves. Their headline? ... "Go Ye and Preach the Gospel" - Five Do and Die."

Thanks to the writing skills of Elisabeth Elliot, Jim Elliot's widow, the world has heard of and been amazed at the commitment and dedication of these young men. In her book *Shadow of the Almighty*, in a chapter entitled "Mission Accomplished", she writes of Jim's last days and poignantly and simply concludes with the words: "...the men for whom Jim Elliot prayed for six

years killed him and his four companions."

At the recent Amsterdam 2000 conference, in front of 10,000 delegates from around the world, nearly fifty years after the incident, Steve Saint, son of Nate Saint, the martyred pilot, shared the platform with two Woarani believers. When delegates were asked to stand to indicate who had been influenced by the death of the five, a reporter wrote, "It was impossible to gauge the extent of the response because everyone around us stood enthusiastically."

Jim Elliot and his friends will be remembered as committed young people prepared to die for their Lord. An inspiration, and rightly so.

It was with amazed delight that I recently came across another dimension to the story of Jim Elliot. Older by three years, Jim's brother, Bert, also followed God's call to South America, to the mountains of Peru. In a recent article it was revealed that Bert and his wife, Colleen, now in their seventies, had just completed 50 years in missionary service. They went to Peru in 1949, and have been ministering together for the Kingdom of God, planting at least 40 churches. In a world where attention spans are shaped by 30 second TV commercials, and the ever changing landscape of technology, the thought of a 50 year ministry seems unreal. What a picture of commitment and endurance.

The vastly different ministries of these two brothers highlight some truths about the Christian life. I'm not going to unpack them in detail but throw them out for your consideration and meditation.

1. Fame or reputation is a poor indicator of an

individual's value in God's economy. While Jim Elliot's fame and reputation are widespread, Bert Elliot is, for the most part, an unknown. Yet both have contributed significantly to God's kingdom.

2. What your life, as a "living sacrifice" to God, looks like will differ dramatically from other believers. Both Jim and Bert gave their lives unconditionally to the Lordship of Christ. For one it meant an early martyrdom, for the other, a long lifetime of service in a foreign land.

3. Much has been said, both critically and defensively, about today's generation of young adults who are often unwilling to enter into long-term commitments to organisations or projects. I want to suggest that, whether we believe this represents a lack of commitment, or a changed focus, God's standard has not changed. He demands absolute commitment to himself, and he'll make the decisions as to how long, or short, your time in any one place will be.

I started this article with Jim Elliot's famous quote, which I've always seen as being prophetic and applicable to the sacrifice that he and his friends made. I now see that it applies equally and just as appropriately to his brother, Bert, and the long-term church planting service that he has offered his Lord.

May I be so bold as to add to Jim Elliot's original words: "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep, by **dying young or living a lengthy life of obedient service**, to gain what he cannot lose."

Colin is the missions lecturer at BTC Southern Africa.

¹ Better known as the Auca. Auca is the derogatory word meaning "savage" which outsiders of the tribe used to describe them. The word "Woarani" is the what the tribe use to talk of themselves. It means "the people".

"Whatsoever is good for God's children they shall have it; for all is theirs to help them towards heaven; therefore if poverty be good they shall have it; if disgrace or crosses be good they shall have them; for all is ours to promote our greatest prosperity."

—RICHARD SIBBES