

Passion *and* Purity

“Passion and Purity couldn’t
be more timely,
more on target”

—Ruth Bell Graham

“This book is definitely for men, too”

—Billy Graham

Also by Elisabeth Elliot:

A Slow and Certain Light
The Savage My Kinsman
Love Has a Price Tag
No Graven Image
The Journals of Jim Elliot
Through Gates of Splendor
Shadow of the Almighty
Let Me Be a Woman
The Mark of a Man
Discipline: The Glad Surrender
Quest for Love

“Rainbows are made of sunlight and rain. The sunlight, which turned my world into a radiance of color, was the knowledge of Jim Elliot’s love. The rain was the other fact he explained to me as we sat on the grass by the Lagoon—that God was calling him to remain single. Perhaps for life, perhaps only until he had firsthand experience in the place where he was to work as a jungle missionary. Older missionaries had told him that single men were needed to do jobs married ones could never do. There were some areas where women could not go. Jim took their word for it and committed himself to bachelorhood for as long as the will of God required.”

Five years passed before Jim Elliot knew that it was God’s will that he and Elisabeth marry. During those five years both experienced the same feelings that you may now have—loneliness .-. longing .-. impatience .-. hope .-. fear of what may lie ahead combined with trust in God .-. the elation of love mingled with the pain of separation. Through their time of waiting upon the Lord, both grew in faith and their love was purified. They learned many lessons which Elisabeth Elliot now shares with you. You, too, will learn to let your heart rest “where true joys are to be found.”

Passion *and* Purity

*Learning to Bring Your Love Life
Under Christ's Control*

Elisabeth Elliot



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Preface

In my day we would have called them love affairs or romances. Now they are called relationships. The word *love* has fallen on bad times. To many people it means nothing more nor less than going to bed with somebody, never mind what sex the other may belong to. Bumper stickers substitute a picture of a red heart for the word *love* and apply it to just about anything, anybody, or any place. In some Christian gatherings people are asked to turn around and look the person next to them full in the face, even if he is a perfect stranger, and say, with a broad smile and without the least trace of a blush, “God loves you, and so do I,” and prove it by a hearty bear hug. This apparently makes some of them feel good. Perhaps it even convinces them they’ve obeyed the strongest and toughest command ever laid on human beings: Love one another *as Christ has loved you*. No wonder people cast about for some other word to describe what they feel for an individual of the opposite sex. It’s new. It’s neat. It’s really neat. It’s special.

“What’s special?” I sometimes ask.

“Well, you know, this, like, relationship.”

“What relationship, exactly?”

“Well, I don’t know, you know, it’s like, I mean, it’s just really neat.”

A schoolteacher wrote to me recently about a “growing friendship” with a man she had been riding to work with. He had gone to a distant state, and she was feeling very lonely and uncertain about the future. She was not sure just what their relationship had been or was now or might turn out to be, but having picked up from my writings bits and pieces that refer to matters of the heart, she wanted to know more.

“I want to know a little of what you were thinking, if I may. What were your feelings? What was going through your mind? Did your emotions often conflict with your thinking? If you can spare a few minutes and write back, I would hold on to any words of wisdom you have.”

Of course I spared the few minutes. The letters keep coming, bombarding me with questions along these lines, suggesting that the experience of one from a different generation might still be a signpost. Here are snippets from other letters:

“I am writing to you as a young woman seeking as honestly as I know how to be obedient to God, to know wisdom and discernment, to be pleasing and faithful and to wait on Him. My walk with Christ is rather an alone one. I lack knowing the spiritual leadership of a woman who is older than I. I know that concerning some things it was intended that the older women instruct the younger. I know that you are a servant, and I hope that you might respond.”

“How should a woman behave if a man is not fulfilling his role?”

“How shall I know that this woman is right for me?”

“How far can we go without a commitment to marriage? How far if we have that commitment?”

“What is our role as single women—waiting around?”

“You seem so strong and unswerving in your faith. Over and over I tell God I cannot go through this anymore. I quit. I tell Him I am mad. Don’t you ever falter and feel

you cannot go on? Have you never had times of giving up?"

"Did you struggle with the desire to be with Jim all the years you were separated?"

"Did you struggle with being single if your heart yearned for Jim?"

"If Tom had not come into my life, all my thoughts would be focused on the Lord. There would be no conflict. It bothers me so—I am lonely, and cry so easily, almost as if my heart is breaking. Is this part of God's plan?"

"How did you handle the impatience of wanting to be with the man you loved?"

I answer all the letters that come. I find myself trying to put into words, again and again, the lessons that came out of my own experience. I've been there where these men and women are. I know exactly what they mean. I fear that my replies to them must often seem cut and dried. "Oh, she's too opinionated. She's got no sympathy. She's the strong type anyway; she's never agonized as I do. And the way she dishes out advice! Do this, don't do that, trust God, period. I can't handle that stuff." I've heard the objections. I've overheard them, too. In college cafeterias after a talk I've given. At the book table where they're leafing through my books, unaware that the author is sitting to their left, with both ears open.

I thought that if I put these things into a book, they would not seem so cut and dried as they must in a one-page letter. Perhaps I must tell enough of my own story to serve as evidence that I've been there. Could I tell it without stickiness? Without seeming to be at too many removes from people whose vocabulary is different, but whose cries wake clear echoes of my own? I hope I can. But in order to do that I must run the risk of indecent exposure. I must put in my own cries and some of Jim's, my own weaknesses, my falterings—not by any means all (if you knew how much I've left out!), but some samples.

So the book has grown. Letters written to me during the last five or ten years are quoted. My own journals of thirty to thirty-five years ago. Letters from Jim Elliot. Statements as to the principles that apply.

The framework of the book is the story of five and a half years of loving one man, Jim, and of learning the disciplines of longing, loneliness, uncertainty, hope, trust, and unconditional commitment to Christ—a commitment which required that, regardless of what passion we might feel, we must be pure.

It is, to be blunt, a book about virginity. It is possible to love passionately and to stay out of bed. I know. We did it.

Have I nothing to say, then, to those who have already been in bed? I would have to have my head in the sand to imagine that my unmarried readers are all virgins. Those who have given away their virginity write to me, too, some of them in despair, feeling that they are forever banished from purity. I write to them to say that there is no purity in any of us apart from the blood of Jesus. All of us without exception are sinners and sinful, some in one way, some in another. If I can help some to avoid sin, I want to do that. If I can show others that the message of the Gospel is the possibility of a new birth and a new beginning and a new creation, I want to do that.

The love life of a Christian is a crucial battleground. There, if nowhere else, it will be determined as to who is Lord: the world, the self and the devil, or the Lord Christ.

This is why I take the risk. My own love story might be of more or less interest to a few; the “Dear Abby” sort of letters and my replies might be amusing; but my chief concern is that readers consider the authority of Christ over human passion and set their hearts on purity.

In the providence of God, I have had three chances to reflect on and try to practice the principles I write about

here. I have been married three times: to Jim Elliot, killed by Indians in the Ecuadorian jungle; to Addison Leitch, killed by cancer; and to Lars Gren, who is feeling fine on the day I'm writing this. Lars has lasted nearly six years, which is longer than either Jim or Add, so he says he is the "front runner." May he outrun me!

I will not tell the stories of all three. The Jim Elliot segment should suffice as a framework for what I want to say. Here is a chronology of that segment:

1947—both of us students at Wheaton College, Illinois.

He visits our home in New Jersey at Christmas.

1948—Jim confesses his love for me just before I graduate.

Summer, I in Oklahoma, he traveling with a gospel team. No correspondence between us.

Fall, his decision to begin to write to me when I go to Canada to Bible school.

1949—Jim graduates, goes home to Portland, Oregon.

I work in Alberta, then visit his home.

1950—Jim at home, working, studying, preparing for missionary work. I in Florida. We spend two days in Wheaton when my brother Dave Howard is married.

1951—We meet again when Jim comes east to speak in missionary meetings in New York and New Jersey.

1952—February, Jim sails for Ecuador. April, I sail for Ecuador. Spend several months in Quito, living with Ecuadorian families to learn Spanish by "immersion." August, Jim moves to Shandia in the eastern jungle to work with Quichua Indians.

September, I move to San Miguel in the western jungle to work with Colorado Indians.

1953—January, we meet in Quito, Jim asks me to marry him. Engagement announced.

June, I move to Dos Rios, eastern jungle, to start study of Quichua, fulfilling the condition of his proposal, "I won't marry you till you learn it."

October 8, married in Quito.

1955—daughter, Valerie, born.

1956—January 8, Jim dies by Auca spears.

(For complete story, see *Through Gates of Splendor*, *Shadow of the Almighty*, and *The Journals of Jim Elliot*.)

Introduction

On the stack of mail awaiting my return home lay a note saying Lars Gren had called and would I please return the call.

Now, Lars is one of my favorite people, married to another favorite, Elisabeth Elliot. So I called. Elisabeth answered, surprised that Lars had called me, not knowing what it was about.

“Are you working on another book?” I asked Elisabeth. She replied that she just finished one, *Passion and Purity*.

I felt it couldn’t be more timely, more on target, and told her I was looking forward to reading it.

When Lars called back—I chuckled to learn, without saying anything to Elisabeth—he wondered if I would be willing to read the manuscript, saying he would understand if I was too busy. When you’re that interested in a subject, you feel privileged to get a preview, and I told Lars as much.

Today the manuscript came and I sat down to glance through it.

From the very first it gripped my attention. This wasn’t what I expected. Oh, I knew whatever Elisabeth had written would be worth reading and readable, but this is a book about bringing one’s love life under the authority and

Lordship of Jesus Christ. Elisabeth has made it warmly personal, supporting her theme from memories, journals, and old love letters to Jim Elliot. She writes with poignancy and restraint. Interspersed through it are rich, right words from the Bible, beautiful old hymns, quotations from favorite authors—each so appropriate because they had met a living need. I didn't put it down until I had finished it.

I thought of the confusion of today's young people (and older, alike), Christians as well as non-Christians, and wished everyone could share in Elisabeth and Jim Elliot's love story—a successful (though brief) “orbit into space,” because they followed God's guidelines explicitly. “The best way to show up a crooked stick,” someone has said, “is to lay a straight one beside it.”

So amid today's too-crooked thinking, Elisabeth Elliot Gren has come up with a straight stick. And a beautifully unforgettable one at that.

Ruth Bell Graham

1

Me, Lord? Single?

There was not much of a view from the window. The central feature was the garbage cans behind the dining hall. The closed windows shut out neither the tremendous crash and clatter of early morning collections nor the noisome effluvium of the day's cooking. Nevertheless I was tickled pink to have that little room. It was a single one, what I had been wanting and finally got when I was a senior in college. It had a bed, a bureau, a bookcase, and in the corner by the window, a desk with a straight chair and a lamp. A place for solitude and silence, a "closet" of the sort Jesus said we should go into to pray.

I did my studying and some of my praying at the desk. There were maple trees and an old elm behind the garbage cans, and I was often distracted by the crowd (the flock? the skitter?) of squirrels that lived there. I watched them getting ready for winter, tearing up and down, frantically transporting provisions, scolding, chattering, flicking their tails. I watched the maple leaves change color and

fall, watched the rain paste them to the black driveway. I watched snow fall on those trees and cans.

It isn't hard at all to put myself back in the chair at that desk. When I sit at a different desk now and read letters from puzzled young people, I become that girl again who gazed out at the snow. What I wore was not very different from what they wear now—styles easily come full circle in thirty-five years. I had two skirts, three sweaters, and a few blouses, which I did my best to mix and match so that it looked as though I was wearing different outfits. Wednesdays were easy. Everybody in the senior class wore the same blue wool blazer with a college emblem sewn over the breast pocket.

My hair gave me an awful time. It was blond, hadn't a hint of a bend in it, and grew about an inch a month. How easy it would have been to wear it hanging long and straight, but that was unthinkable then. My curls were all a "put-up job." I could afford only one permanent a year. In between times I relied on the old pin-curl system, twirling strands of hair around my finger every night before I went to bed, securing them with a bobby pin.

If I couldn't do much with my hair, I could do less with my face. Like most girls, I wished I were pretty, but it seemed futile to tamper much with what I had been given, beyond using a cautious touch of pale lipstick (something called Tangee, which cost ten cents) and a pat of powder on my nose.

I needed that tiny, cozy room that year, perhaps more than ever before. Some issues that would set the sail of my life were to be dealt with. During the preceding summer I had finished praying about whether or not I was to be a missionary. I was. After what my Plymouth Brethren friends would call an exercise and what people now would call a struggle, it was clear at last. The struggle was not over any unwillingness to cross an ocean or live under a thatched roof, but over whether this was my idea or God's

and whether I was meant to be a surgeon (I loved dissecting things) or a linguist. I came to the conclusion it was God who called and the call was to linguistics. I asked for assurance from the Lord and got it, so that was that.

But there was another matter of business not by any means finished. That was the one for which God knew I would need a “closet.” It was about being alone—for the rest of my life. I was saying “Me, Lord? Single?” It seemed to come up between me and my Greek textbooks when I sat at the desk, between me and my Bible when I tried to hear God speaking. It was an obstruction to my prayers and the subject of recurrent dreams.

I talked often about this to God. I don’t remember mentioning it to anybody else for many months. The two who shared the suite of which my room was one-third were not the wildly popular sort of whom I would have been envious. They were quiet, sensible girls a few years older than I—one a music major who spent most of her time practicing the organ in the conservatory, the other a former WAVE (the women’s branch of the Navy) who was an expert at knitting argyle socks. Both of them, in fact, turned out countless pairs of socks and mittens and sent them off somewhere by parcel post. “When you get a needle in your hand,” Jean said to me one day, “you are just lost, aren’t you?” Compared to those two, I was.

After college Jean married. Barbara is still single. I have no memory of any discussions with them on love and marriage (though we must have had some), but I am perfectly sure that for all three of us singleness meant one thing: virginity. If you were single, you had not been in bed with any man. If you were to be permanently single, you were never going to be in bed with any man.

That was a hundred years ago, of course. But even a hundred years ago anybody who quite seriously believed that and acted on it would be seen as an oddity by many people. Perhaps we were in the minority. I can’t be sure

about that. Certainly the majority *professed* to believe that sexual activity was best limited to husbands and wives, whether or not their private lives demonstrated this conviction. Now, however, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, times have changed, they tell us. For thousands of years society depended on some semblance of order in the matter of sex. A man took a wife (or wives) in some regularly prescribed manner and lived with her (or them) according to recognized rules. He “messed around” with other men’s wives only to his peril. A woman knew that she possessed a priceless treasure, her virginity. She guarded it jealously for the man who would pay a price for it—commitment to marriage with her and with her alone. Even in societies where polygamy was allowed, rules governed responsibilities to spouses, rules on which the whole stability of the society depended.

Somehow we’ve gotten the idea that we can forget all the regulations and get away with it. Times have changed, we say. We’re “liberated” at last from our inhibitions. We have Sex and the Single Girl now. We have freedom. We can, in fact, “have it all and not get hooked.” Women can be predators if they want to, as well as men. Men aren’t men unless they’ve proved it by seducing as many women as possible—or as many men, for we may now choose according to “sexual preference.” We can go to bed with those of the opposite sex or those of our own. It doesn’t matter. A mere question of taste, and we all have a “right” to our tastes. Everybody’s equal. Everybody’s free. Nobody is hung up anymore or needs to deny himself anything. In fact, nobody *ought* to deny himself anything he wants badly—it’s dangerous. It’s unhealthy. It’s sick. If it feels good and you don’t do it, you’re paranoid. If it doesn’t feel good and you do do it, you’re a masochist.

The reason my roommates and I believed that *single-ness* was synonymous with *virginity* was not that we were college students a hundred years ago when everybody

believed that. It was not that we didn't know any better. It was not that we were too naïve to have heard that people have been committing adultery and fornication for millennia. It was not that we were not yet liberated or even that we were just plain stupid. The reason is that we were Christians. We prized the sanctity of sex.

I sat at that desk by the window and thought long and hard about marriage. I knew the kind of man I wanted. He would have to be a man who prized virginity—his own as well as mine—as much as I did.

What do women want today? What do men want? I mean, deep down. What do they really want? If “times” have changed, have human longings changed, too? How about principles? Have Christian principles changed?

I say no to the last three questions, an emphatic no. I am convinced that the human heart hungers for constancy. In forfeiting the sanctity of sex by casual, nondiscriminatory “making out” and “sleeping around,” we forfeit something we cannot well do without. There is dullness, monotony, sheer boredom in all of life when virginity and purity are no longer protected and prized. By trying to grab fulfillment everywhere, we find it nowhere.