

Hearts Set on Pilgrimage

by Elisabeth Elliot

Elisabeth Elliot emphasizes the importance of having a heart set on pilgrimage, surrendering to God's will, and embracing the trials that shape our faith journey.

Duration: 41:53

Scripture: Job 10:8-9, Psalm 77:8-9, Psalm 84:5, Psalm 126:5, Matthew 16:24, Romans 8:28, Hebrews 5:8, Hebrews 11:13

Topics: "Pilgrimage"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker shares a personal experience of facing trials and challenges while doing missionary work in a remote area. He mentions reading from 1 Peter, where it talks about not being surprised by fiery trials. As he was reading, he heard gunshots and later discovered that his entire station had been destroyed. Despite the devastation, the speaker's faith remained strong, and he received a letter from a friend assuring him that God is still in control. The speaker also mentions the importance of choosing to believe that God is God, even in the face of difficult circumstances.

Transcript

For this seminar, it is wonderful, one of my favorite passages, the heart set on pilgrimage. Those who have personally encouraged me from my childhood and up to my old age have been many. I wish I had time to tell you about some of them.

I'll mention just a few, but I have known a good many people whose hearts were very obviously visibly and tangibly set on pilgrimage. I came from a godly home in which we had endless streams of missionaries passing through, so we six children had the great privilege of growing up with missionaries from all over the world. I still have my mother's guest book that has forty-two countries represented in it, and we heard missionary stories firsthand around the dinner table.

Five out of the six of us became missionaries, and I have no doubt that that's one of the major reasons, because we knew these people personally. I'll just mention a couple of those that we remember. Betty Scott was a lady who was going to China to marry her fiancé, John Stamm, and she sat at our dinner table when I was just a little girl.

When I was eight years old, I learned that Betty Scott Stamm and her husband had been killed by Chinese Communists. They were both beheaded. You can imagine that the memory of that lady at our dinner table

and my child's imagination of what that beheading must have been like was indelible in my life.

But far from dissuading me from wanting to become a foreign missionary, I was galvanized to wish to be exactly that kind of a servant of God, and I copied into my Bible a prayer that Betty Scott Stamm had written, 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.

She wrote that prayer, I believe, when she was about 18. Can you imagine what she might have imagined the cost would be? She could hardly have imagined the beheading of her and her husband. She had to watch her husband's head chopped off first.

Then there was a wonderful little Chinese man that used to visit us quite frequently. His name was Leland Wong, and his motto was, no Bible, no breakfast. And when he would come down to breakfast, when he was staying in our home, he would ask us children how many of us had read the Bible that morning, and you could be sure that we were very much ashamed if we were not able to say that we had not read the Bible before we came, because he would say, no Bible, no breakfast.

Then there was a wonderful man from Belgium by the name of Mr. Van Steenburg. He had a marvelous French accent. We loved him, and he was a man with a great sense of humor.

But these were people who suffered, every single one of them. He suffered in losing his sons in World War II. They were shot.

And then, of course, there was Amy Carmichael, whom I never met, but a woman who knew what deep suffering was. I want to read just a few passages from this lovely little book called *The Loveliness of Christ*. It's a compilation of excerpts from Samuel Rutherford, who was a man in the 1600s.

In July of 1636, Rutherford was summoned to appear before the High Commission Court to answer for his nonconformity to the acts of episcopacy, and also on account of his treatise against the Armenians, and as a consequence was forbidden to exercise his ministry anywhere in the Kingdom of Scotland and to confine himself to the city of Aberdeen. It was while confined in this place that the greater portion of his letters were written. Richard Baxter's opinion of this is well worth quoting.

Hold off the Bible, such a book the world never saw. He means by that, I believe, besides the Bible, the world never saw a book like Rutherford's letters. An English merchant who heard him preach in St. Andrews says, I went to St. Andrews where I heard a sweet, majestic-looking man named Blair, and he showed me the majesty of God.

After him I heard a little fair man, Rutherford, and he showed me the loveliness of Christ. For example, ye will not get leave to steal quietly to heaven in Christ's company without a conflict and a cross. He will not get leave to steal quietly to heaven in Christ's company without a conflict and a cross.

And I myself would echo his words in just these two lines, O what I owe to the file, to the hammer, and to the furnace of my Lord Jesus. If you and I are going to be true pilgrims, there is going to have to be the file, the hammer, and the furnace. And when it happens, let's try not to look up and say, Lord, why are you doing this to me? Because there isn't any other way to shape us into the image of his Son.

Romans 8.28 tells us what God is up to. Everything that happens fits into a pattern for good to them that love God, to them that are called according to his purpose. But his purpose is spelled out in verse 29.

Romans 8.29 says that we might be shaped to the image of his Son. And it is my lifelong desire to be shaped into the image of his Son. I urge upon you a nearer communion with Christ, and a growing communion.

There are curtains to be drawn by in Christ that we never saw, and new foldings of love in him. I despair that ever I shall win to the far end of that love, therefore dig deep, and sweat and labor, and take pains for him, and set by so much time in the day for him as you can. He will be won with labor.

A heart set on pilgrimage has got to be a clean heart, a hot heart. I remember that C. T. Studd, that great missionary to Africa and also to China, told his five daughters, one of whom I heard speak years ago, the one and only, you might say, date that Jim Elliott and I ever had. We went to Moody Church in Chicago to hear this marvelous woman tell about her father.

And one of the things he used to say to people was, all God wants is a hot heart. Any old turnip will do for a head. And that should be a comfort to a whole lot of us.

But you know the verse from which this theme is taken, Psalm 84.5, and then in Hebrews 11.13, that's one of my favorite verses here, they did not receive the things promised. All these people were still living by faith when they died, but they did not receive the promised. And it just so happens that my current newsletter has a piece, the opening piece, is right down this same alley.

I entitled this, Is He a God of Love? This is an ancient question. Job said, Your hands shaped me and made me. Will you now turn and destroy me? Remember that you molded me like clay.

Will you now turn me to dust again? And the psalmist cried, Has his unfailing love vanished forever? Has his promise failed for all times? Has God forgotten to be merciful? Has he in anger withheld his compassion? Who that has walked any distance at all with Christ has not asked similar questions? Because God does not behave exactly the way we would expect him to, does he, all the time. We have wondered, no doubt, if anybody was really out there. We feel so alone.

We feel like orphans in a great dark universe at times. Are we utterly at the mercy of mere chance? Is there, after all, no care, no order, no purpose, no meaning? Are we adrift in a sea of nothingness, at the mercy of chance, mishap, calamity, misfortune, disaster, catastrophe, undesigned and unattended? Surely such agonizing thoughts must have plagued Joseph as he lay for years in prison. What was God up to all that time? Have you ever pondered how many years Joseph must have been in prison? There doesn't seem to be a hint that God was paying any attention.

Did Joseph question his wisdom, his love, his very existence? Did he ask God why he permitted his brother to hate him? They had planned to murder him. Then, finding that they could make some money, they sold him into slavery. A faithful servant, he was lied about by an adulterous woman, and because of her went to prison.

His fellow prisoners promised to put in a good word for him, but forgot. When the great famine came, Joseph had by then been released and elevated to the prime minister's position, and was therefore able to save his hateful brothers and his old father from starvation. What a strange concatenation of events.

Have you ever thought about the fact that the birth of Jesus led to the slaughter of countless baby boys? Strange, isn't it? How God works these wonderful things with incomprehensible, terrible things. Have you thought about the fact that Jesus prayed all night before choosing his disciples, and Judas was one of those disciples? Have you thought about the fact that Peter's deliverance from prison led to the guard's death, that Elemas' opposition to Paul led to his own blindness, but then to the proconsul's salvation? Strange things, one after another, one on top of the other. God does indeed move in mysterious ways.

The results can sometimes bewilder us. But we can rest assured that everything that happens fits into God's pattern for good to them that love God. That pattern is in process every minute of every day.

Romans 8, 28, and 29 answer our desperate questions and make God's purpose as clear as it can be to us mortals. He's shaping us into the image of Christ. What does it take to make an image? Michelangelo made it sound very simple.

He said, You simply take a block of marble and knock off anything that doesn't look like David. God's shaping process cannot be painless, for it takes the powerful blows of a hammer, the careful chippings of a chisel, and the patient rasping of a file. Some of us have known some hammer blows, most of us have experienced the chippings of a chisel, the lesser treatments, and probably nearly every day God is working on us with that file, just to rasp off the sharp corners and the sharp edges.

It is a loving Father who shapes us, and only he knows precisely what is needed to conform each individual to the image of Christ. May he make you and me teachable. When I finally reached the mission field after what seemed to me like a much longer time than was necessary, I graduated from college when I was twenty-one and hoped very much that by the time I was twenty-two I would be in God's chosen place for me overseas.

The Lord was dealing with me with the hammer and the chisel and the file for four years before I went to Ecuador. When I went to Ecuador I was thrilled to get there. I'll never forget getting off the boat.

It took us ten days to get down to Ecuador from New York in those days. When I arrived in the city of the port city, I realized that I had never seen a worse place in my life. I was so thankful to know that I knew God wanted me in Ecuador or I would have been back on that boat again and straight back up to New York.

There were huge vultures pulling the stuffings out of dead rats in the middle of the streets. All the houses in those days were made of bamboo. The place was stinking with garbage and poor little naked children running around.

Anyway, I was still thrilled because I said to myself, I'm in Ecuador. This is where God wants me to be. Of course, I couldn't do anything very constructive until I began the study of Spanish.

When I had finished the study of Spanish, the Lord sent me to the western jungle of Ecuador, which was a rather small area between the Andes and the Pacific Ocean. There were two British women there, missionaries, who had been struggling for five years to reduce an unwritten language to writing. They were working with the people called the Colorados.

You Spanish speakers, of course, know that the word Colorado means red. The reason that these people were called Colorados was because they painted themselves literally brilliant red from head to toe. They were a spectacular sight.

But as far as we knew, nobody had ever learned their language. The only speakers of Colorado were the Colorados. And so I knew that I was going to have to try to find somebody who would have the patience to sit down with this apparently retarded foreigner.

And of course, what could an Indian think of someone who couldn't speak a word of his language, but that she was retarded? And so I began to pray that God would enable me to find someone with that kind of patience and willingness to sit down and help me with the language. God answered that prayer exceedingly abundantly above anything that I had asked or thought. I had been told that there were no speakers of the Colorado language.

But a man turned up who needed a job. He was willing to work for me at my price. To my utter astonishment, I discovered that he was bilingual.

He spoke both Spanish and Colorado, and he was willing to work for me at my price. On top of all that, he turned out to be a Christian, and he was thrilled to think that he was going to be given the privilege of cooperating in this work, which he certainly saw as spiritual work, the foundations being the reduction to writing of the Colorado language in order that we might eventually translate the Bible for these people. So this man, whose name was Macario, would come to my house every morning, and we'd spend about one hour, he with his endless patience with me, I sitting there with my notebook and my pencil, trying to write down whatever he said.

Of course, because he could speak Spanish, he could tell me what he had just said in Colorado, so we made good progress for perhaps six or eight weeks. One morning I was on my knees in my bedroom reading my Bible, and I was reading from 1 Peter. Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial that is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you.

It happens that you might be conformed to the image of Christ or something like that. Don't be surprised at the fiery trial that is about to happen, whereupon I heard gunshots. Well, that was not unusual at all.

We heard gunshots every day because the white men in the clearing where I lived hunted with guns, and the Colorado's, of course, had learned to buy guns from the white men, and they also hunted with guns back further in the jungle. But every day we heard gunshots. These, however, were followed by all kinds of pandemonium out there in the clearing.

Horses galloping, people screaming, children crying. So, of course, I got up off my knees and went racing out to see what had happened. Macario had been murdered.

Now, remember, there was nobody else on the face of the earth that spoke those two languages. And I looked at the corpse with a great gaping hole in the forehead, and it was just as if I was looking into an abyss from which there was not the slightest glimmer of light or answer of an echo. And I said what you probably would have said, why? Why, Lord, would you allow a thing like this to happen? And then, of course, all the horrible, devastating questions that my adversary the devil was reminding me of was to go way back and say, well, maybe you completely missed the will of God.

He didn't want you to be a missionary at all. Well, Lord, did you want me to be a missionary? I think you sent me here to Ecuador. I didn't have any question about that for a while.

Now I was questioning everything. Did I come to the wrong tribe? Now, I had been invited by these two British women very earnestly and warmly to come and help them because they were without linguistic

training. I had had linguistic training at the University of Oklahoma.

So their prayer for a helper was answered when I came. So I got so confused, thinking, surely, Lord, over all those years that I was praying, I asked you to send me where you wanted me. I thought this is where you wanted me.

And then when I learned Spanish, these two women asked me to come and work with them. I did that. You answered the prayers for an informant, and here he is dead.

And it's at times like that, ladies, that we look into an abyss. And there is no glimmer of light, and there is no answering echo, and it is as though God is simply saying to you, do I exist or don't I? And there are only two choices. There is no medium.

Either God is God and he's got the whole world in his hands, and he's got you and me, sister, in his hands. Or he's not God, he hasn't got the whole world in his hands, everything is at the mercy of chance, chaos. Those who pass through the Valley of Baca make it well.

Well, that was a stunning blow to my faith. But you know which I chose. Either God is God or God is not God, and if I had chosen the latter, I would not be here tonight, would I? I knew that God was God.

I knew that he had to have a purpose in this. I couldn't imagine what it was. I continued with the work, the linguistic work, with much more difficulty.

It was almost impossible to get a Colorado to come and sit for more than ten minutes at a time before they would just throw up their hands and say, this stupid foreigner, she's never going to learn a language, she doesn't know anything about anything. And so I would get different people, different days. But I continued plugging along much more slowly than I had with Makario.

God was not finished with me yet in that very first year as a missionary. I went along with one of my British colleagues. They were both midwives, and one time in the middle of the night one of them called me and asked if I would go with her to help deliver a baby.

Well, I had never seen a baby delivered before, and so of course I went along with alacrity. But that night I had to watch a mother and a baby both bleed to death, and that was a horrifying, absolutely horrifying experience. Once again I just felt as if the universe was quaking.

In the middle of that year the most wonderful thing happened. The man that I had fallen madly in love with way back when I was a senior in college, a man named Jim Elliott, who was working way over on the other side of the Andes. I was in the western jungle between the Andes and the Pacific Ocean.

He was in the eastern jungle between the Andes and the Amazon. He asked me to marry him. After five years, we had fallen in love in college.

If you read *Passion and Purity* you know the story. But it was five years before God gave Jim a green light to propose to me. So when he asked me if I would marry him, you can be sure that I did not have any hesitations whatsoever.

I was quite sure that if God ever gave Jim a green light, that would be my green light to say yes. And of course I said yes. But Jim added a stringent condition to his proposal.

He said, I'm not going to marry you until you learn Quechua. Well, of course Quechua didn't have any connection with Spanish or Colorado, but I didn't think it was too high a price to pay to get a man like Jim Elliott, so I said yes. This meant that I had to leave the western jungle and my British missionary colleagues and move way over into the eastern jungle on another station, not where Jim was, and begin the study of Quechua.

So I did that, having coached my British colleagues in the use of the groundwork which I had laid. I had done a fairly thorough groundwork of the reduction to writing of the language, not the Bible translation, of course. That's another much more tremendous job.

But reducing the language to writing is not as difficult as it might seem to some. So I was able to coach my British colleagues in the use of these materials. When I went to the eastern jungle, I was staying on another station other than Jim's, and one of my jobs there was not only to learn Quechua, but also to man the shortwave radio in the morning.

There was a jungle network we would all call in every morning at a certain time to the missionary aviation base, so that anyone who had an emergency or needed a flight that day or for whatever reasons, we could always call at that time of day. So it was always a thrill to me if I happened to hear my fiancé's voice. But one day, his voice sounded rather tremorous, and he reported that the entire station on which he and his buddy Pete Fleming had been working had just gone down the river in a flood.

Five buildings, three of them he had built with his own hands, two of them he had repaired from termite damage, the whole station went down the Amazon in one night. Once again, I looked up and said, Lord, why? And Jim, I don't think asked why, he wrote me a letter and said, I have heard the voice of the Lord in the sound of many waters. Just assuring me from that verse of the songs that we didn't have to know why God's purposes were like this.

All we did have to know was God is still in control. He does know what he's doing. He doesn't make any mistakes.

There was yet one more stunning blow after the death of Mercado, watching the death of the mother and baby, the flood, complete demolition of the flood. I received a letter from one of my two British colleagues telling me that all of my language material had been stolen. In those days, there were no Xeroxes and there were no tape recorders.

So there was nothing left. It was all in one suitcase, about this big, hundreds if not thousands of three-by-fives, charts, notebooks, all the work that I had done on the Colorado language, gone like that. Now, of course, we prayed because we knew that God knew where that suitcase was, and God could bring it back.

We prayed most earnestly, remembering that God had given us Mercado as an informant, and guess what? We didn't get it back. We never saw any of that again. A heart set on pilgrimage is going to have to go through some tears.

Years after that happened, I was invited to speak at a with the pastor and his wife. While we were eating dinner, his wife told me a long story about an extremely difficult time in her life. She was plagued with horrible fears.

She was actually in the hospital. I think she'd had a miscarriage or a difficult birth. I've forgotten exactly what it was then, but she said while she was in the hospital, somebody lent her my book called These Strange Ashes, which was the story that I had just told you.

And she said, I can't tell you how God cheered and strengthened me through that book. I thought to myself, if anybody had asked me to recommend one of my books for someone who was in deep trouble, the last book I would have ever given them would have been the book called These Strange Ashes. But God had used that book to bring her out of the slough of despond.

And so she gave me that testimony that day. Well, the next day when I spoke to the church group, this lady was in the group and she came to me afterwards and she said, Elizabeth, I have a question. And I guess I've been asked the same question, I don't know how many times since then, but she said, did God ever give you any hint as to why he allowed all those things to happen to you in that very first year as a missionary? And I said, yes.

Well, tell me about it, she said. Well, I said, what happened last night at your dinner table? She looked absolutely blank. I said, didn't you tell me that that was the book that dragged you out of that slough of despond? Oh, yeah.

So all I had to say to her was, look, that was one tiny glimpse of why God allowed those things to happen. It helped one woman sick in the hospital. I don't have to know whether God had any other purposes.

I didn't have to know that purpose. I couldn't see that God had any purpose. I knew he did, but I didn't know of any.

It's a great lesson. Nothing is for nothing. Suffering is required.

Jesus himself learned obedience by the things which he suffered. And there will be the valley of Baca for every single one of us. There will be tears.

It was wonderfully confirming and uplifting to me to just talk to that lady and realize that that really did happen. Well, I used that title because it comes from a poem written by Amy Carmichael that I had memorized some years before. Where have I got it here? She wrote this, and of course she never gave us any clues as to what she might be going through.

She studiously avoided letting us think that she ever really suffered in any way. But of course, her writings were redolent of deep suffering. And she had written this, and only God knows what the occasion was.

But these strange ashes, Lord, this nothingness, this baffling sense of loss. This is she talking to God, but she had a rather diffident way of letting us think that the author is always male. Well, she used the male word son here.

This is just a little dialogue with God. So the son is asking God, these strange ashes, Lord, this nothingness, this baffling sense of loss. And he says, Son, was the anguish of my stripping less upon the torturing cross? Was I not brought into the dust of death, a worm and no man I? Yea, burned to ashes by the vehement breath of fire on Calvary.

O son beloved, this is thy heart's desire. This and no other thing follows the fall of the consuming fire on the burnt offering. Go on and taste the joy set high afar.

No joy like that to thee. See how it lights thy way like some great star. Come now and follow me.

Surely Amy Carmichael was referring specifically to the Old Testament stories of sacrifice. If an Israelite brought a lamb to the tabernacle and presented it to the priest, what happened to that lamb? Throat was slit, the lamb was laid on the altar, and the fire consumed the lamb. What was left for the man that brought the lamb? Nothing but ashes.

It was the consummation of his offering. And yet we ask these questions, but these strange ashes, Lord, this nothingness, this baffling sense of loss. So I think you can understand why I entitled my book *These Strange Ashes*, because that seemed to me to be exactly the experience that God was giving to me.

And of course, it illuminated most marvelously a facet of God's holy high purposes. Every single one of us has got to go through the fire. There is no other way.

If we are going to be crucified with Christ, we are going to have to go down into the depths with him, and we are going to have to be nailed to a cross again and again and again. And we are forever saying, I don't understand what God is doing. Where did you ever get the idea you were supposed to? Where in the world did you get the idea that God ought to be explaining himself to you and me? Who do we think we are? We are worms.

We are dust. We are ashes. Oh, they are horrible things to say nowadays.

We would never say anything like that. We revise the hymns so that they are comfortable and cool and clean and neat. The wonderful words to *Beneath the Cross of Jesus* is one stanza that is usually omitted from the hymn books, but if it is put in there, they end up with, *My sinful self, let's see, how does it go? I take across thy shadow for my abiding place.*

I ask no other sunshine than the sunshine of his face. Content to let the world go by, to know no gain or loss. My sinful self, my only shame, my glory, all the cross.

I take, O cross, thy shadow for my abiding place. I ask no other sunshine than the sunshine of his face. And at the very end, where it says in the original, My sinful self, my only shame, my glory, all the cross, there is also the line, my mind has gone blank as to what precedes this, it says instead of my own worthlessness, most of the hymn books have cleaned it up and said, and my unworthiness.

I think all of us are willing to acknowledge that we are unworthy, but we certainly don't want to call ourselves worthless. But Elizabeth Cleefane, who wrote that beautiful hymn, put it that way. There are two things, the glory of his glorious love, the marvel of his glorious love, and my own worthlessness.

There has to be the cross. Janet Erskine Stewart wrote this about the verse in the Psalms that says, if we sow in tears, we shall reap in joy. And this is what she writes.

It is good that we should have to submit to what we do not understand. It teaches us the laws of faith and hope. It is good that we should have to do what we should rather not, in circumstances not of our choice.

It is good that there should be always something to prick us on, something to remind us that we are in an enemy's country and we belong to a marching column. It is good that every creature we lean upon should fail or disappoint us. It is good that we should meet with checks and failures in what we undertake, to keep us humble and prayerful.

All these things belong to sowing in tears. And if you can forgive me for quoting one more poem by Amy Carmichael, this has been one of the watchwords of my life. She prayed this prayer, From prayer that asks that I may be sheltered from winds that beat on thee, From fearing when I should aspire, From faltering when I should climb higher, From silken self, O Captain, free thy soldier who would follow thee.

Give me the love that leads the way, The faith that nothing can dismay, The hope no disappointments tire, The passion that will burn like fire. Let me not sink to be a clod, Make me thy fuel, Flame of God. Are you willing to be fuel for God? If your heart is set on pilgrimage, what do you expect? There are going to be some steep mountains to climb, some deep valleys to go down into, some long, long, long slugging and slogging.

So what else is new? What do we expect? To be carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease while others fought to win the prize and sailed through bloody seas? Again, I ask, who do we think we are? There's nothing new about suffering. God measures it exactly to your need, and he loves us with an everlasting love. And he says to us with great tenderness, great compassion, Will you love me? Will you trust me? Will you praise me? May our answer be yes, Lord, yes, yes.

God bless you.

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