

Jim Elliot

Born October 8, 1927 to Fred and Clara Elliot in Portland, Oregon. His mother worked as a chiropractor and his father was a preacher. He was their third of four children and third and final son. His brothers and sister were Robert, Hebert, and Jane.

“Clara had her professional office off the living room of her home so that she could keep her fingers on the family pulse, for she considered the children her first responsibility. The idea of hiring a babysitter never occurred to her. What the family could not do together, they simply did not do. The Elliot children went to worship meetings and Sunday School from the time they were six weeks old. ‘I don’t think it hurts any child to sit quiet through an adult meeting,’ Clara declared; ‘it’s good for his nerves.’ And as for any foolishness about ‘forcing religion down their throats,’ the parents had not the slightest worry. They wanted the best for their children (‘except money, which can become a curse,’ they said) and gave it to them—spiritual as well as physical care, and all the other good things they could offer. If the child failed to appreciate the need for spiritual guidance, he probably failed, too, to see the need of physical rest when bedtime came around, but the parents guided him just the same, to God as well as to bed. Discipline in the home was firm. Honesty and obedience were stressed the most. The children were punished until the age of fourteen. After that they were told they were responsible to the Lord for their actions. “And don’t ever think you’ll get by with something because we don’t know about it,” their mother told them. “God knows, and has His own way of punishing.”

“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.”

Jim was saved when he was six years old and as soon as he was saved he began to tell all his friends about salvation. The Elliot home was always open, and sometimes missionaries would come. This influenced Jim to share his faith even more.

In 1941, Jim chose architectural drawing as his major at Benson Polytechnic High School. He was the star in several school plays and did so well that some of his teachers thought he should go into professional theater. He was also a great orator in high school, so much so that they called him the “oratorical king” of Benson. He also started reading poetry and memorizing it. His friend Dick Fisher said, “He’d be sitting at his desk, and when I’d walk in the door, he’d start in on ‘Quoth the Raven, Nevermore.’ I’d sit there, wide-mouthed and awed, while he went through the whole thing with gestures and fanfare.” Jim, Dick, and their friend Dutch would go out camping and hunting together often. Jim always had a Bible on top of his books. He would not open and start talking unless one or two others were present. As his Dick said of him, “He never missed an opportunity to talk to me about Jesus Christ, about whether I believed in Heaven, Hell, the Hereafter, et cetera.” He was never afraid to stand up for what he believed in. While running for class president, he gave a sermon on sin, judgement, and salvation. He would also argue that “a follower of Jesus could not participate in war or politics.” Given that World War II was going on, this did not help him in the election. Because of these two things, Jim went from winning class president to being vice president.

Jim Elliot went to Wheaton College in Illinois in the fall of 1945. He had one purpose entering college, committing himself entirely to God and discipline of doing so. Students commented on this attitude that he had a one track mind and that he was especially spiritual, but he would always turn it back to God. He said of his being able to go to college, “This schooling experience is one wherein I can perpetually celebrate that all has been supplied by His ever-tender loving-kindness. To Him be all the glory and thanks.” He wrote home frequently and his letters were saturated with God’s Word. Such an example of this is in a letter to his younger sister Jane. “Begin each day with private reading of the Word and prayer. Bunyan has well said, ‘Sin will keep you from this Book, or the Book will keep you from sin.’ From the very frist, as you begin high school, give out gospel tracts to those you meet. Make a bold start—it’s easier that way, rather than trying to begin halfway through. Memorize Scripture on the street car. Buy up the time! It’s costly because it’s so fleeting. These are terse remarks, and trite, but I wish someone would had said them to me about Labor Day, 1941. ‘Do your best to present yourself to God as on approved, a workman who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the Word of Truth.’”

“Jim set his alarm every night to waken him in time for prayer and study the Bible. ‘None of it gets to be “old stuff,”’ he wrote, ‘for it is Christ in print, the Living Word. We wouldn’t think of rising in the morning without a face-wash, but we often neglect that purgative cleansing of the Word of the Lord. It wakes us up to our responsibility.’”

After the first two years of college, Jim decided he wanted to be a missionary. He wrote down these facts in his diary.

“1700 languages have not a word of the Bible translated.

“90% of the people who volunteer for the mission field never get there. It takes more than a ‘Lord, I’m willing!’

“64% of the world has never heard of Christ.

“5000 people die every hour.

“The population of India equals that of North America, Africa, and South America combined.

There is one missionary for every 71,000 people there.

There is one Christian worker for every 50,000 people in foreign lands, while there is one to every 500 in the United States.”

“In view of the unequivocal command of Christ, coupled with these staggering facts, Jim believed that if he stayed in the United States the burden of proof would lie on him to show that he was justified in so doing.”

So Jim took action. In the summer of 1947, he and Ron Harris hitchhiked to Mexico, where Ron’s parents were missionaries. During his six weeks in Mexico, Jim learned as much Spanish as he could to share the gospel. “Toward the end of his stay in Mexico he was asked to speak in a children’s meeting. With exactly one month’s Spanish study behind him, he decided to attempt it without an interpreter. ‘The subject was Noah’s ark and the rainbow of promise. About 150 kids were quiet and attentive while he spoke for over half an hour. There was a blackboard behind him, and every time he needed a word he didn’t know, he would draw on the board and get someone to tell him the word needed. His enthusiasm and willingness to use what he learned made him get ahead rapidly with Spanish in so short a time.’ There was little doubt in Jim’s

mind, as he hitchhiked back toward Oregon, that it was Latin America to which God was calling him. He knew then that he could never be satisfied with the 'usual.' His face was set toward those who had never heard.”

Jim went back Wheaton College for his third year and decided to major in Greek. He wanted to use the knowledge of the Greek language to translate the Bible into different languages. In his Greek classes, Jim met a woman named Elizabeth or Betty Howard, who would later be his wife. She too wanted to learn Greek to translate it into other languages. She was a one year older than Jim and the sister of one of Jim's friends, Dave Howard. This is what she wrote of Jim. “Jim sat across the aisle from me in ancient history class... We talked occasionally after class, and one day in October Jim asked me for a date, which on the spur of the moment I accepted but later broke. This, I was informed by my friends, was a poor move. Didn't I know that Jim Elliot was a woman-hater? I had rejected a unique opportunity.” Jim Elliot did not hate women, but rather he felt that God was calling him the single life, like Paul, so that he could completely devote himself to God. He wrote this in his diary, “No one warns young people to follow Adam's example. He waited till God saw his need. Then God made Adam sleep, prepared for his mate, and brought her to him. We need more of this 'being asleep' in the will of God. Then we can receive what he brings us in His own time, if at all. Instead we are set as bloodhounds after a partner... It is true that a fellow cannot ignore women—but he can think of them as he ought—as sisters, not as sparring partners.” However, he would struggle with this because he was interested in Betty. They would continue to walk together talking about things of the Lord until she graduated at the end of the year.

During the summer, “Jim, Dave, Roger Lewis, and Verd Holsteen traveled together as a gospel team, representing the Foreign Missions Fellowship. The itinerary took them through the Midwestern states, from Michigan to Montana, where they spoke in churches, Bible conferences, camps, and schools, presenting to young people the need of a life given wholly given to the Lord.”

Jim returned to Wheaton for his final year in 1948. Betty stopped by on her way to Canada for missions work. She and Jim met up and knew that they loved each other. However, they decided to wait as Jim was finishing college and she was going to Canada believing that God was calling them to other things right now. He wrote this to his parents about Betty. “I have just come in from a long talk with Betty Howard. I don’t know what I have written of her, nor what impressions I have given, but somehow she is deliciously satisfying company—and this, strangely enough, is not on account of a fine-featured face, a shapely form, nor even on account of rare conversational powers. Of the former two she possesses little of appeal. Of the latter, though she has decided gifts of expression, she does not at all strike one as startling. This is what amazes me, for objectively she has practically nothing that would center my interests. We find, however, that our thought-patterns coincide in a myriad of minutiae as well as in a great many major issues. There is a thought-bond that I have known with few others, and a huge thirst for God that may surpass my own in many respects. Both of us sense the kindred interests in one another, but are a little awed to speak of it, fearing it may lead to relationships neither of us intended.” Betty left for Canada, but they agreed to write each other.

Soon thereafter, his brother Hebert left for Peru to do missions work. This caused Jim to think more about mission's work, while he finished his last year at Wheaton college. He continued to speak to everyone he meet about Christ. He even would take a train to Chicago and preach the gospel in the train station. He led devotions, communion, and prayer for a group on campus.

After graduating college, Jim went back to Portland for about a year. He concentrated on studying the Bible, preaching, teaching children, and searching for a way into the mission's field. He finally had some hope of where he was to go in late 1949. To Betty he wrote, "I have had detailed correspondence with two missionaries to whom I wrote; one, Wilfred Tidmarsh of Ecuador, who is having to leave an established forest work among Quichua Indians; the other Rowland Hill of Bangalore, India. Both describe fields of tremendous interest to me and both are quite anxious regarding my leading from the Lord...How is one to decide when the heart is equally torn for both works?" Jim believed however that in time God would let him know where to go, so Jim continued at the work he had been doing. This was partly answered as he learned of the Summer Institute of Linguistics, which eventually he was accepted to attend.

In the summer of 1950, Jim went to the University of Oklahoma to attend the Summer Institute of Linguistics. He learned, along with many other prospective and returned missionaries, how to study unwritten languages—how to write them down and analyze them. Towards the end of the course each student was to practice this with a language they had never heard. The university brought in people who spoke different languages for the students. Jim chose a former missionary from Ecuador who spoke the Quichua language. Jim was excited by this and wanted to go to the

Quichua people. The missionary told him of the Aucas or the Waodani, who had never heard the gospel. Jim continued to write to Dr. Tidmarsh, excited about going to the Quichua people.

When the course was over, Jim stayed in Norman for a couple months. He had made a friend named Bill Cathers through the course and both wanted to go the Ecuador. Dr. Tidmarch encouraged both of them to come as soon as possible, and so both applied for passports. While in Norman, Jim received a letter from Ed McCully, a former college friend, talking about looking for open doors to proclaim the gospel. Jim eagerly went to visit Ed in Milwaukee, Wisconsin and convince him to join him in going to Ecuador. Ed was willing to come along, but by the time Ed joined, Bill got engaged and backed out. Jim was disappointed, but worked with Ed over the next several months preaching the gospel throughout Indiana and Illinois. However, Ed too got engaged and backed out.

Jim headed back to Portland to figure out what to do. Dr. Tidmarsh came and visited to encourage Jim to still come to Ecuador. Jim soon found a partner to go with him, Pete Fleming. However before they could get supplies, Jim needed to go to the east coast with Bill for some meetings on missionary work. While on the east coast, he visited Betty, who was about to head to the South Pacific. However, the door to the South Pacific was closed to Betty and she thought about heading to Ecuador with Jim. Jim asked her though to not just follow him, but inquire that this is what God wanted her to do.

After Jim returned to Portland, he and Pete set to work on getting all their necessary supplies.

While waiting, he continued to preach the gospel, and Betty learned that God was leading her to Ecuador. This made Jim happy, but he could not wait for her.

On February 4, 1952, Jim and Pete traveled to Ecuador by ship. On their way they preached the gospel to the captain and the rest of the crew.

Jim and Pete arrived in Guayaquil, Ecuador on February 24, 1952. A few days later they were in Quito, where they met up with Dr. Tidmarsh. They worked quickly to learn Spanish, so that they could preach the gospel. This was helped along as they were living with a local family. They also had a month's training in medicine. In May, Betty arrived in Ecuador and Jim was happy. However, they still did not believe the God wanted them to marry at this time. Near the end of his stay in Quito, Jim was finally able to preach in Spanish. He wrote, "Got my first crack as preaching in Spanish. Great joy in it, but not really fluent yet. Never felt more apostolic in my life than this morning, when I was actually 'disputing in the market place' with two or three interested questioners in the crowd of perhaps forty people. One feels all alone, but the joy seeing people who do not know of the evangel asking sensible questions about faith and works or our belief in the virgin is something I have not known before. Oh to be able in their language! I look forward with great pleasure to this time of witnessing. It is true that we get a couple of hundred tracts torn up every week, and there are hecklers who throw an occasional jibe or orange peel, but in all we feel that we are making friends, and destroying the traditional prejudice. We believe God is supporting His Word and following it to the consciences of some."

In August, Jim and Pete left for Shell Mera on the foothill of the Andes Mountains. There they taught in a boy's camp about Christ. One day after a lesson, four boys went back to their rooms crying. They prayed and talked with them and all four confessed Jesus as their Saviour and repented of their sins.

After the camp, they headed to Shandia north of Shell Mesa and also on the foothill of the Andes Mountains. Here, they worked as doctors with Dr. Tidmarsh and also as teachers in the school there. Eventually, they go out into the surrounding forest and interact with the Quichua to learn their language and preach the gospel to them. Some were being saved, and those that were saved they were teaching how to study God's Word. Around this time Betty left for Santa Domingo, Ecuador to work with the Colorado Indians.

In early 1953, Jim returned to Quito to meet Ed McCully and his family who had just arrived in Ecuador. Ed finally came to join Jim as he promised a couple years back. It was at this time that Jim called Betty back to Quito and they finally got engaged.

Ed and Jim headed back to Shandia to help build a house there. They started building the house in March, while still preaching and teaching to the Quichua. However in late July, heavy rains came through for a week. The river started eroding the cliff that Shandia was on. By August 1, 1953, Shandia was gone. Jim and Pete had worked to save as much of the supplies as they could. Regardless of what had happened, they continued to preach to the Quichua. They even let Luis and Lucas preach, two Quichua who had been saved. Jim wrote of event in his diary. "First time I ever heard an Indian preach the Resurrection the way it should be preached." Together they

eventually decided to look for a new location to the south, and for the next three weeks they searched through the jungle. Eventually, they came across the small town of Puyupungo, where a man named Atanasio begged them to come and live with them and establish a school. The men agreed right away.

Before they started setting camp, Jim and Betty got married in Quito. After a honeymoon in Panama and Costa Rica, they headed to set up camp in Puyupungo. They started preaching to the Quichua and some believed. To those who believed, they taught them how to study God's Word. They also started building a house and set up a school.

For the next two years, they worked with the Quichua people. Pete, Ed, and Jim all worked to translate the Bible into Quichua and train the Quichua believing men how to preach and study God's Word. The Quichua men started preaching regularly, which helped further the gospel because many Quichua thought white men could preach.

On February 27, 1955, Valerie Elliot was born to Jim and Betty in Quito. He loved her immediately. He wrote about her in his diary and to his parents often.

The work with the Quichua picked up with more coming to be baptized. In Shandia, the number of believers grew to 25. Those who were baptized were generally mocked by others.

In September 1955, Ed and pilot, Nate Saint, found a small Waodani village. The Waodani tribes are hostile to outsiders because of mistrust from outsiders in the past. They told Pete and Jim and together they worked on a way to reach the Waodani. So, Ed and Nate began dropping

them gifts from the plane in order to gain their trust. They found a Waodani girl who had run away year ago, who taught them some Waodani phrases. They also found a loudspeaker in which to call to the Waodani from the plane.

All the while they continued to teach the Quichua men how to preach and study God's Word, so that when they were able to go to the Waodani, they wouldn't have to worry about always being around for the Quichua.

Nate found a place to land the plane on a sand bar on the Curary River and recruited one more missionary, Roger Youderian.

These men left to meet the Waodani on January 4, 1956. They stayed on the shore two days before meeting the Waodani. They met one man and two women. They took the man for a ride in the plane. Then, the Waodani left. Two days later, the Waodani came and killed them. Jim Elliot died at the age of 28.

All quotes taken from "Shadow of the Almighty: The Life and Testament of Jim Elliot" by Elizabeth Elliot.