

LETTERS FROM GRANDPA
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Dearest grandchild,

Today's letter is about Valerie Elliot Shepard and is adapted from the article "Living With A Legacy" by Kim Henderson (*World Magazine* Aug. 27, 2022). Valerie is an only child. Her father was the famous martyr, Jim Elliot. Jim was one of five heroes who died for Christ in Ecuador on Jan. 8, 1956. His faithful companions in death were Nate Saint, Roger Youderian, Pete Fleming, and Ed McCully. Thirteen years before this, five members of New Tribes Mission also died as martyrs trying to evangelize the Ayore tribe of Bolivia. These faithful martyrs were Cecil Dye, Bob Dye, Dave Bacon, George Hosback, and Eldon Hunter. Their story is told by Jean Dye Johnson in the book *God Planted Five Seeds*. There have been millions of martyrs for Christ, and all of them are famous in heaven. If a sparrow cannot fall without God's knowledge, certainly these brave heroes of the faith make the headlines in heaven. More than that, I believe they will be honored by receiving a "better resurrection" as mentioned in Hebrews 11:35. For reasons known only to God, however, most martyrs die in obscurity and do not become famous like Jim Elliot.

Valerie's mother, Elisabeth Elliot, also became famous. As the widow of the famous martyr she wrote 30 books, had a syndicated radio program, and was much in demand as a speaker. Elizabeth Elliot became one of the most famous women in the world.

Valerie, therefore, has always labored for God in the shadow of her famous parents. Even as a student at Wheaton the presence of "Elliot dorm" was a constant reminder of her family's fame. Valerie is a godly woman, a pastor's wife, and the mother of eight children. She and her husband have even served in Africa, but it seems that Valerie will never become as famous as her parents.

Somewhere around the year 2000 Valerie was forced to acknowledge that her famous mother was suffering from dementia. Valerie grew up listening to the sound of typewriter keys pounding out the next best selling book. Now there was only silence. When she would read to her mother, Elizabeth would fall asleep. Efforts to sing, or talk, were often faced with no reaction at all. Elizabeth lived 15 more years in this debilitating state and died at 6:15 a.m. June 15, 2015. The time of her death is important to the family for the young Elisabeth had a daily routine of rising at 5:00 a.m for devotions and then starting writing at 6:15. One cousin remarked: "*How punctual! Aunt Betty would have loved that!*"

Fortunately, the headlines of heaven are different from those of earth. For example, while overlooked on earth, there is rejoicing in heaven when one sinner repents (Lk 15:10). Or consider that in the eyes of God the two small coins given by a poor widow were more significant than great sums given by the rich (Mk. 12:41-44). It is encouraging to treasure the promise that at Judgment the **"last will be first, and the first will be last"** (Matt. 20:16). Since most of us will never be famous on earth, we can learn important lessons of dedication and service from Valerie.

In the Kingdom of God greatness is achieved by service. **"A dispute also arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest. Jesus said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves."** (Lk.

22:24-27). Please remember that Jesus was not popular when he died. In fact there were only a handful of friends who dared to be with him at the cross. The same fate often awaits those who feed the hungry, give drinks to the thirsty, provide shelter to the strangers and clothes to the naked, and who care for the sick and visit those in prison. They are often not be famous on earth, but will be made famous by God on the day of Judgment (Matt. 25;31-46). Even a cup of cold water given to one of these “little ones” will not be forgotten by God (Matt. 10:42).

The world honors the beautiful music of Handel, but God also honors the man who pumped the billows to make that music possible. The world honors the artistic genius of Michelangelo, but God also honors the man who cleaned his brushes. The world honors the great legacy of Elisabeth Elliot, but God also honors her daughter Valerie and the dedicated care givers who loved her during those last difficult days of her life.

This brings the subject back to you and me. Our goal is not fame, but service. Whatever we do in word or deed we do in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him (Col. 3:17). This was also the goal of Jim and Elisabeth Elliot. Neither of them sought fame. They sought only to serve and it was God chose to make them famous. We too must choose to serve whether God makes us famous or not. Praise the Lord! **“God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them” (Heb 6:10).**

Valerie has a beautiful attitude toward the rich legacy she inherited. She tunes in faithfully to the monthly Elisabeth Elliot board meetings. Her friend and author Ellen Vaughn has all the personal papers needed for Elisabeth’s authorized biography. In an extra bedroom, Valerie has placed her grandmother’s antique writing desk and her mother’s favorite books. Valerie also has plans to retouch and restore the faded photographs that will enhance and clarify the legacy she will bequeath to her children. Valerie says: *“I was protected and cared for by the Father of orphans, as well as a mother who was kind and wise, even lots of fun. I continue to be thankful for my parents. We all can”.*

I love you,

Grandpa Boyce