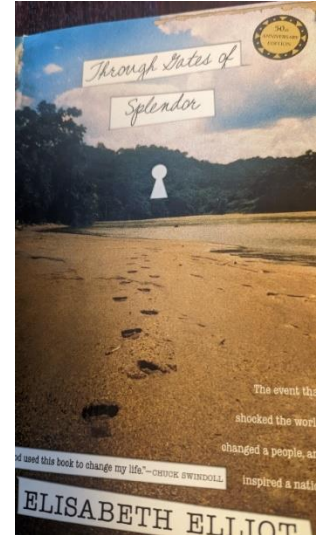


## Seeking a Reference Point Outside Human Experience

I just finished reading a book about five missionaries and their families serving in Ecuador in the 1950s. The book described Ecuador as a beautiful country with expansive, sparsely populated jungles. The jungles were a haven for the native population of indigenous tribes, none of whom had heard the name of Jesus Christ. The natives spoke a different language and lived an entirely different culture. The book, Through Gates of Splendor (by Elisabeth Elliot) describes the work and motivation of missionaries who aimed to reach the indigenous population in Ecuador.

Author Elisabeth Elliot described those serving as "missionary pioneers – always looking to the regions beyond immediate horizons." They were willing to go into the dangerous jungles to reach those they hoped to enlighten with the Word of God and a message of peace and love. The missionaries had a big challenge in front of them. The Bible encourages us: *I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:14).*

It took a great effort to find the tribes. Searches were by small aircraft. One of the missionaries described flying over a remote native dwelling in a single-engine airplane and thinking to himself, "These are people for whom Christ had died, and you have to find them before you can take the Gospel to them, so I was happy to have stumbled on them." The missionary effort was a collision of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century civilization with indigenous natives still living in a primitive culture. As loving and careful as the missionaries were, it took a unique approach to address the mistrust from those they were trying to reach for Christ.



The book had a surprise ending that I am still unpacking in my mind. It is human nature to want to live our lives like a novel with an easy, straightforward storybook ending. We have expectations for immediate results. In doing so, we place human parameters on the timing of God's work. Things don't always go as planned, and there may be significant setbacks along the way. Elisabeth Elliot said setbacks are "one incident in human history ... but only one incident." Failure isn't the end. In the book's epilogue, Elliot says, "God is the God of human history, and He is at work continuously, mysteriously, accomplishing His eternal purposes in us, through us, for us, and in spite of us."

We get opportunities for missions every day. For most of us, mission opportunities may be as close as next door, in our families, and at our workplace. The chance to witness is everywhere. Our efforts won't always appear to be fruitful. The important thing is to not give up, even when you feel unsuccessful or rejected. Trust that God is at work and He can work wonders, even from our failures. Elliott wrote: "It is not the level of our spirituality that we can depend on. It is God and nothing less than God, for the work is God's and the call is God's, and everything is summoned by Him and to His purposes."

Human timelines for completion are rarely practical, and there will be roadblocks along the way. Our approach is only the starting point, not the finish line. We plant the seeds that come to fruition when others accept the Holy Spirit in their lives. We may not see the finish line in our lifetime, but we set the stage for transforming lives. *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth (Acts 1:8).* Elisabeth Elliot wrote, "A healthier faith seeks a reference point outside all human experience." Transforming lives is much bigger than us, but we can be the catalyst for it to happen.

Jesus died for all, including those who don't yet know Jesus Christ. There *will* be a storybook ending, but it may not be during our lifetime or on this planet.

**Question:** Who can you witness to for Christ?

*This devotion is motivated by the book, Through Gates of Splendor by Elisabeth Elliot. The book is fascinating to read. I have tried not to spoil your experience by giving too much detail about its storyline. I received this book from a close friend who has recently worked for more than a decade in the mission field in Ecuador.*