

## Lives Worth Imitating – Elisabeth Elliot July 14, 2019

Anyone here ever struggle with the frailty and disappointments of this life? Anyone ever cry out to God with the question, “Why?” The individual we’re going to be looking at this morning certainly had many opportunities to ask God, “Why?” Her name is **Elisabeth Elliot**.

- Elisabeth Howard was born December 21, 1926, in Brussels, Belgium where her **parents were missionaries**. When Elisabeth was quite young her family moved to the United States.
- Growing up, her parents often had missionaries stay with them. They designated one bedroom as a missionary bedroom. Over the years they had 42 different countries represented. She began to pray at a very early age seeking whether God wanted her to give her life to missions.
- One of those missionaries was Betty Scott Stam who along with her husband, John, served as missionaries to the communist Chinese. Their life ended abruptly when they were arrested one day, marched half naked through a Chinese village where they were both beheaded. That struck Elisabeth as a 8 year old girl. She copied a prayer that she’d learned from Betty Scott Stam into her Bible and prayed it daily.

"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  
And work out Thy whole will in my life **at any cost** now and forever."

- In college she took Wycliffe Bible translation and ended up in Ecuador. She met 2 women who were working with a tribe in the western jungle called the “Colorados” translating the Bible into their language. She felt particularly blessed by God when she found a Christian man who could speak both Spanish and the Colorado dialect fluently. He was the only person in the whole world who could speak both of those languages. She hired him and they worked hard together for 6 months. But one morning he was attacked and murdered. When he was murdered, Elisabeth heard the shots as she was reading **1 Peter 4:12-14 (NIV)** *Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. 13 But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. 14 If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.* In the midst of that murder she felt God was asking her, “**Do you trust me?**”
- A short time after that, Elisabeth reconnected with Jim Elliot, (who she had met in college) who was also working in Ecuador, with the **Quichua tribe**. Jim proposed to marriage to her but under one stipulation – that she would learn the Quichua language. Elisabeth accepted and for the next 5 years they worked together and after 5 years, when Elisabeth had finally learned the Quichua language, they were married.
- Shortly after she began dating Jim Elliot, she got word from the 2 women who she had worked with translating the Bible into the Colorado language, that all of her earlier translating work had been stolen. Elisabeth had put all of her previous work into a suitcase for these women to use as they continued to carry on her work. But now, all of her time and effort had been stolen and was never seen again. It was back to square one as far as translating the language. And once again, it was as if God were saying, “**Do you still trust me?**”
- Jim and Elisabeth had been married a little over 2 years when they got exciting news from a fellow missionary, and pilot, **Nate Saint**, that he’d discovered some inhabited Wuodani Indian huts. This tribe of Indians were known as a murderous group of Indians who had killed anyone who had ever

tried to reach out to them with the Gospel. They were quite excited about this discovery, for Jim and others had been praying for several months that God would allow them the opportunity to share the Gospel message with an unreached group of people. For several months they began to reach out to these Wuodani Indians by flying over head and dropping gifts to them. In 1956, Jim Elliot and 4 other men, went to the outskirts of the Wuodani territory and set up camp with the hopes of connecting with them and getting an invitation to go into their village. However, shortly after that, they made contact but all 5 men were speared to death. The year was 1956 and Elisabeth and the other wives were quite devastated and Elisabeth wrote that in her devastation she cried out to God asking, **"Why God? Why would open this door only to allow all 5 men to be killed?"** And she once again felt strongly that God was once again asking her, **"Do you still trust me now? Do you really believe I have the whole world in my hands and under my control?"**

- Later Elisabeth wrote that when she initially heard that Jim and the others had gone missing, God brought to her mind the words of the prophet, Isaiah, **"When you pass through the waters, I will be with you."** (Isaiah 43:2) However, she recalls crying out to God. **"God I know you are always with me, but what I want is Jim. I want my husband!"** And some of you can relate to that deep anguishing pain when something's been taken from you. Something or someone you love deeply. And while you may not turn your back completely on God, at those moments what you want is what you once had to be returned. It could be a person, or a relationship or your health or job, etc. You don't deny God's existence but your heart aches for what's been lost. And in your anguish you cry out to God.
- The news of these 5 men's murders quickly spread around the world and the general reaction was shock that this could happen to 5 men attempting to share the Good News of Jesus Christ. Elisabeth forgave these men who killed her husband and went back to working on translating the Bible into the Quichua people's language. In the midst of this translation work, she met two Wuodani women. Through their connections, Elisabeth, her two year old daughter, Valerie, and Rachel Saint (the sister of the murdered pilot) went back to this tribe who had murdered Jim Elliot and the others and as a result of their efforts, many of the Wuodani Indians were led into a relationship with Jesus Christ.
- Elisabeth eventually, after 7 years, returned to the U.S. and settled in New Hampshire. It was there that she met a professor at Gordon-Conwell seminary, **Addison Leitch**. However, after only 4 years, Addison died of cancer and once again she cried out to God – **"Why?"**
- 4 years later Elisabeth married her 3<sup>rd</sup> husband, **Lars Gren**, and was happily married to him until her death at the age of 88 in June 2015.
- For many years, Elisabeth had a very successful ministry hosting a radio show entitled, **Gateway to Joy**, and she wrote many books and traveled the world speaking about her experiences and the Lord's goodness to her. Most of that ended 10 years prior to her death in 2015 when they began to see the early signs of dementia, which she suffered with for the last 10 years of her life.

## **Principles of Suffering:**

### **1. Core Questions about God:**

- a. **Is God good all the time?** (even when life is tough) We like to sing, **"You're a good good Father."** But do you really believe that, when your circumstances of your life are far from what you'd call "good".
- b. **Is God sovereign all the time?** (or are there times it escapes His control?)  
**Psalms 46:1-3 (NIV)** *God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging.* The psalmist has determined that, despite my surrounding difficult circumstances, God is still my refuge and strength. He's going to be my "go to" in the midst of challenging circumstances.

**Psalms 46:10-11 (NIV)** *He says, "Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth." The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.* Often in the midst of personal storms, we tend to panic and try to figure out a solution to get us out of this mess. The psalmist has resolved in his heart and mind, that in the midst of my storms this is going to be my response. I'm going to settle my mind and heart and focus on God. And his resolve/commitment is that God would be glorified in the midst of my storms and heartache. The reason you can do that is because of your foundational belief that God is with me!! Do you believe that God is with you, even though you can't see or feel Him? Often our pain and heartache overwhelms us to a point where that's all we can see and feel and sense. God is drowned out by our circumstances. That's why it's so important to settle in your mind and heart the question, "Is God sovereign all the time?" Because He can't be sovereign part of the time. I don't want a God like that.

The issue of God's sovereignty all the time strikes to whether I can trust in God. That's the issue Elisabeth Elliot heard God asking her repeatedly during the painful times of her life. Can you trust God to do what's always best for you?

That was the core issue Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were facing when they refused to bow down to King Nebuchadnezzar and they were now about to be thrown into the intensely hot fiery furnace. Their response to the king was: *"King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty's hand. But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."* (Daniel 3:16-18 (NIV) Your circumstances can challenge your trust in God's sovereignty and goodness.

- c. **Does God love you all the time?** (or are your sufferings and challenges evidence that God doesn't love you any more?) **Romans 8:39** reminds us that *"nothing in all of creation can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

## 2. Core Beliefs about Suffering

### a. Is suffering to be avoided at all costs

Elisabeth Elliot defined suffering as: *Having what you don't want or wanting what you don't have.*

**Jesus endured suffering for your salvation.**

**Luke 9:23-24 (NIV)** *Then he said to them all: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. 24 For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it.* In that culture, a cross wasn't a pretty piece of jewelry you hung around your neck. A cross always meant death. Jesus is saying that in order to be a follower of His, you must daily, sometimes hourly, be willing to give up control of your life to God. To say, God this life is not mine, it's merely on loan from you. Notice the three step process:

1. **Deny yourself** – saying to God and yourself, I'm not living this day for me but rather I'm living this day for God and the display of His glory in and through me. And so, our prayer every day ought to be – *"God use me today for your honor and glory, whatever that takes."* That means that when you feel anger over something in your life, you're going to have to let that go, you're going to have to forgive, you're going to have to not focus on your personal pain because that's bringing the focus back on yourself.
2. **Take up your cross** –What was your cross yesterday or this week. It may be a medical diagnosis, or fear or anger over something that happened to you.

- Seldom do we get to choose our crosses – because if we did, most of us would politely turn them down. So, taking up your cross may be more an attitude of living life. An attitude that says, “*God use every circumstance that You allow into my life today to make me more like Jesus and to use it to glorify You.*” With that attitude we can begin to view the crosses in our lives as an opportunity for God to grow us into Christlikeness.
- Crosses are never comfortable or convenient.
- And crosses seldom seem fair.
- Crosses can often cause us to cry out to God, “*Why God?*” I’ve seen good Christians carry crosses but it was a constant burden and never became an opportunity to let God do a powerful work in and through them.

**Elisabeth Elliot:** “*God never does anything “to” us that is also not “for” us.*”

- 3. Follow Jesus** – In order to follow someone you’ve got to keep your focus on them. You can’t keep getting distracted by the things around you or you’ll quickly lose the person you’re following. The same principle applies to your life and mine. If you are continually getting distracted by your painful circumstances, then you can’t possibly follow Jesus. The way you keep your focus on Jesus is through prayer and spending time in God’s Word.

A great verse to remember as you try to put this principle of taking up your cross daily would be **Galatians 2:20** *I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*

#### **b. Suffering can be a gift from God**

God can use our sufferings to teach us greater dependency upon Him. Therefore, we need to learn to thank God for our sufferings as a tool to draw us closer to Himself.

**Fanny Crosby** was made blind at a very early age from a doctor’s malpractice. But rather than become bitter she resolved in her mind and heart to live life with gratitude in her heart. At age 9 she wrote the following poem,

Oh, what a happy soul I am,  
 Although I cannot see,  
 I am resolved that in this world  
 Contented I will be.

How many blessings I enjoy  
 That other people don't  
 To weep and sigh because I'm blind  
 I cannot nor I won't.

Fanny Crosby went on to write 8,000 hymns, among them: “To God Be the Glory”, “Blessed Assurance”, “Rescue the Perishing”.

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Luke 9:23-24

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