

Through Gates of Splendor Book Discussion Guide

Chapter I: “I Dare Not Stay Home”

Describe Jim Elliot. What was he like?

What were some of the life experiences that shaped Jim into the man he was?

How did Jim know that God wanted him to spend his life as a missionary in Ecuador?

What kind of man was Pete Fleming?

Pete Fleming wrote, “A call is nothing more nor less than obedience to the will of God, as God presses it home to the soul by whatever means He chooses” (page 22). Can you think of any times when you were absolutely sure of the will of God? What are some ways we can make ourselves more open to hearing God’s voice?

Chapter II: Destination: Shandia

Before you began to read this book, what did you know about the life and culture of Ecuador?

Which elements of Ecuadorian culture do you think were most appealing to the missionaries? Which posed challenges?

Based on the brief historical sketch of Ecuador given in this chapter, what might have been some of the Ecuadorians’ assumptions about foreigners, and vice versa?

Chapter III: “All Things to All Men”

The portrait of Venancio (pages 41-42) describes the daily life of a typical Quichua native. How does this compare with daily life where you live?

In what ways does the Quichua birthing experience (pages 43-45) differ from a typical Western birth? What do you think this story signifies about Quichua attitudes toward children and family life? Toward medicine?

Why is it so important—beyond basic communication—for missionaries to become as fluent as possible in the native language of those they are trying to reach?

Chapter IV: Infinite Adaptability

Describe Ed McCully. In what ways was he similar to Jim Elliot and Pete Fleming? In what ways was he different? What special characteristics did he add to the missions team?

What qualities do you think a missionary wife must cultivate? Do you see some of those qualities in the description of Marilou McCully?

Chapter V: “Expendable for God”

What kind of man was Nate Saint? What were some of his contributions to the team in Ecuador?

Nate had been disappointed early in his career by an injury that kept him from flying military airplanes (page 67). But God had another plan for Nate and his aviation skills. Have you ever experienced a disappointment that, in retrospect, turned out to be a gift from God?

Consider Nate’s strong concern for safety measures versus admonitions to “trust in the Lord” for safety (pages 64-65). Do you think that one is more important than the other?

Chapter VI: Missionary to the Head-Shrinking Jivaros

Describe Roger Youderian and the qualities and skills he brought to the missions team. What was his primary purpose in going to Ecuador?

Despite their varied backgrounds, have you noticed any common elements in the early lives and upbringing of the five missionaries? In their spiritual lives?

What are some of the concerns that a missionary with a family would have, versus those of a single person?

Review the description of Jivaro culture on pages 76-79. How did they cope with their “sin problem,” according to Nate Saint? How do people in more developed countries deal with their “sin problem”?

Chapter VII: Breaking Jungle Barriers

What were relations like among various native tribes in Ecuador? Were foreigners their only worry?

What were some of the barriers the missionaries had to overcome to build relations with the Atshuaras? How did the missionaries respond to these barriers?

In what ways was the hand of God evident in the story about flying into the new airstrip at Santiaku’s place and delivering penicillin to the sick people? Have you ever experienced a situation that seemed fraught with snarls but eventually worked out for good?

Chapter VIII: The Aucas

What experiences in Auca history might have contributed to their distrust of outsiders? Do you think some other cultures around the world might have similar stories to tell?

The author states that among the Aucas, “anger finds immediate expression in a killing” (page 101). Can you think of other places and times in history where this has been true? What does this say about human nature?

What was Dayuma's story? How was she able to help the missionaries?

Chapter IX: September 1955

Why did the missionaries persevere in their goal in spite of warnings about the ferocity of the Aucas? Weren't they fearful for their safety?

What caused Pete Fleming to write, "Today the angels are rejoicing over Puyupungu, and so are we" (page 126)? Does this have anything to do with why the missionaries were willing to face the Aucas?

Chapter X: Operation Auca Begins

How did the missionaries plan to melt the hostilities of the Auca people?

Chapter XI: A Line from Plane to Ground

What were some of the objects chosen as gifts for the Aucas? Why do you think these items might appeal to the Auca people?

What were the pros and cons of delivering the gifts from the plane? Did the missionaries have any alternative means of delivery? What were the risks involved?

What was the purpose of the little wooden plane? Why might this be a useful object for communicating with the Aucas?

Chapter XII: The Savages Respond

What were some signs of encouragement that the missionaries received from the Aucas?

How were the five men a balance for each other, both temperamentally and in terms of skills and abilities?

What was the cause of Roger Youderian's personal crisis of faith? What was the resolution? Have you ever questioned whether you were doing the right things in your life? Do you believe that God is always at work, even in situations we might perceive as failures?

Chapter XIII: The Search for "Palm Beach"

In their quest to find a safe and appropriate place to land the plane and set up camp, the missionaries exhibited a range of skills much larger than their stated goal of preaching the gospel. What were some of the skills the missionaries needed to survive in the jungle?

Why is it important not to assume that there's one certain "type" of person who makes a good missionary?

The Aucas relied on very primitive technology—basically machetes and lances. It's easy to assume that greater technology would bring greater ease to their lives and that they would welcome such progress. Is that a valid assumption? Why or why not?

Chapter XIV: An Auca on the Path

Why wasn't Marilou McCully afraid to approach the Auca who was spotted near her home?

How were the Quichua and missionary goals at odds regarding the Aucas?

Think of a time when you were afraid of something. Did you react more like the Quichua or more like the missionary? Why?

Chapter XV: Why Did the Men Go?

This chapter opens with the men's statement that they were ready to die, if necessary, in their mission. What gave them their zeal?

The author speaks for the wives in saying, "Each of us knew when we married our husbands that there would never be any question about who came first—God and His work held first place in each life" (page 175). Do you think this made them worry about their husbands any less? Why or why not?

When the author says that "the question of personal safety was wholly irrelevant" to the missionaries (page 175), what does she mean? Were the men selfish not to take their responsibilities to their wives and children into account before tackling a dangerous mission?

Chapter XVI: "We Go Not Forth Alone"

As the men set up their base on Palm Beach, why was it important to wait for the Aucas to approach them, rather than go in after the Aucas?

Nate Saint wrote, "It is no small thing to try to bridge between twentieth century and the stone age. God help us to take care." Why did the missionaries need to be so careful? Wouldn't the natives be eager to learn about advancements in knowledge and technology that would make their lives easier and more productive?

Chapter XVII: Success on Friday

What were the joys and frustrations of meeting the Aucas face-to-face for the first time?

How did the meeting move the missionaries closer to their goals? What did they most hope for?

Chapter XVIII: Silence

When the wives learned that their husbands were in trouble, and even when the bad news of their deaths started arriving, they did not panic or fall apart. Barbara Youderian wrote, "The Lord has closed our hearts to grief and hysteria, and filled it with His perfect peace" (page 236). Does this reaction seem strange to you? Why or why not?

Where did the wives get their strength and encouragement?

Why did the burial of the men need to be so quick and hurried?

Chapter XIX: “Yet Have We Not Forgotten Thee”

What was your initial reaction to learning the fate of the five missionaries?

What were some of the reactions from people around the world? Are any of these reactions similar to yours?

Why would the widows want to pray for their husbands’ murderers?

Wrap-Up:

Why did many of the widows remain in missions work after their husbands’ deaths? Especially, why did Elisabeth Elliot continue to work among the Aucas? Don’t you think they would have had enough of missionary life?

Explain how the events in this book became a much larger story than that of five missionaries and their families.

Jim Elliot wrote, “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.” What does this statement mean to you?

The author says that, even today, there are questions about the nature of God’s will that remain unanswered (page 268). Is there a situation in your own life where God’s will remains shrouded in mystery?

Has reading *Through Gates of Splendor* affected your thinking in any way: about missions work, about seeking and following God’s will, or about God’s call on your own life? If so, how?