

Jim Elliot

1927-1956

Christian martyr in Ecuador

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

Death for nothing? Many people thought it was a tragic waste of a life when Jim Elliot died trying to contact the Aucas. Jim was a very dedicated man who was physically and spiritually ready to go the mission field of Ecuador. His life and death by the Aucas continues to inspire Christians. Yet, how many Christians would risk their life for an opportunity to share the gospel? Jim Elliot, a young modern martyr, gave what he could not keep and gained what he could not lose.

Philip James Elliot was born on Oct. 8, 1927, in Portland, Oregon to Fred and Clara Elliot. He was born into a family of three siblings. His father was an itinerant non-sectarian evangelist in the Puget Sound area and his mother conducted a chiropractic practice. Growing up, many missionaries visited his home. This proved to be an important influence in his life. When Jim was eight years old, he accepted the Lord Jesus Christ into his heart.

Jim attended Benson Polytechnic High School, majoring in architectural drawing and participating in football. He was also such a talented actor that his teachers urged him to enter professional theater. Jim developed his talent of preaching during his high school years. In his senior year he was elected class president.

When Jim graduated from high school, his brother recommended Wheaton College which he entered in 1945. He and his roommate, Pete Fleming, devoted their lives to Christ. He was granted a scholarship but had to work part time to support his studies. He participated in the College wrestling team and made the varsity his first year there. A **"missions"** statistic that profoundly challenged him was, **"There is one Christian worker for every 50,000 people in foreign lands, while there is one to every 500 in the United States."** He preached in youth groups in the Wheaton area and one summer he visited Mexico where he stayed with a missionary family to learn Spanish for six weeks. Here, he felt his missionary call to South America.

During his college years, he went to two Inter Varsity mission conferences. In his junior and senior years in college, he started paying attention to a girl named Elizabeth who was a year ahead of him and also wanted to be a missionary. However, they did not yet feel a confirmation towards marriage at the time of Elisabeth's graduation. In her journal she wrote, "Agreeing...the matter was too big for us to handle, we decided to pray about it separately." They said their "good-byes", and wrote to each other. In one of his letters to Elisabeth he wrote, "There is within a hunger after God, given of God, filled by God. I can be happy when I am conscious that he is doing what He wills to do within." Jim went on a mission trip to Mexico and his interest began to grow quickly in Latin America.

In 1948, he was elected the president of Foreign Mission Fellowship and was part of the Gospel team during the summer. In one of his notebooks he wrote that year, **"God, I pray Thee, light these idle sticks of my life and may I burn for Thee. Consume my life, my God, for it is Thine. I seek not a long life, but a full one, like you, Lord Jesus."** He chose Greek as his major and graduated with highest honors in 1949. Jim returned home to live with his family to focus on Bible study and his relationship with the Lord. He worked at odd jobs and would preach wherever anyone would listen.

In June, 1950, Jim spent much time in Norman, OK where he worked with a former missionary to the Quechua Indians of Ecuador and first learned of the feared Auca Indian tribe. Immediately, Jim felt the call and after ten days of praying, he wrote a letter to Dr. Tidmarsh asking whether he could come help with the missionary work that they had going on there. Jim immediately applied for a passport after Dr. Tidmarsh agreed to receive him. However, Jim's decision to go to Ecuador was postponed a year while Tidmarsh went to England.

Jim joined Elizabeth in the linguistic school for a few months then continued his relationship with her through letters and visits. Jim worked with youth in Indiana and Illinois where Ed McCully and Pete Cathers helped him in working on a radio broadcast series called, "The March of Truth". Jim convinced his friend Ed McCully to leave law school and to start mission training. Pete Fleming and Jim started raising money and getting prayer support. Pete was for going to Ecuador right away. Ed wanted to stay and get married with Marilou. After some convincing from Pete, Jim was ready to go.

When Dr. Tidmarsh returned the three men readied for their trip to Ecuador. Elisabeth Howard also had been called to do missionary work in Ecuador. On February 4, 1952, Jim Elliot and Ed McCully sailed for Ecuador and arrived in Quito on the 21st. Pete and Jim stayed in Quito for six months with a missionary family that helped them learn Spanish accurately and quickly. In April of the same year Elisabeth arrived to study Spanish, tropical diseases, and medical work. Although she went to the opposite side of Ecuador to work with another tribe, Jim and Elisabeth stayed in contact by letters.

The men's plan was to locate themselves in an old oil station that was abandoned because it was considered too dangerous for oil personnel. It was close to the Auca tribe and had a small airstrip. In February 1953, Jim and Elisabeth met in Quito and made an agreement to be married. Jim and Elisabeth were married on October 8, 1953 by an official of the Registro Civil in Quito, Ecuador. The only witnesses were fellow missionaries Ed and Marilou McCully--and senior missionaries Dr. and Mrs. Wilfred Tidmarsh (who about that time returned to the States due to Mrs. Tidmarsh's poor health).

Of his first year of marriage he writes, "It has been the happiest and busiest year of my life." The Elliot's daughter, Valerie, was born February 27, 1955. Jim and Elisabeth worked together in translating the New Testament into the Quechua Indian language at the new mission station called Shell Mera.

To get to Shandia they had to take a plane to the nearest village. Their pilot was Nate Saint, a missionary pilot with another organization. Just east of the ancient Inca Empire, they landed in the nearby village and hiked for two hours through jungle and swamplands to get to Shandia.

At Shandia Pete and Jim made contact with the Quechua Indians. Ed and his wife Marilou joined Pete and Jim in Shandia after their six months of Spanish training in Quito. Nate Saint and his wife also joined them. Together they built a mission station, a small medical station, a few houses for the missionaries to live in, and a small airstrip, which all took about a year. After all that had been accomplished, the missionaries had their first Bible conference with the Quechua. During the rainy season, a flood came that wiped out everything that they had built during their first year.

While Jim was working in Shandia, he recalled in his linguistic training learning about the Auca tribe. One thing that he remembered was that they were a **violent and murderous tribe** and ***had never had any contact with the outer world***. He wanted to bring the Gospel there, so he started a plan which was called Operation Auca. Besides him and his wife, his team consisted of Nate and his wife, Ed and his wife, Pete and his wife, Roger and his wife, another missionary couple who joined them from the States.

The men discovered the first Auca huts with the help of a missionary jungle pilot, Nate Saint. As the plans for contact with the Aucas continued, Roger Youderian, a young missionary was asked to join them. The men's first attempt to contact them was by airplane. Nate Saint would fly the men around the camp shouting friendship words in the Auca language through a loud speaker and dropping down gifts in a basket such as beads, cloths, machetes and a photograph of each man. The Aucas realized they were friendly and allowed them to land on an island they called Palm Beach. The Aucas responded by sending back up a parrot and feathered head dresses.

When they got back to their campsite, the missionaries showed the Indians modern things such as rubber bands, balloons and balls. Then they had lunch of hamburgers with mustard. Toward the end of the visit, the Indians showed signs that they wanted to stay the night on the beach with them. The missionaries hospitably set up a hut and said that they could sleep there for the night. All of a sudden, Delilah gave a shrill cry and headed off toward the jungle with George following close behind. Soon after, the older woman left.

Encouraged by this visit, the men felt that it was time to go in and try to minister to them. On the morning of January 8th, after numerous songs of praise and considerable prayer, the men radioed their wives saying that they were going to go into the village and would radio them at about 4:30. "Operation Auca" was under way. He wrote to his father five days before his departure for "Palm Beach", "...they have never had any contact with white man other than killing. They have no word for God in their language, only for devils and spirits. I know you will pray."

The next day, Nate and Ed were flying back to Shell Mera when they saw a group of twenty or thirty Aucas going toward Palm Beach. As soon as they saw that, they got very excited and turned around and landed at Palm Beach. They shouted, "Guys, the Aucas are coming!" As soon as the three others heard that, they flew into action straightening up their camp. *Little did these five men know that this would be their last few hours of life.* The last radio contact they made with Shell Mera was Jim calling his wife saying, "We'll call you back in three hours." As they lived their last minutes during the attack, they did not injure one Auca.

The women back at the base were praying the entire time for their husband's time with the Aucas and asking God to keep them safe. At 4:30 there was no reply, which immediately put the women in alarm. An hour later helicopters and planes from the Ecuadorian Air Force, the US Army, Air Force and Navy swarmed along the Curaray River looking for any sight of the missionaries. Finally, one of the helicopters radioed in saying that they had found their bodies on the beach. Jim Elliot's body was found down stream with three others. Their bodies had been brutally pierced with spears and hacked by machetes. All of the plane's fabric had been ripped off as if they had tried to kill the plane. Nate Saint's watch had stopped at 3:12 p.m. So it was concluded that the Indians had attacked them at that time. Their wives received the news and replied, "The Lord has closed our hearts to grief and hysteria, and filled in with His perfect peace."

These martyrs are known worldwide and continue to be an encouragement for many missionaries. After their deaths, there were many conversions to Christianity among the Indian tribes of Ecuador. After Jim Elliot's death, Elisabeth Elliot and her daughter Valerie continued working with the Quechua Indians and later moved to work with the Auca Indians. ***Forgiveness allowed them to have amazing success with the once murderous Indians.***

Jim Elliot's life was lived honorably and he was known to have looked for God in everything he did. Jim Elliot once said, **"He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."** He gave his all in faith to the Auca people, and he cannot lose in the Kingdom of Heaven.