

FOSY: When Saying “Yes” can Change Everything

John 21

Open: Video of Jim Elliot. They went out of the way...

Open: Charlie Kirk (2025) and Jim Elliot (1956)

Let me illustrate 2 Paths – John and Peter of missions.

The Lives of Jim and Elizabeth Elliot

Jim and Elizabeth Elliot served as missionaries in Ecuador beginning in 1952. Less than four years later, Jim—along with four other men—was speared to death on a remote beach as they attempted to make peaceful contact with an indigenous tribe. News of their martyrdom quickly spread across the globe. Jim's story became a catalyst for world missions, and his biography inspired thousands to answer God's call.

That's often how God works, isn't it? He will use the biography of a believer to instruct us, to warn or correct us, or to encourage and motivate us.

I love reading Christian biographies. They remind me that from century to century, the problems and challenges of the Christian life remain the same. Most importantly, these stories remind me that God is not timing how fast we run our race, nor is He counting how many people we influence along the way. Faithfulness, not fame, is the true measure of running the race well.

When you think about it, the Bible is a book filled with biographies. God often chooses to communicate great truths by wrapping them around the lives of individuals.

- The apostle Paul wrote in Romans 15 that the history of Israel, written in the Old Testament, was given for our instruction:
“...so that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.” (Romans 15:4)
- The writer of Hebrews adds in chapter 12:
“...since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.”
1 Cor 10:5 – Given example.

They had to go out of the way...

God has entrusted each of us with a unique purpose and role. We honor Him best when we pursue that calling wholeheartedly—not by looking at others, but by watching the Lord. Our Human Nature!

FOSY – Fear of Saying Yes

FOSY is described as a common phenomenon, especially during periods like the start of a new year when personal change is encouraged, and opportunities arise. Stepping outside one's comfort zone, such as fear of judgment, pre-conceived ideas of not being good enough by comparing to others.

Fifty years later, John—the last surviving apostle—alone records Peter's public restoration and recommissioning, showing how his friend embraced Christ's call and answered “yes”.

Outline: The Setting of John 21

1. **The prediction of Jesus** (21:18–19): Jesus predicts that Peter will someday die a martyr's death by crucifixion.
2. **The comparison by Peter** (21:20–22): Peter asks Jesus what kind of death John will die (Comparison Snare).

The imagery in John 21:18 refers to the transition in Peter's life from youthful freedom to the constraint he will experience in old age, specifically foreshadowing his martyrdom by crucifixion. Jesus tells Peter that when he was young, he dressed himself and went where he wished, but when he is old, he will "stretch out his hands" and be led where he does not want to go—this phrase poetically describes the crucifixion, which church tradition holds became Peter's fate.

In the book of John, the apostle Peter asks Jesus a question that every Christian has been tempted to ask—a question rooted in comparison. Even the healthiest, most godly relationships can become fertile ground for comparison, but the truth is that comparison always causes more harm than good.

- Gal 6:4-5 – you should test your own actions.
 - 2 Cor 10:12 – You are not wise.
 - We could look at King Saul to David - 1 Sam 18:6
 - Leah to her sister Rachel – Gen
 - Jacob to his brother Esau – Gen
 - Martha and Mary
3. **The explanation from John** (21:23): Jesus tells Peter, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?"
 - a. Jesus tells Peter, "If I want him to remain until I return, what is that to you? You follow Me!" making clear that each disciple's calling is unique and personal. Jesus's reply also counters rumors that John would not die but clarifies that He never said John would be immortal—He was highlighting Peter's responsibility to focus on his own path.
 - b. Symbolism of "Stretch Out Your Hands"
A false rumor spreads among the believers that John will never die.
 - c. *Concerning the witness for Jesus* (21:24): John testifies that all he has said about Jesus is true!
 - d. *Concerning the works by Jesus* (21:25): He says if everything that the Savior did while on earth was written down, the whole earth could not contain the books!

"Go Out of the Way" suggests going beyond former limitations, stepping into sacrificial leadership, and living out the call to "feed my sheep"

Let's go back to our original illustration of Jim Elliot...

Meteors and Plodders: Another Missionary Story

Not every missionary will become world-famous like Jim and Elizabeth Elliot. Not every biography will become a bestseller. This is a great reminder: God does not measure us by our fame, but by our faithfulness.

Because...Next to Ecuador lies the country of Peru. While Jim and Elizabeth served in Ecuador, another missionary couple—**Bert and Colleen**—were serving in Peru. When the world was stunned by the martyrdom of Jim Elliot and his fellow missionaries, Bert and Colleen quietly continued their own long journey. Their names never became well-known, no books or movies were made about them, but their faithfulness endured.

Jim was a natural leader, a gifted speaker, and a bold influence—killed at the age of 28. Bert lived to 87, a quiet disciple-maker and church planter, often teaching Peruvians how to farm and care for animals. Jim served for less than 4 years; Bert served 55 years. Remarkably, they labored in the same Amazon region, just 350 miles apart.

Elizabeth Elliot herself later wrote, "I often think of Bert and Colleen as examples of godly self-sacrifice, simple perseverance in jungle heat, mildew, mud, and rain, humbly ministering to lonely and needy people."

Then there was Bert and Colleen, who passed away in 2012. When Bert was once asked to compare his ministry to Jim's, he smiled and said, *"Jim was a brilliant meteor lighting up the sky. I was more like a faint star rising night after night."* On another occasion, he referred to himself as a "plodder"—just faithfully staying the course.

Bert refused to compare himself to Jim. He knew the gospel is carried forward not just by meteors, but also by plodders. During their 55 years in Peru, Bert and Colleen faced grueling travel, illness, floods, and even bandits, but they kept going—quietly faithful to the end.

As one writer put it: *"Jim's martyrdom inspired thousands to go; Bert's life showed them how to stay."*

You see - Jim and Bert were bold... Bert had been on the field 4 years before Jim. Just as they were close, so Peter and John were brothers in Christ. Peter did live to 65 years old, but John went for 30 more years into his 90's.

Conclusion: Imitate Faith, Not Fame

You're not called to copy someone else's experiences, ministry style, occupation, or gifting. We're called to imitate their faith—their resolve to follow Christ.

One purpose of Christian community, including your life right now, is to learn from the examples around you. Hebrews 10:24 says:

"Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some..."

In this way, we become living biographies for one another. Someone is observing you—your attitude, your spirit, your service. Inspire them to imitate your faith by what they read in your life story.

But let's be careful. Imitation should never become competition. We're called to emulate integrity, not compare ministries or outcomes. The danger in watching other believers is it can lead to disappointment or resentment when God's plans for them differ from His plans for us. Imitation can quietly slip into comparison.

- Someone you admire might thrive in business while you face bankruptcy.
- Another believer may enjoy good health, while you struggle.
- Someone's gifts and blessings may seem "better" than yours.

Learning from another believer is not the same as longing for their life, their influence, or their particular blessings.

Remember, God uniquely designed you for a purpose only you can fulfill. Pursue your race faithfully, and honor Him with the life He's given you.

Reject FOSY – and say “yes” to usability.

Take Home Truths

- 1. Have you thanked God for designing you uniquely?**
- 2. Will you be willing to go out of the way?**
- 3. Are you willing to say “yes”?**

Conclusion – Why mention Jim Elliot and Bert – because they were brothers (2 of 4 siblings).

There's an old hymn that was written in 1774, right before we became a nation. The poem is authored by William Cowper and is best known as the hymn "God Moves in a Mysterious Way." It says:

Oh, fearful saints, new courage take.
The clouds that you now dread
are big with mercy and will break
in blessings on your head.
Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
but trust him for his grace
Behind a frowning providence,
he hides a smiling face.

God's purposes will ripen fast, unfolding every hour.
The bud may have a bitter taste, but sweet will be the flower.
Blind unbelief is sure to err and scan his work in vain.
God is his own interpreter, and he will make it plain.
So God, we trust in you.
Oh, God, we trust in you.
When tears are great and comforts few,
we hope and mercy is ever new.
We trust in you.

That phrase happens to be one of our mottos of this country. We have two mottos, e pluribus unum, out of many one, and in God we trust. We all have a choice in how we respond to tragedy.

Close: "Everything good is on the other side of hard" (Terry Thompson; Small Church USA).