

# Elisabeth Elliot



## The Shaping of a Christian Family

*How My Parents Nurtured My Faith*

*A Companion Study Guide*

By The Elisabeth Elliot Foundation



Copyright © 2023 by The Elisabeth Elliot Foundation  
Little Rock, Arkansas 72212 - [www.elisabethelliot.org](http://www.elisabethelliot.org)  
Permission is granted to print one copy of this study guide for personal use only.

This content is based on the book *The Shaping of a Christian Family* © 1992 by Elisabeth Elliot  
and published by Revell, a division of Baker Publishing.  
A Special Thanks to Revell for use of the © cover image from the 2022 edition.

Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®),  
Copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.  
Used by permission. All rights reserved.



The EEF Board would like to recognize those who lovingly contributed to making this Study Guide a reality.  
Many thanks to Angela Lee for her gifted writing skills, to Rachel Johnson for her design expertise, & to Michelle VanLoon for her  
skill in refining the final edit.



# Introduction & Preface

*Pages 9-17*

1. On page 17, Elisabeth describes her purpose for writing *The Shaping of a Christian Family*. She says, “*My parents’ life stories are naturally of keen interest to me, but I have not thought of putting them into a book until a few years ago when I began to hear from many young fathers and mothers who earnestly desire to establish Christian homes but have no such background as I have. How does one go about it? What shape should it take? Where are the models worth copying?*”

~ Reflect on the examples of Christian families in your life. How are they helpful as you consider how to pray for your own family or other families?

2. Elisabeth explains that she offers this book as a description of how one family applied the principles of Scripture to their home, NOT as a prescriptive example for all families.

~ What is the difference between a descriptive example and a prescriptive example?

~ How will Elisabeth’s intention to describe how her family applied Scripture inform the way you read and apply this book?

3. On page 13 of the introduction, Katharine Howard offers Psalm 127 as a prayer for the call to faithful parenting. Read Psalm 127 and consider the following:

~ Describe the ways verses 1-2 encourage us toward humility and dependence on God in our service.

~ Describe God’s view of children as stated in verses 3-4.

*In light of these insights, take some time to pray through Psalm 127 for your own family or other families in your life.*



# God's Grace & Sovereignty

## *Chapters 1-9*

1. In Chapters 1-9, Elisabeth tells the story of her parents' upbringing, their coming to faith, and their engagement. God's sovereignty and grace brought Philip and Katharine to Himself, and then He brought them to one another. Read Acts 17:24-27 and Ephesians 1:3-10, then answer the following questions:

~ What are some of the ways God works in a person's life?

~ What do these passages say about God's purpose for us?

2. As you consider the lives of Katharine and Philip, what events and people did God use to bring them to Himself, and bring them to one another?

3. Next, take time to reflect on your own life.

~ What events and/or people has God used to bring you to Himself?

~ What events and/or people has God used to shape your family and your view of families?

~ How does God's work in your life lead you to thanksgiving and praise?

~ How does His work in the past lead you to trust Him today?



# God's Word as the Center

## *Chapters 10-17*

In Chapters 10-17, Elisabeth describes the foundational practices and disciplines on which her family was built. In Chapter 10, Elisabeth summarizes the Howards' time on the mission field: "*The Word of God was always the reference point for the Howard family. If God had something to say about any matter, they listened*" (p. 71).

Elisabeth writes about the Scriptural principles on which the Howards depended, and how they lived them out in their own family life. She mentions spiritual disciplines, the faithful examples of her parents, frugality, hospitality, heroes, honoring the Lord's Day, and orderliness as important rhythms for her family.

1. Look up the following passages and take note of the ways they point to the principles Elisabeth mentions. Record your observations.

Spiritual disciplines— Colossians 3:15-16, Romans 12:1-2

Faithful parenting— 1 Thessalonians 2:10-12, Titus 2:2-8, Ephesians 6:1-4

Frugality— Matthew 6:19-21, 25-34

Hospitality— 1 Peter 4:9-10

Heroes— 1 Corinthians 11:1, Hebrews:13:7-8

The Lord's Day— Hebrews 10:19-25

Orderliness— 1 Timothy 3:1-4, Proverbs 24:30-32



2. As you reflect on the chapters in this section, what stands out to you about the way that the Howards lived out the above principles?

~ Think about these scriptural principles with your own life and/or family dynamics in mind. What first step could you take this week to begin to better apply one of more of them?

3. As we apply principles in Scripture, there will be times when we inevitably fail to measure up to God's standard. In Chapter 11, entitled "He Lived What He Taught Us", Elisabeth offers a helpful and encouraging example of her father's repentance and change: "*My father inherited the famous temper of one of his grandfathers. There were a few occasions when he did slam doors, thunder up the stairs, or leap so furiously from the table as to throw his chair over backward. Because these were exceptions, we children were stunned to silence, and his humble apologies later reinforced the standard. He was greatly ashamed of his failures and prayed for victory over them. Over the years he saw his prayers answered, and at a recent family reunion, the younger three in our family said they seldom witnessed the scenes we older ones remembered so well.*" (p. 75)

~ What resonates with you about this example?

4. Read John 3:16-17 and 1 John 1:7-10. When we are overwhelmed with our inability to measure up to God's standard, what hope do these verses offer us?
5. How might God's gifts of repentance and change inform the way you pray this week?



# Foundation Stones

## *Chapters 18-23*

On page 151, Elisabeth says that sacrificial authority, trust, and love are the “*foundation stones on which the discipline of a Christian home is laid.*”

1. Our hope for living out the character of these foundation stones is that God has demonstrated these traits towards us. Look up the following passages about God’s character, then answer the questions below: Psalm 107, Psalm 19:7-9, Isaiah 43:1-7, 1 John 4:7-21, John 13:1-7, Matthew 20:23-28.
  - ~ How has God demonstrated sacrificial authority?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - ~ How has He proven He is safe to trust?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - ~ How does He demonstrate perfect love?
2. How does Christ’s demonstration of these character traits move you to pursue the same traits in your own life and parenting?
3. As you consider applying these principles, pick one example of the Howards’ faithfulness in these character traits from Chapters 18-20. How did this example resonate with you?
4. What steps might you take this week to practice sacrificial authority, trustworthiness, and/or love?



5. On page 151, Elisabeth clarifies the purpose of rules for parenting. She says, “*Because parents bear this sacrificial authority, because they carry the responsibility of their children’s trust, and because they love God and love their children for His sake, they must establish rules, or as modern parlance prefers, ‘guidelines.’*” Consider this quote and insights from these chapters.
    - ~ What is the connection between the “*sacrificial authority, trustworthiness, and love*” of parents and the rules they enforce?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
    - ~ Why are rules and guidelines necessary for loving relationships and families?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  6. Read Hebrews 12:4-13. What does this passage tell you about:
    - a. The enforcement, or discipline of those rules?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
    - b. God’s heart and intention behind the rules?  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - ~ How does God’s heart as described in these passages challenge you to prayerfully reflect on your own motivation behind your rules and guidelines?
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
7. What steps might you take this week as you apply the principles in this book about rules and enforcement?
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
8. In Chapter 23, entitled “Encouragement”, Elisabeth shares 1 Corinthians 13 as our model for love and encouragement. Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-6 and consider the following questions:
  - ~ How has God demonstrated this kind of love to you?





~ In what ways might you respond to God's love by following the example in 1 Corinthians 13 towards your children and neighbors?

~ How might this challenge lead you to pray?

9. As you reflect on the principles and methods you learned about encouragement, who can you encourage this week? How will you do it?

10. On page 171, Elisabeth says, *"In all of us there is a strong resistance to a forced obedience. Even in an infant we see the stiffened back, the defiant expression. But gentleness, patience, tenderness, and encouragement bring out the best in us."*

~ Take some time to pray, according to your own family circumstances and relationships, that God would help you and grant you "gentleness, patience, tenderness, and encouragement" for those in your life.



# “Arrows” - Psalm 127:4

## *Chapters 24-31*

In the last chapters of the book, Elisabeth writes about rhythms and habits in her family home that shaped her as she transitioned to adulthood.

1. In Chapter 25, Elisabeth shares how both work and play were carried out in her family. She said, *“The Bible opens with God working. The proportion was six days of work to one day of rest, a formula that has never been improved upon... When work is faithfully, thoroughly, and conscientiously done from Monday through Saturday, Sunday can be relished”* (p. 191). God’s structure of work and rest served as an important example for the Howards.

~ Read Exodus 20:8-11. What does God say about work?

~ What does God say about rest?

2. How do these proportions of work and rest challenge you?

~ How do these proportions encourage you?

3. As you reflect on Elisabeth’s insights on work and play, and her restful memories from their vacation home in Franconia in Chapter 24, what are some rhythms of work and play you might consider implementing for your own life and family?

4. In Chapter 26, Elisabeth describes how courtesy was a family value that shaped her life. She defines courtesy in these ways: *“Courtesy is plain old fashion thoughtfulness—what will make the other person most comfortable? Do for him or her what you would want done for you. Nobody is born thoughtful. We must all learn it”* (p. 199). *“...Courtesy begins with the realization that the world does not revolve around ourselves”* (p. 202).



~ Elisabeth also references Philippians 2:2-7. Read this passage and consider how courtesy flows from the humility described in these verses.

~ How might you heed this call to imitate Christ's humility among your family and community?

5. As we reflect on the Howard family's model of Christian character, we may become aware of our own need for dependence on the Lord as we aim to imitate them. Consider the description of Katharine Howard's prayer time in Chapter 27. What stands out to you about her devotional habits?

~ How might you set aside time this week to spend time in prayer for your family?

6. What stands out to you from Chapter 31, "The Family Letters"?

~ How do you think this chapter's content serves as an example of both the Howard's investment in their family and in the depth of their relationships?

~ How does their example both challenge and encourage you?



# Afterword & Conclusion

*Pages 252-253*

1. Read and reflect on the poem Elisabeth's mother shares with her entitled "Call Back". How has this book served as a "call back" to encourage you?
  
2. As you finish this study, consider Elisabeth's quote on page 252: *If you are convinced of the value of standards here set forth, never think of the impossible. It is always possible to do the will of God. Begin to be ready to do. What do you want your home to be? What does God want it to be? Waste no time wondering if you can do it. The question is simply, will you? Your weakness itself is a potent claim on the divine mercy*" (see 2 Cor. 12:10).

~ Using these verses Elisabeth references, take some time to ask for God's help in shaping your Christian family:

*"But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:9-10)*

*"David also said to Solomon his son, "Be strong and courageous, and do the work. Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the Lord God, my God, is with you. He will not fail you or forsake you until all the work for the service of the temple of the Lord is finished." (1 Chronicles 28:20)*



# DISCOVER ELISABETH ELLIOT'S MINISTRY, WRITING, & TEACHING

*Now all in one place at*

ElisabethElliot.org



The Elisabeth Elliot Foundation was created based on the life, love, and ministry of Elisabeth and Jim Elliot. Through the ElisabethElliot.org website and other media platforms, the Foundation brings together the writings and ministries of the Elliot Family in an evolving repository of their work, a resourceful collection of their writings and teachings, and a place to honor their legacy. It serves as an ongoing, worldwide outreach to help further the Foundation's mission to give:

*Hope in Suffering*

*Restoration in Conflict*

*Joy in Obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ*

*Elisabeth Elliot*  
Foundation