

# BE STILL MY SOUL



*Reflections on Living  
the Christian Life*

Elisabeth Elliot



*a division of Baker Publishing Group*  
Grand Rapids, Michigan

© 2003 by Elisabeth Elliot

Published by Revell  
a division of Baker Publishing Group  
PO Box 6287, Grand Rapids, MI 49516-6287  
www.revellbooks.com

Repackaged edition published 2017

ISBN 978-0-8007-2877-9

Previously published in 2003 by Servant Publications

Printed in the United States of America

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—for example, electronic, photocopy, recording—without the prior written permission of the publisher. The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews.

The Library of Congress has cataloged the original edition as follows:  
Elliot, Elisabeth.

Be still my soul I Elisabeth Elliot.

p. cm.

Originally published: Ann Arbor, Mich. : Vine Books, c2003.

ISBN 10: 0-8007-5989-3 (pbk.)

ISBN 978-0-8007-5989-6 (pbk.)

1. Christian life. 2. Christian women-Religious life. I. Title.

BV4527.E44 2004

248.4-dc22

2004050831

Scripture marked KJV is taken from the King James Version of the Bible.

Scripture marked LB is taken from *The Living Bible*, copyright © 1971. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Wheaton, Illinois 60189. All rights reserved.

Scripture marked NASB is taken from the New American Standard Bible®, copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. (www.Lockman.org)

Scripture marked NEB is taken from the *The New English Bible*. Copyright © 1961, 1970, 1989 by The Delegates of Oxford University Press and The Syndics of the Cambridge University Press. Reprinted by permission.

Scripture marked NIV is taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®.

NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com

Scripture marked NKJV is taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture marked Phillips is taken from *The New Testament in Modern English*, revised edition—J. B. Phillips, translator. © J. B. Phillips 1958, 1960, 1972. Used by permission of Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc.

Scripture marked RSV is taken from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright 1952 [2nd edition, 1971] by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

17 18 19 20 21 22 23 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Elisabeth Elliot, *Be Still My Soul*

Revell Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2003. Used by permission.

# Contents

Dedication and Acknowledgments 7

*Introduction: Christ-Bearers* 9

1. Do We Know What We're In For? 13
2. Acceptance and Peace 25
3. All Things Are Yours 41
4. Material Evidence 53
5. Helps to Holiness 63
6. Walking With Jesus 73
7. A Servant Heart 85
8. Helps in Prayer 97
9. Longsuffering Love 109
10. The Hope of Glory 123

## Dedication and Acknowledgments

We have become friends with many people over the years through our travels. You may live far away, yet you are not far from our hearts. We have come to know other friends only through the mailbox-radio listeners, newsletter subscribers, and conference attendees. Thank you for bringing us joy and for telling us when we were mentioned in your prayers.

This book is dedicated to all of you, with thanksgiving.

Thanks also to Don Cooper of Servant Publications for publishing a number of my books and for being a good friend to us. (Lars has fond memories of their time together at the Frankfurt book fair in Germany, where Don was disturbed that my thrifty husband had brought a ninety-eight-cent can of smoked kippers from the States for his lunch, while he had to pay fifteen dollars for a mere hot dog, chips, and soda pop.)

*Dedication and Acknowledgments*

Then there is Kathy Deering, who edited my newsletter for many years and who compiled the books taken from it. With gratitude, I also want to mention Linda Meyers, Kay Hill, Kathy Gilbert, Pat Cresoe, Jeannie Illges, and Jan Wismer, who have all had a part in helping over the years.

—Elisabeth Elliot  
Magnolia, Massachusetts

# Christ-Bearers

I have spent my life plumbing the depths of what it means to be a Christian. I am, as of this morning, still learning. One thing I learned a long time ago is that we have to receive the life of Christ ourselves before we can live it. We have to live it before we can give it to others. Receive, live, give. The theologians call this “incarnation,” and it applies as much to us as Christians as it does to our Lord Himself.

Before Jesus was born, a young virgin named Mary responded to a heavenly summons and allowed God’s Spirit to become flesh. She gave her body to be the chalice into which the life of God was poured. A chalice is a cup. What Mary did is what you and I are meant to do, every one of us, every day, no matter where we are or what the circumstances—to carry Christ into this world. We are like chalices, empty vessels willing and ready to be filled with the life of God. Cleaned out in the process, we are poured out for others. Our lives illustrate what God is like much more by what we *are* and

*do* than by what we say. We incarnate Christ by taking up our crosses and following Him, doing exactly as Jesus did when He was obedient to the Father.

The word *incarnation* means “taking on flesh” or “being manifested in a human body.” It comes directly from two words meaning “in the flesh” or “the enfleshing.” God, who is Spirit, took on visible form for thirty-three years in the person of Jesus Christ. When Jesus died, the world could no longer see Him or touch Him. But because He gave us His Spirit when He rose from the dead and returned to His Father, Jesus made sure that the world could continue to see God in the flesh. The same Spirit that is in Him is in us Christians, “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27b, KJV). Even though Jesus may have become invisible to the eyes of people in the world, you and I are quite visible to them and to each other. In us, the world may in fact see God.

When the angel went to Mary, he said, “‘Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.’ Mary was greatly troubled at his words” (Luke 1:28–29, NIV). The angelic message was alarmingly clear and Mary’s response was awe—and bewilderment. When something interrupts what we are doing (the angel interrupted Mary’s housework, I suppose), most of us fret. God’s message to Mary would have seemed to most engaged girls an enormous inconvenience, even a disaster. For her, it caused a moment of puzzlement (how could this be?). Then, as far as we know, she raised no objections about what would happen to her or her fiancé. Her answer came with simply, “Be it unto me according to thy word.”

Whether or not an angel ever comes to us, we might be troubled at some of God's words to us as well. We might wish we'd never heard them. But our response should be modeled on Mary's and that of her Son Jesus—immediate obedience. Like someone holding out a cup to be filled when a drink is offered, we need to put our hearts forward right when God offers to pour Himself into us for an assignment, large or small. It's the attitude of a Christ-bearer.

A writer once said, "Mary's was the purposeful emptiness of a virginal heart," not a formless emptiness without meaning. Like Mary, we are best suited as Christ-bearers if we too have a purposeful emptiness, a readiness to be filled. If we fill up on trivialities or anxieties, we won't have room in our hearts for Him.

For Christ-bearers, there is no dichotomy between secular work and spiritual work. There wasn't for Mary and there shouldn't be for us. Her work was to say yes to God's will and to follow through by doing the everyday tasks that needed to be done. She tended to the simple but time-consuming needs of her husband and family. She raised the baby Jesus into young manhood. She released Him to do the work of the kingdom of God.

Our life may seem more complicated than Mary's, but the basics are the same. We live in a continuum of visible, tangible things. We live with the washing machines that break down and the dinner that burns and bills to pay and traffic jams. It is an act of obedient surrender as you tend your small child with all this mess and endure sleepless nights and juggle your responsibilities at work and at home.



The baby Jesus would not only be fed at Mary's breast and learn at her feet and in the carpenter's shop, but He would one day feel the blindfold, the ropes, the lash, the thorns, and finally the blood, nails, and the splinters of the cross. The Lord of the universe had taken on the body of an ordinary, vulnerable, mortal man in order that He might suffer and be totally emptied and annihilated—to bring God's life into the world. "The bread which I will give is my body and I shall give it for the life of the world" (John 6:51b, Phillips). What bread do you and I have to give to the world?

We are meant to be chalices, life-bearers. As God's expression of what He is like, we become broken bread and poured-out wine. There is no greater fullness.

## *One*



# Do We Know What We're In For?

One day as Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, He saw two fishermen, Simon Peter and his brother Andrew, casting a net into the lake. “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will make you fishers of men” (Matt. 4:19). At once they left their nets and followed Him. Did they know what they were in for?

Jesus began at once to teach His new disciples. The sermon on the mountainside was His starting point, and it was a bombardment of seemingly impossible requirements. Then He proceeded to demonstrate His supernatural power to heal the sick and the blind, to calm a storm, to raise the dead. He reminded the disciples that the student should be like his teacher, the servant like his master—and that they would be able to do greater works than He did. They were

warned not to be surprised if they should lose their lives for His sake. Jesus told them He must go to Jerusalem where He Himself would suffer many things, then die. This was too much for Peter. “Never, Lord!” he said. “This shall never happen to you!” For this, he received a stinging reply: “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God but the things of men” (Matt. 16:22–23). Then, immediately after speaking so scathingly, Jesus offered an invitation: “If anyone would [wants to, wills to, wishes to] come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Matt. 16:24).

### **The Cost Is High**

Jesus never lured disciples by false advertising. Once, when great crowds were following Him, He turned to them and said, “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, even his own life, he cannot be a disciple of mine” (Luke 14:26, NEB). With terms like that, there was never a stampede to join Him when He walked the roads of Galilee. There is not likely to be one now.

He wanted followers, didn’t He? Would Jesus ever make some kind of deal with potential recruits? Would He waive a few of the requisites? No. He added one more: “So also none of you can be a disciple of mine without parting with all his possessions” (Luke 14:33, NEB). Surely He exaggerates.

Does He? Twice He repeats His unequivocal words to great crowds. He is not speaking privately to the twelve whom He had instructed at length in the principles of discipleship, but

to the masses. His message is: What I am asking is more than any of you can possibly give. You must ask for terms.

There is no hope for any of us until we confess our helplessness to be Christians. Then we are in a position to receive grace. There we have the “terms”: grace—first, last, and always. So long as we see ourselves as competent we do not qualify. Jesus vividly depicted the obligations as beyond us. But “Come to me,” He says. *Carry your cross and come with Me. I alone can make you a disciple.*

Like the twelve, we would-be disciples are “foolish and slow of heart to believe.” We don’t know what we’re in for, but we’re signed up and we’re pretty sure we want to go all the way with Him. However, we are hampered by our preference for familiar comforts, and even sometimes by our exalted notions of the noble sacrifices we will make for the Cause. We miss the significance of the very sacrifices that count the most, the ones that convey our hearts to the One who has purchased us with His blood.

The first sacrifices in the Bible were those of Cain and Abel. Cain was a tiller of the soil and he offered grain, and Abel was a hunter who offered blood. God accepted Abel’s sacrifice but rejected Cain’s. Cain was infuriated, murderously so. But the problem was not in the choice of sacrificial substance, it was a matter of the heart. Cain’s sacrifice was not offered from a trusting heart. “By faith, Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead” (Heb. 11:4, NIV).

When a little boy comes to his mother with his sweaty fists full of smashed dandelions, there is nothing intrinsically valuable in the gift, but it is welcomed by her simply because her own son has offered it. When I was little I used to ask my father for money so I could buy him a present, and my father would give me a dime. In those days, a dime could buy a whole box of chocolates. So I would go to the drugstore and buy candy for my daddy. It wasn't chocolates that he wanted and he had given me the purchase price in the first place, but he was delighted with my small present.

## No Turning Back

If we have chosen the narrow way, it is fortunate for us that we cannot always find a way to go back. We are committed—we have trusted God and agreed with His objective, though we do not know all that this is going to mean.

An early lesson in commitment is a ride on a roller coaster. Remember the eager waiting at the gate, the rush to climb in when the cars came clattering to a stop at the platform, the ecstasy with which you gripped the cold steel of the guardrail in front of you, the first steep climb over the top—only to see the tracks dropping away beneath you? You gasped at what you were about to do. The impossibility of changing your mind was an awful revelation. Why are so many of us willing to pay to have ourselves helplessly flung through the air like this, sickeningly plunged and whirled and jerked? The worst of it, the part that doesn't bother children, is that the train isn't going anywhere. You've had this terrible ride just for the *ride*?

The initial choice to go the whole way with God is made, of necessity, in ignorance of all that will follow. We have been warned that the road will be a hard one, for our Master Himself walked a hard road, and He reminds us that servants are not greater than their masters. But if, given all the previews of what is coming, we have nevertheless set our faces to follow the Pioneer of Faith, there will be many times along the road when we look over our shoulder, longing, like the Israelites on the way to the Promised Land, for the “leeks, the onions, and the garlic” of our slavery (Num. 11:5, RSV). We are fortunate, then, that it is hard to find a way back.

During my first year in the jungle, before I married Jim, I lost my informant as well as all my language materials. It was as though God said to me, “What did you expect? You gave everything to me when you were twelve years old. When you were a young woman, you told me that you would go anywhere that I wanted you to go. You prayed, ‘Work Your whole will in my life at any cost.’ And so when your informant is killed and Jim’s station is demolished in a flood and you lose your language materials, is that your business? It’s Mine. I can do what I want with what you have given to Me.”

The cost of discipleship seemed pretty steep.



### *The Joy Paradox*

What is the result? Paradoxically (and generations of Christians will back this up) it is *joy*. “Jesus, . . . for the joy that

was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb. 12:2, RSV). We don’t have to wait for heaven to have the joy; it comes to us regularly right here on earth. The Lord Himself discipled us so that we can share the joy of our Master. A merciful Father strips us as a tree is stripped of its blossoms before it can bear fruit. He is not finished with us yet, whatever the losses we suffer. As we lose our hold on visible things, the invisible ones become more precious. Where our treasure is, there will our hearts be (Matt. 6:21).

Once an earnest young man asked what worldly things he must forsake for the sake of Christ. The answer was very specific:

Colored clothes, for one thing. Get rid of everything in your wardrobe that is not white. Stop sleeping on a soft pillow. Sell your musical instruments and don’t eat any more white bread. You cannot, if you are sincere about obeying Christ, take warm baths or shave your beard. To shave is to lie against Him who created us, to attempt to improve on His work.

Sound absurd? It was a sincere response and it was given in the most celebrated Christian schools of the second century AD. We can all think of contemporary counterparts. Does “giving up worldly things” buy us a ticket to bliss?

There was nothing distinctively ascetic about Jesus. He ate what other people ate, drank what they drank—and even in questionable company, and in such a manner that He was accused of being a glutton and a drunkard. The Son of God went to a village wedding. Not only did He attend, He

worked a miracle so that the guests could have second servings of wine when the host's original supply failed. Surely He dressed as other men dressed if He was not easily recognized on many occasions. (He even had to be identified by Judas's kiss.) The one garment about which we are told must have been of the currently acceptable cut, or it is doubtful whether soldiers would have quibbled over it.

So if Jesus didn't seem to condemn worldly things themselves, why do we have the lists in Colossians and James of worldly things that are condemned? Let us be very careful to note that these do not list material things—they are characteristics of people, that is, they are specific sins. We are to put to death these worldly (or "earthly") things, since we have been raised from the dead with Christ Himself, and we no longer have any business with immorality, impurity, evil desire, covetousness, anger, malice, slander, foul talk, or lying. These spring from a desire for "things" that the world can provide, such as acclaim and status, or they attach themselves to material things in such a way that we may need to be stripped of the thing in order to repent of the sin.

He may be asking us to sell a much-loved house, to retire from a position in which we feel ourselves irreplaceable, to turn over to Him fears which hold us in bondage, to give up forms of self-improvement or recreation or social life which hinder obedience. Afterwards, with a joyful lightness of spirit and awareness of God's active involvement in ordering our happiness, we may wonder why we waited so long.

The process of being stripped does not feel good. But the joy we taste is not incompatible with the sorrow. I remember waking up one morning in my house in Shandia after Jim



had been killed. The bed was empty beside me. Suddenly, in the place of fresh tears of sorrow, I was surprised by a sudden, unexpected surge of joyful exultation, realizing where Jim was at that very moment. He would never have to suffer again. He would never have to undergo the degradations and humiliations of old age. I would never have to spend days and nights in that dreadful fear of not knowing if he was safe. He was now with the Lord. Even with the reality of my widowhood and my daughter's fatherlessness and the house and station that I had to run all by myself—there was joy! Psalm 116:17: "I will offer the sacrifices of thanksgiving."

I will offer Him both my tears and my exultation. Nothing we offer to Him will be lost. It is the person who tries to save him- or herself who loses it all. Jesus gave His word: "Whoever loses his life for my sake will find it" (Matt. 10:39, NIV).

Indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to his death.

Philippians 3:8–10, NKJV



## ***Knocking Out the Props***

It is an unsettling business, this being made conformable to His death, and it cannot be accomplished without knocking out the props. If we understand that God is at work even when He knocks out the small props, it will be easier for us to take it when He knocks out bigger ones.

The very week which I had looked forward to begin the writing of a book found me dragging around with what appeared to be a heavy cold, accompanied by a deep cough. I tried to work at my accustomed place and pace. I couldn't. I could not grasp a thought, hold onto it firmly, and carry it through to its logical conclusion. A day or two went by with little to show. I took myself by the scruff of the neck—"Get on with it!"—but found that a prop had been knocked out. I had a fever. Only a degree or two, but enough to scramble my brains, and a salutary reminder that normal health and the ability to do ordinary work are gifts from God for which I should thank Him every day of my life. A letter "happened" (was ordained) to come then, remarking that God is much more interested in making us holy than He is in getting a job done. The letter made me pause. The interruption was more important, for those few days, than the book.

I was reminded of St. Augustine's words, "The very pleasures of human life men acquire by difficulties." Sometimes we recognize them only in retrospect. On one of those terrible days during my second husband's cancer, when he could hardly bear the pain or the thought of yet another treatment,

and I could hardly bear to bear it with him, we remarked on how wonderful it would be to have just a single *ordinary* day.

And then there are the inevitabilities of old age. Wear and tear make their indelible marks on our face reflected in the mirror which (weirdly and shockingly sometimes) becomes the face of a stranger. Fear overtakes us as we take note of how much altered we have become, and we contemplate what is to come. The specters of loneliness, illness, abandonment, and the serial deprivation of our powers stare back at us from the furrowed and sagging face. But God will be there. There is no need to fear the future, *God is already there*, and God's promise for us is, "They still bring forth fruit in old age" (Ps. 92:14, RSV). The best fruit will be what is produced by the best-pruned branch.



### *More, and Then Some*

I will offer Him my prayers, my sighs. I will pour out my heart to Him. Even in their distractedness, inconsistency, and deficiency, I can be confident that my prayers rise to Him like incense ("Let my prayer be counted as incense before thee, and the lifting up of my hands as an evening sacrifice!" Ps. 141:2, RSV). He receives my imperfect prayers like the mother receives the crushed dandelions, as gifts made perfect in love. Besides, He Himself has been praying for *me* all along: "He is able to save completely those who come to God through

him, because he always lives to intercede for them” (Heb. 7:25, NIV).

What else can I offer Him? In the words of Isaac Watts’s great hymn, “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross”:

Were the whole realm of nature mine,  
That were an offering far too small;  
Love so amazing, so divine,  
Demands my soul, my life, my all.

My all, to gain all.

The widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17) was destitute, even more desperate than the ordinary widow of the time because those were days of famine. Along comes Elijah, who had been getting supplied with bread and meat morning and evening courtesy of divinely ordered ravens, but who had left when the brook dried up from the drought. The ravens did not come with him to Zarephath. When he came to the town gate, he saw the woman gathering sticks.

He called to her and asked, “Would you bring me a little water in a jar so I may have a drink?” As she was going to get it, he called, “And bring me, please, a piece of bread.”

“As surely as the Lord your God lives,” she replied, “I don’t have any bread—only a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug. I am gathering a few sticks to take home and make a meal for myself and my son, that we may eat it—and die.”

1 Kings 17:10b–12, NIV

The widow was a most unlikely prospect to provide for his needs. But the prophet Elijah prevailed upon her, and she believed him when he spoke, “For this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: ‘The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the Lord gives rain on the land’” (1 Kings 17:14, NIV).

The nameless widow used up all her flour and oil and made him bread, giving her all, and the word came true. The same God who ordered for Elijah more than was on the menu will do the same for us, if we are listening when He asks us for some small, but usually very important, sacrifice.