



A Companion Study Guide
By The Elisabeth Elliot Foundation



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Section 1

Preface: Is God still in Charge?

1. In the Preface to her book, Elisabeth wrote of questions she received about suffering and faith from people who had experienced confusing circumstances and tragedies. On page 10, she asks, “Shall we assume we are at the mercy of mere chance? Or shall we cling to the conviction that God is still omnipotent as well as all-loving?”

What is your initial response to this question?

What circumstances in your life have caused you to wrestle with such questions?

2. On pages 10-11, Elisabeth encourages us to remember the cross as we reflect on our questions. She writes:

“There is something else for us to remember also: Christ, who willed our freedom, suffered for all of us. Take a long look at what happened at Calvary. The agony there was of the just for the unjust. Why? To bring us to God. Jesus, even in the hands of His captors, was aware that the hour of darkness had its limits, set by His Father. Everything that happened to him was part of the appointed way, yet He said, ‘Alas for that man by whom he is betrayed.’ The Son of God, helpless in the hands of wicked humans. What a strange thing. What a mystery Christians proclaim in their faith.”



Read Isaiah 53, 2 Kings 6:15-18, and Romans 8:28-39. In light of Elisabeth's quote above, what do these scriptures teach us about God's purpose when we don't understand our circumstances?

Isaiah 53

2 Kings 6:15-18

Romans 8:28-39

3. On Page 12, Elisabeth said, "Of this I am perfectly sure: God's story never ends with ashes." How does this principle inform your perspective as you read Elisabeth's story of her first year as a missionary?

How might this quote inform your perspective about confusing or difficult circumstances in your own life?



Section Two

Chapters 1-6: Settings and Perspectives

1. In Chapters 1 and 2, Elisabeth describes “the way in” and the setting of her new beginning. What are your initial reactions as you read about the setting she describes?
2. In the following passages, Elisabeth helps us to understand her perspective at the beginning of her missionary journey. Read the following quotes:

“Obedience to God was the reason for this journey.” (Page 18)

“I wanted to get out of this place. The depression it brought me made me feel guilty, for I thought at the time that the ugliness and squalor and lack of privacy were sacrifices appropriate for a servant of the Lord. If I did not like the atmosphere it must mean that I was not yet prepared to lay down my life as I had promised.” (Pages 24-25)

“It is a thrilling thing when you are young to imagine what good things you will be doing and what the world will do to you. It is easy to picture life as pleasant. It is probably even more thrilling if you believe in God and believe that He Himself has called you to do a work for Him in a certain place. San Miguel was that place, I had been called, these women were to be my associates, and the invisible Colorados would soon be visible and work would begin. All was ordered and arranged.” (Page 41)

“For me there was also a deep conviction that God blesses those who obey Him and work things out in beautiful, demonstrable ways for those who have given themselves to do His work... There was every reason to expect that God would grant success.” (Page 53)



Summarize Elisabeth's perspective in your own words.

3. Reflect on a time when you were at the beginning of a journey to which God had led you. How would you describe your perspective on that journey?

Has your perspective on those circumstances changed or stayed the same?



Section 3

Chapters 7-11: The Work

1. What is your impression of the work in which Elisabeth was engaged?
2. On pages 64-68, Elisabeth wrote about the time God provided an informant for her language study. According to her story, how does this provision seem to encourage Elisabeth's faith and sense of calling?
3. How have you received encouragement from God during a difficult task? What did you learn about God from this encouragement?
4. In Chapter 9, entitled *The Neighbors*, Elisabeth writes about the frustrations and joys of serving alongside people.

What frustrations did you notice?

What joys did you notice?

5. How does working alongside people in our God-given tasks to be both challenging and encouraging?



What do you learn about God when you work with people?

What do you learn about yourself?



Section 4

Chapters 12-19: Kindergarten Lessons

In the Epilogue, Elisabeth refers to the deaths of Maura and Macario, the loss of the year's language work, and the destruction of Jim's buildings as her "four kindergarten lessons" in the school of faith. In the last two sections of this study guide, we will explore and reflect on those lessons and the implications for our own lives.

1. In Chapter 12, Elisabeth recounts the story of the first time she witnessed death. What details stand out to you from Elisabeth's story?
2. The tragedy was made more complicated by the people and relationships involved. On page 99, Elisabeth explains that the family in crisis was "bitter enemies of the Evangelicos." How did their relationship and the events leading up to Maruja giving birth make the experience especially complex?
3. Pages 103-105 include Elisabeth's reflections on the trauma. She wrote:

"We had been defeated. An opportunity had been given to reach the most resistant family in San Miguel, the Quinones. It was a life and death matter, and if God had spared Maruja's life, the whole Quinones tribe might have been delivered from spiritual death. In my heart I could not escape the fact that it was God who had failed. Surely He knew how much was at stake. Surely He could have done better by all of us. To my inner cries and questioning no answer came. There was no explaining any of it. I looked into the abyss...there was nothing there but darkness and silence.

If God had actually wanted us here at all, if we knew how to pray, if in fact He was concerned with the salvation of the Quinones family, would He now



have spared the mother and child? If Maruja or her men had any glimmer of faith, if we had any reason at all to believe that she had died in the peace if God, it would have made all the difference. As it was, the Quinones household remained beyond our reach. We had not helped at all”

What is your response to Elisabeth’s honest questions about these events?

4. How is her perspective in these chapters different from her perspective in Section 2, question 5?

5. In Chapter 16, A Fish or a Scorpion, Elisabeth recounts the death of Don Macario. What was Don Macario’s connection to Elisabeth and her mission work?

Why do you think these events were such a test of Elisabeth’s faith?

6. Chapters 16 and 18 record the lessons of the destruction of Jim’s buildings and the loss of Elisabeth’s language work. Summarize these losses below.

7. What stands out to you from Elisabeth’s recounting of these events?



8. Has there been a time when you had similar questions about suffering, God's will and God's work? Record your thoughts below.

What did you learn about God during that time?

What did you learn about faith?



Conclusion

Chapter 16-19 and the Epilogue

1. Several quotes in chapters 16-19 articulate Elisabeth's faith amidst the unexplainable. Consider the quotes below:

“As I look back on that time, I think it was Lesson One for me in the school of faith. That is, it was my first experience of having to bow down before That which I could not possible explain...Faith's most severe test comes not when we see nothing, but when we see a stunning array of evidence that seems to prove our faith vain (134).”

“It was a long time before I came to the realization that it is in our acceptance of what is given that God gives us Himself. Even the Son of God had to learn obedience by the things He suffered. He had come for only one purpose: “Lo, I come, in the volume of the book it is written of me, to do thy will, O God” and His reward was desolation, crucifixion (136).”

“This grief, this sorrow, this total loss that empties my hands and breaks my heart, I may, if I will, accept, and by accepting it, I find in my hands something to offer. And so I give it back to Him, who in mysterious exchange gives Himself to me (136).”

“Faith, prayer, and obedience are our requirements. We are not offered in exchange immunity and exemption from the world's woes. What we are offered has to do with another world altogether (158).”

What wisdom might these statements offer us for times of unexplainable suffering and loss?



2. How did Elisabeth's perspective change from the beginning to the end of her first year as a missionary?

Have you ever had a similar experience of growth? If so, describe that time below.

3. Throughout these chapters, Elisabeth describes the danger of expecting visible fruit and evidence for our service, and simple black-and-white solutions to our suffering. Do you ever have these expectations?

How do these expectations lead to frustration?

4. What does Elisabeth conclude about the purpose of our faith, trials, and service?

How does Elisabeth's perspective challenge you?

How does her perspective comfort you as you consider your questions of God that seem to be unanswered?



5. In the Epilogue, Elisabeth points us to 2 Corinthians 1:5-6 and 1 Peter 4:12-13. What do these verses say about the purpose of our suffering?

How does this truth confront you?

How might God's purpose inform the way you process and pray through your trials and suffering?

6. To encourage us to keep walking in faith through inexplicable circumstances, Elisabeth highlights Deuteronomy 29:29: "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law."

What "things revealed" by God through His word might be a help and comfort to you as you learn to walk in trust and obedience through trials?

7. Reflect on both Amy Carmichael's poem (for which *These Strange Ashes* is named), and on Elisabeth's quote from the Preface, below.

But these strange ashes, Lord, this nothingness,
This baffling sense of loss?
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, turned to ashes by the vehement breath
Of fire, on Calvary?
O Son beloved, this is they heart's desire:
This, and no other thing
Follows the fall of 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 the way like some great star.
Come now, and follow Me.
—Amy Carmichael

Of this I am perfectly sure: God's story never ends in "ashes" (12) - Elisabeth Elliot

As you reflect on this poem, this quote, and the insights you gleaned from Elisabeth's book, take time to consider how the cross might inform our view of the "ashes" in our lives?

How might this lead you to pray for yourself and/or for others experiencing "ashes" this week?



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