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INTRODUCTION



Clueless in America

How do I fit into God's plan for the world?

1994 was a big year for me. I graduated from high school and started college. I remember a few other things that happened in my little world in 1994. However, I was blissfully unaware that during that same year up to a million people in a tiny country on the other side of the world were killed by their own neighbors simply because of their differing ancestries.

I know all about Rwanda now. I heard about the genocide a few years ago and was appalled. It amazed me that I didn't know about it, so I read some books, watched *Hotel Rwanda*, and read international news reports saying Rwanda is still recovering from the devastation. But at the time it was happening, I had no idea such things actually occurred in today's world. All I knew about was a comfortable, middle-class life in a democratic country, and the thought of having a war in my homeland was unthinkable, barbaric, and *totally* 19th century.

In the years since 1994, I've discovered that most of the people in this world don't live the way I do. My travels have exposed me to the posh city life of London and Paris, but also the African bush and the slums of Rio de Janeiro. The more I see of the world and its various peoples, the more I want to see. I want to be aware of what's happening and what God's doing around the world, not just in my own little corner of it.

Are you globally minded? Do you know what's going on in Sudan, Belarus, Venezuela, or Japan? Do you take the time to see beyond your home, your family, your job? Those things are important, but we also need to open our eyes to the rest of the big world we live in. Proverbs 25:25 says, "Like cold water to a weary soul is good news from a distant land."



Reaching the World

Clueless in America

3

In the following collection of articles, you'll be inspired to send the good news of Jesus to a far away place. Perhaps God will give you the desire to bring hope to oppressed or persecuted women in a country you've never even heard of. Maybe your task will be to pray and spread awareness of global issues. Possibly you'll even physically go to a far-off land to help others. However you choose to respond to this study, I pray that God will bless you as you begin your global journey.

Blessings,

Dana Wilkerson

Contributing Editor, Women's and Family Issues

Christianity Today International



LEADER'S GUIDE



How to use “Reaching the World” for a group study.

“Reaching the World” can be used for individual or group study, but if you intend to lead a group study on this, some simple suggestions follow:

- 1 Make enough copies for everyone in the group to have her own guide.
- 2 Depending on the time you have dedicated to the study, you might consider distributing the guides before your group meets so everyone has a chance to read the material. Some articles are quite long and could take a while to get through.
- 3 Alternatively, you might consider reading the articles together as a group—out loud—and plan on meeting multiple times.
- 4 Make sure your group agrees to complete confidentiality. This is essential to getting women to open up.
- 5 When working through the “Thought Provokers” be willing to make yourself vulnerable. It’s important for women to know that others share their experience. Make honesty and openness a priority in your group.
- 6 End the session in prayer.





Faith Without Borders

7 ways to become a cross-cultural Christian.

by Siri L. Mitchell

When the military moved our family to Tokyo, we were blessed to find a vibrant church of Japanese believers. Our first Easter in Japan, my thoughts were filled with spring, I dressed in pastel colors. But when I walked into church that morning, everyone was wearing red. Before I could say “Happy Easter” to the usher, he greeted me with “Happy Resurrection Day!”

When I slipped into a seat next to an American friend, she explained it to me: “The Japanese wear red on Easter—Resurrection Day to them—to honor Christ’s shed blood.”

In that moment, I realized several of my ideas about Easter were cultural. Since then, I’ve discovered many aspects of my faith are grounded in my American paradigm rather than in my Bible.

Faith has always been embroidered by culture. But we risk creating God in *our* image when we view Him only through the lens of our experiences. Our God is too small if we limit Him to our culture.

Did you know Americans have become minority members of our religion? By numbers alone, the language of Christianity is no longer English. Soon, two-thirds of all Christians will be from Africa, Latin America, or Asia.

If God loves everyone, irrespective of political borders, then we need to do a better job of becoming citizens of the world. Who are our international sisters in the faith, and how can we get to know them? We might just find that in knowing them better, we discover new ways of knowing ourselves—and God.



1. Read a different newspaper.

American television's "world news" offers little coverage of stories outside the U.S. And newspapers have limited space in which to display six continents' worth of news. So why not broaden your source of news coverage?

Almost every nation has a newspaper or interest group devoted to covering its news. Hundreds of newspapers are a click away. You'll find many of them at www.world-newspapers.com. My favorite source for global politics is the International *Herald Tribune* at www.iht.com. If your interests are specifically Asian, try Asahi Shimbun's Asia Network at www.asahi.com/english/asianet.

2. Take a personal interest.

Do you know the origins of the coffee you drink? Ugandans hope you do. Uganda's cash crop used to be tobacco—before Americans decided smoking was bad. Now their biggest export is coffee because Americans have decided drinking coffee is good. Did you know your daily Starbucks run had global implications? I didn't either, until I met someone from Uganda.

Now, whenever I see "Uganda" in a headline, I read the story. Why? It's important to my friend, so it's become important to me. Pay attention to the people around you; find out where they're from, where their roots lie, and take an interest. The next time they celebrate their culture, join them! Observe Chinese New Year. Take part in Scottish Highland Games. Eat your heart out at a Festa Italiana.

3. Vacation somewhere new.

In 1998, when the military sent my family to France, we went to Morocco for Christmas vacation. As our trip approached, I became increasingly nervous. We were entering Morocco during the holy month of Ramadan, and in 1998 the U.S. was bombing Iraq throughout that season. I didn't know what sort of reaction Americans would receive in a country that's 98 percent Muslim.

As it turned out, I was completely unprepared for what we experienced. Our golf caddy, a man who lived just above poverty level, gave us a Christmas present. Our taxi driver invited us over to his home to meet his family and join them in breaking the Ramadan fast. Had I not visited Morocco, the only portrait of Muslim nations I'd have would be prejudicial and negative.

Travel expands your knowledge as well as your world. Yet many of us vacation in the same place every year. Do you know at least enough Spanish to say "please" and "thank you"? Then most of South America is at your doorstep. With just English you can navigate Australia, New Zealand, the Bahamas, Singapore, or (surprise!) India. India now has the largest English-speaking population in the world.



Or start closer to home by sampling the different cultures in North America. If you normally vacation in tropical Florida, head to the Southwest or the wild coasts of Maine.

4. Enjoy international art and music.

If you don't have the time or money to travel, you can still explore foreign landscapes through art and music. For example, I never appreciated Cézanne's landscape paintings until I visited southern France and stood at the very places he'd painted. As I saw the vivid blue skies and gaunt trees, I discovered I'd disliked the paintings only because they were unfamiliar. Now I find art from other cultures fascinating.

From the elemental shapes in African sculpture to the detailed work of Asian printmakers, you can learn something about the world your sisters live in by studying their art. Visit a local cultural museum or go to a large city to see a traveling art exhibit.

Similarly, people have always turned to music to express emotion. So what melodies do your sisters in Christ hum as they go about their day? What words do they whisper? Are the songs about freedom? Pain? Celebration? Visit Harmonia Mundi's online catalog at <http://harmoniamundi.com/usa/catalogue> for traditional music from European countries. Or visit World Music's website, www.worldvillagemusic.com/anglais/artistelist, for music from around the globe.

5. Check out foreign books and movies.

Every time I read a foreign book or watch a foreign movie, my vision of the world expands. The word *foreign* comes from a Latin word meaning "on the outside." Reading a book or viewing a film is seeing the world from someone else's perspective.

Most writers and film directors search for truth when they practice their craft. When they discover it—even in the mundane or the secular—they also discover God. And you can too.

Here are some suggestions to get you started.

Movies: *Hotel Rwanda* (South Africa/ Britain/Italy/Canada, 2004); *Le Retour de Martin de Guerre* (France, 1982); *Maria Chapdelaine* (Canada, 1983); *Shall We Dance?* (Japanese version, 1996); *Babette's Feast* (Denmark, 1987); *Il Postino* (Italy, 1995); *Life Is Beautiful* (Italy, 1997).



Books: *The Little Prince* by St. Exupery (French); *Crow Lake* by Mary Lawson (Canadian); *The Samurai's Garden* by Gail Tsukiyama (Japanese); *Polite Lies* by Kyoko Mori (Japanese); *Reading Lolita in Tehran* by Azar Nafisi (Iranian).

6. Practice your hobby internationally.

When my husband, Tony, and I married, I committed to participating in one of his hobbies so we could spend more time together. To my surprise, I found I actually enjoyed golf as much as I appreciated our couple time. I've now golfed with Tony on four continents. In so doing, I've also met generals and presidents of multinational corporations, and in the process have glimpsed their various lifestyles and cultures.

Travel virtually by joining an Internet group that focuses on your hobby. The Internet has created a world without borders in which you can "meet" people across the globe who share your interests.

Or use your hobby to aid those outside your culture. Do you enjoy reading? Help fund a project to restock books for schools in Afghanistan or Iraq. Do you enjoy quilting or weaving? Make something to give to an organization collecting blankets for impoverished people in Africa.

7. Picture Jesus.

If Jesus were alive today with the cultural references he had when he walked this earth, he'd probably feel more at home in Near Eastern cultures than he would in America. And he certainly wouldn't speak English. That idea makes me feel a bit like an outsider in my faith. But that's OK. All cultures radiate a part of God's image because they're comprised of people God created. Problems begin when we all reflect the same sliver of His image. When that happens, we begin to believe that sliver is a complete picture of God. But when we explore other cultures, we gain a fuller portrait of our Creator.

*Siri L. Mitchell is the author of several novels. Find out more at www.sirimitchell.com. This article first appeared in the **March/April 2007** issue of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN magazine.*



Thought Provokers

- *How have you experienced cultural differences with a friend or someone you've run across?*
- *What is your favorite foreign book or movie? Why do you like it so much?*
- *How will you implement one of these seven tips for becoming a cross-cultural Christian this week?*



FEATURES



Go Girl!

Why a change of scenery can be good for your soul.

by *Marlee LeDai*

All good trips are like love, says travel writer Pico Iyer, because they “admit us to a heightened state of awareness ... ready to be transformed.” Travel is about being carried out of yourself and deposited in the midst of terror and wonder. Stepping into unfamiliar territory shakes your stereotypes, rattles your defenses, and redefines your paradigms.

I’ve found this to be true in my life. As a young believer, I took my first solo trip right after college and spent two years working my way across Europe and the Middle East. I worked for room and board in a home for cast-off people in England, a B&B in Austria, a peanut farm in Israel, and a Jesus-people barn in Bavaria. By the time I returned home, I’d smuggled Bibles behind the Iron Curtain, been pelted with stones by boys in Gaza, endured endless nights sleeping on cold trains, and swum with a shark in the Red Sea. I learned I was more resourceful than I thought. But most importantly, I found God present in the most unlikely moments, and I’ve learned to watch for His wonderful surprises showing up in my life ever since.

Even now, as a mother of three adult daughters and as someone who lives on a budget, I find travel continues to play a pivotal role in my spiritual development and life choices. Not long ago, I camped with a group in the Pacific Northwest, and part of our itinerary included kayaking. Pulling on the oars with all my might wasn’t enough to keep my kayak on course. As my straying vessel was pulled toward open sea, I thought of the aching lament I’d prayed many times during my divorce: “Oh Lord, your sea is so big and my boat so small.” Much to my humiliation, the guide had to rescue me, towing me back to shore. Coming face to face with my vulnerability that day was another lesson in compassion for others adrift in shame or loss. The emotional impact of that traveling experience motivated me to train as a life coach, to help guide people through the crosscurrents of their lives.



So issue an invitation to yourself. Challenge the everydayness of the familiar. Take a trip. Go somewhere. Go anywhere. Go where nothing matters but the adventure itself

Women Lead the Way

The travel industry tells us women make 70 percent of all travel decisions and compose 75 percent of those who take nature, risky, physical adventure, or cultural trips. In fact, the average adventure traveler is a 47-year-old female who wears a size-12 dress! So what else is new? The Bible and Christian history are full of tales of women and their experiences on the road—Hagar, Ruth, and Mary, to name a few. During the Middle Ages, women made up the largest contingent of visitors to sacred sites. In fact, it was a woman who later created a prototype for pilgrim lodgings as places of spiritual and personal growth.

Today, many Christian women travel not only for fun, but also to connect with the global body of Christ and enlarge their understanding of God via short-term mission trips. Two of my daughters have had their faith in Christ sculpted by their experiences on mission trips. The eldest says she nearly starved to death in Haiti, where meals consisted of meager rations of rice with bits of chicken. But photos of her embraced by dozens of pairs of little arms tell a happier story. Today, she tells her boyfriend that if they marry, her plan to adopt a Haitian child is not negotiable. My youngest daughter spent eight weeks in Mexico, waking three to four times every night to feed newborns and calm toddlers. “Today, I look at the pictures of the faces I touched with my own two hands,” she wrote in a journal, “and I pray for the children who clung to me, whom I loved until it was a cross I bore, until it hurt to love them so much.”

Travel Is a State of Mind

Above all, travel is about a shift in perspective. It's not about where you go or what you do; it's about being open to seeing what God is doing in the world around you. For busy moms, travel may mean a girlfriend getaway to the beach or the mountains. Pack your prettiest pjs and a pair of comfy shoes for exploring. Perhaps you can join your husband on a business trip. Go sightseeing in a new city or take in a local art gallery while he's on the job. Professional women can liven up their business trips by engaging in conversation on the plane instead of hiding behind a newspaper; look for what makes your seatmate's eyes light up. In your free time, take a brisk walk along a lake, seeking an epiphany of the heart. Give God the gift of listening and expect to hear His voice.



If you can't travel across the country or get a babysitter, you can still seek adventure. If you live in the suburbs, go downtown. Catch a trolley, serve people at a homeless shelter, or ride the glass elevator of a high rise. Why not drive to the country for fresh produce, flowers, and a walk through a muddy meadow? As the landscapes around you change, you'll notice changes in your point of view about your life circumstances.

Do you think you're too old to travel? Think again. In my fifties, I learned to snowboard with a class of college kids, and later joined a daughter backpacking through Europe. I have a friend who treated herself to a kayak trip through Alaskan waterways to celebrate her big 5-0. Another friend spent a weekend at a Christian hostel for women in NYC instead of a quiet B&B. She met plenty of New Yorkers as she helped serve meals at a rescue mission. Elder hostels are remarkable places to meet interesting people and see the world too. I once met a 60something gentleman who'd been all the way to Timbuktu just to say he had!

The Best Souvenir Is Change

When you make that first step into unfamiliar terrain, you become God's apprentice in the holy art of living. Does that mean everything will go smoothly? That you'll come home with armloads of stunning photos? That you'll find fantastic souvenirs? No, not at all. A journey is a metaphor for life. And life can get messy.

When Eva Green set out to photograph old barns along the Eastern seaboard in a small motor home, things didn't go as planned. An increase in gas prices forced her to economize and skip many of the back roads she'd wanted to explore. Then, two weeks into the trip, the flu forced her to lay low while she lost several precious days from her itinerary. Eva found that disappointment can't always be avoided, but that in spite of it, there's much for which to be thankful—namely fun and some beautiful pictures

Christine Gilman traveled to Liberia to help her husband, a photographer, document the need for adoptive families. A year later, she returned to adopt four-year-old Ama, just 29 pounds, who joined their family of five. "When I first visited Africa, that wasn't in the plan," Christine says. "I argued with God about it." As Ama grew, Christine watched news reports of the civil war in Liberia, and learned that rebel troops invaded the compound where Ama had lived. When a call came later to help rebuild, Christine had no doubts about responding: "My daughter was once one of those 500 children; how could I not go?" she says.

Christine was changed by meeting African women who inspired her to persevere under trouble of all kinds, to meet each life obstacle with faith, and to get involved with other people's problems in our world.



Travel can be a transforming experience that forces you to stretch beyond your ability to cope and leads you to refocus on God's work and presence in your life. It's the kind of experience after which you return home to find everything around you is still the same—but you're not. I've found that's the best souvenir of all.

Make Your Dream Trip a Reality

Think about how many weeks you spend on vacation in a lifetime; shouldn't at least 2 of those be for the trip of your dreams? Here's how to make it happen:

Identify your destination. A whirlwind tour of Europe's most beautiful cities? A slow meander through Yosemite's National Park in the fall? An adventure package with a guide to lead the way? (Don't eliminate the possibility of having a great time with yourself and no one else).

Make it visual. Get a map, travel posters, and photographs of this place and put them where you'll see them daily, such as your computer's screen saver or wallpaper. Research your destination and read novels set in the area. See yourself there: What are you wearing and doing? Where are you eating? Who are you meeting?

Imagine money is available. Create a budget that includes transportation, lodging, meals, attractions, must-sees, and must-dos. Delegate dollars you ordinarily would spend on movies or dinner out to a monthly travel savings account.

List necessities. Think through what you'll need for the climate, recreation, and culture of your destination. What's appropriate attire? Will you need protection from sun or rain? Sporting gear? Gifts for locals you may meet? A sleeping bag or travel mug?

Budget to save. Can you do picnics instead of restaurants while at your destination? Might you stay in hostels instead of hotels? Walk instead of take the subway? Look for economical airfares, museum packages, or coupons for attractions online.

Anticipate! Put your projected date of departure on your calendar, though it may be years away. It's no longer just a dream; you're making it a reality!

Marlee LeDai lives in the Pacific Northwest and is the author of several books, including Go Girl (Revell). This article first appeared in the September/October 2005 issue of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN magazine.



Thought Provokers

- *How has traveling changed your perspective on the world?*
- *The author says that change is the best souvenir. How have you encountered change on a trip, and how did it impact you?*
- *What will it take to make your dream trip a reality?*



FEATURES



Offering Hope Overseas

Women and girls bring relief to tsunami victims.

by Julie-Allyson Ieron

Perhaps you saw television commercials featuring two former U.S. presidents asking for donations to help the hundreds of thousands of people devastated by the mega-earthquake and tsunami that hit the countries surrounding the Indian Ocean on December 26, 2004. Seeing the pictures and the need, tens of thousands were touched to donate funds toward the relief effort.

But a number of godly women and girls decided to put more than their money on the line. Meet a Phoenix politician, a Chicago radio personality, and a group of teen girls in Pennsylvania who felt God tug at their hearts to put themselves on the line for a mission of mercy to hurting strangers.

Mobilizing an Entire City

In Phoenix, Vice Mayor Peggy Bilsten watched the reports of the disaster. “I was reading in Matthew about Jesus washing the disciples’ feet. There’s no doubt in my mind Jesus would have been there with these people. I felt God calling me to action. My heart was so broken for them,” she says.

Peggy quickly called her boss, the mayor of the fifth-largest city in the U.S., to ask, “What’s our city’s response?” She recommended they partner with Phoenix-based ministry Food for the Hungry to adopt a sister city in the Muslim-dominated Aceh province of Indonesia.

So, just ten days after the tsunami, Peggy found herself in a delegation of Phoenix officials and Food for the Hungry representatives touring what was left of the city of Meulaboh (mah’-lah-bow). “It was intense. We could smell death all around; there were so many bodies that still hadn’t been buried,” Peggy explains. She was overwhelmed by the palpable grief that overshadowed the city.



The delegation's objective was to find the town's remaining leaders (40,000 of the 120,000 residents were lost in the disaster) and to ask their permission to provide assistance. "We were welcomed because we represented hope," she says.

The destruction was hard to process. After meeting with Meulaboh's director of education, Peggy learned 164 of their schools were destroyed, 237 teachers (10 percent of their staff) and 3,000 students were lost. Other officials showed her more obstacles in the way of restoring normalcy. Fresh water and soil were contaminated by the saltwater—much of which came inland and never receded. Infrastructure was gone; bridges and streets washed out. People existed in make-shift tents. The need was enormous.

Back in Phoenix, Peggy spearheaded fundraising efforts, netting more than \$200,000 from private citizens, associations, school children, and business groups. At first, these funds went toward emergency supplies such as food and medicine. But the efforts shifted to long-term redevelopment.

Peggy and a group from Phoenix returned to Meulaboh in May to help make this transition. City of Phoenix civil engineer Mike Frisbie joined Peggy on that second trip and donated his vacation time to help create a plan to remove standing saltwater from fields so crops can grow again.

Since \$200 would set up a local worker in his own small business, the people of Phoenix donated 100 pedal taxis for the poorest families to build, own, and operate. It was important the new owners build and paint their taxis rather than building the taxis for them, because it would give them a sense of participation in their recovery. At a dedication ceremony and parade of the new taxis, Peggy recalls, "It was hard for [the new owner-operators] to look us in the eye. They are so low, feeling unworthy to shake our hands. But I hugged them. We shook every hand. They felt the love of Jesus.

"The people told us, 'We don't know why you love us so much, but we are so grateful.'

"The leaders said they were overwhelmed that people across the world would care and love them so much. ... What Phoenix residents have provided is a way for these workers to make money, infuse their economy, and get back on their feet."

Putting Her Life on the Line

While Peggy was making plans for her first trip to Indonesia, Michelle Strombeck was in an airport in the Midwest watching reports of the tsunami. "I was



heartbroken. I so wanted to help them in some way, but I didn't know how or what I could do," remembers the producer of WMBI Christian radio's "Mornings with Mark Elfstrand."

After booking a radio interview with Kevin Turner, president of Strategic World Impact, another Christian organization bringing teams to Indonesia to provide aid, Michelle's response was immediate: "I wanted to go to Indonesia. I just knew."

The following ten days were a blur. Shots for malaria and typhoid. Standing in line for a one-day passport. Gathering hiking boots, rubber gloves, medical masks, and bandanas. Letting her listeners know about the trip.

She would report in to the station daily to give listeners a better understanding of the relief efforts by SWI, Mission Aviation Fellowship, Samaritan's Purse, and other Christian organizations providing food and essentials to the homeless, wave-shocked people in the Muslim region usually closed to all westerners.

With approximately \$12,000 in donations, Michelle's team went shopping in Medan, Indonesia. In less than two days they purchased and loaded on a rickety truck five tons of supplies, including 2,000 blankets, 2,000 sarongs, and cooking supplies—oil, woks, rice pots, stirring utensils, and vitamins—for 400 families in rural villages outside beleaguered Banda Aceh.

While the truck spent 15 hours navigating washed-out roads, the team flew the last leg of their journey. "When you fly into Banda Aceh, you see beautiful country. Beaches, palm trees, mountains. It's spectacular. It's one of the most sought-after vacation destinations in the world," Michelle says.

But the beauty from the air was deceiving. Conditions were bleak. Visitors had to pass a wall where locals posted pictures of lost loved ones, a mass burial mound, freight liners and large fishing vessels run aground miles from shore, whole villages swept clean as if they'd never existed, and blank stares of the shocked and grieving.

The next day, while Michelle's team organized supplies for distribution, members of a rebel faction of the Indonesian military frightened the team by snapping their pictures. Local translators were shaken, telling the team their lives were in danger. Since Indonesia is predominantly Muslim, the thought of western Christians possibly sharing their faith with the villagers had drawn the rebels' attention. The team was alarmed. Yet, they knew God had called them to this place, and despite a long night in fear of kidnapping or even death, they returned to the distribution site in the morning to find hundreds of people lined up, patiently waiting to receive supplies. Their stories and faces haunt Michelle to this day.



On the final day of their week-long relief mission, Michelle's group was invited to the home of the local Imam. "He is sort of the mayor of these four villages, in addition to being the spiritual leader," Michelle explains. "He was so thankful that we came to his country to help that he made a symbolic gesture. He wanted us to take one of his children in payment for what we'd done for his villages. That's how much the relief efforts meant to him."

Daughters Offering Hope

It wasn't just adult women who were impacted by what they saw in the news reports of the devastation. A group of 13- and 14-year-old girls in West Chester, Pennsylvania, wanted to do something tangible to help their sisters in the tsunami zone. When the tsunami hit, the girls were involved in a weekly Bible study group reading the book *Daughters of Hope* by Michelle Rickett, which describes the lives of persecuted women and girls around the world (including the region hit by the tsunami). When the teens heard of the disaster, they immediately wanted to help the ones about whom they'd been reading.

So, the 12 American girls spent two consecutive Saturdays in January 2005 doing what they could: baking cookies—36 dozen of them—that they sold at church and outside a Christian bookstore. They raised \$567, which they donated to a Christian missionary in Indonesia supported by Michelle Rickett's ministry, Sisters in Service. The money was earmarked to help women and girls impacted by the tsunami. When Rickett went to the region with the aid a few weeks later, she encouraged the recipients by telling the story of the teenaged girls in the U.S. who sent their efforts and their love.

Thirteen-year-old baker Stephanie Rodgers explains, "Doing service projects has changed our viewpoint on serving. It's not a chore, but a privilege." After this initial foray into practical service, the girls are now undertaking more ambitious fundraising efforts.

A Changed Perspective

Just as the teenagers had a change in perspective by participating in relief efforts, so did the adult women who saw the devastation firsthand.

Within three weeks of returning to her daily routine, Michelle Strombeck flew to Anaheim, California, to attend a broadcasting convention. Earlier, she and some friends had decided to add a few days of sightseeing to the trip. They visited the Hollywood Walk of Fame and a taping of *Wheel of Fortune*. This brand of western fun, however, seemed empty after her Indonesia experience. She felt guilty leaving Banda Aceh with so much work yet to be done, but more short-term teams followed to continue the work her team had initiated.



Reconstruction estimates range from five to ten years before the region is cleaned up and rebuilt. That's exactly why Peggy promised local leaders that the city of Phoenix will maintain the partnership with Meulaboh for ten years.

“The situation is still unbearably sad. But it's much better than it was [in January 2005]. Meulaboh is a skeleton of the city it once was. Many are still homeless or living in makeshift tents. It's impossible to imagine the sadness and fear they're living with every day. They need the hope that Phoenix and Food for the Hungry are providing.”

Julie-Allyson Ieron is a TCW regular contributor and the author of Staying True in a World of Lies (Christian Publications). You can reach her at joyscom@aol.com. This article first appeared in the January/February 2006 issue of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN magazine.

Thought Provokers

- *Has being a part of relief efforts changed your perspective on the world?*
- *What would your response be if someone from a far-off country helped you in a time of need?*
- *What can you and/or your church do to give hope to the victims of a recent natural disaster?*





Our Suffering Sisters

A close-up look at the female face of the persecuted church—and what you can do to help.

by *Camerin Courtney*

Three Indonesian women—Dr. Rebekka Zakaria, Eti Pangesti, and Ratna Bangun—currently sit in Indramayu State Prison in West Java serving a three-year sentence. They're there because of “Happy Sunday,” the program they launched for schoolchildren at the invitation of a local public elementary school. The program included Christian songs, games, and Bible study, and students attended with the full consent of their parents. Regardless, when some of the children began to sing the Christian songs they learned at “Happy Sunday” at school and at home, Islamic elders took notice—and filed charges against Rebekka, Eti, and Ratna. In July 2005, at the third of their many court appearances, truckloads of angry Muslim demonstrators showed up at the courthouse to harass and threaten the women.

In Columbia, Angela Ballesteros was forced to watch a death squad murder her husband, Pastor Euclides Ballesteros, who had converted many revolutionaries. Ordered to remain silent, she and her four children left their hometown and moved to another region of the country, where she barely makes a living working occasionally as a seamstress at the shop of Miriam Amador, the widow of another murdered pastor.

“Anna,” a young Pakistani girl, assisted her Muslim father in his job as a professor. She converted to Christianity after reading one of his research books that explained Christian beliefs. But when she told her father about her conversion, he beat her. When she went to school and told her teachers she wanted to know more about Jesus, they beat her in front of her classmates. She kept asking—and being punished for her quest for spiritual answers. Eventually, “Anna” had to run away from home.

“In the Bible, God tells us our faith will separate us from our family,” says Jane Huckaby, national director for Women of the Way, a division of Open Doors USA that focuses on women in the persecuted church. “Anna—and so many women like her—knows firsthand what that means.”



The Female Face of Persecution

These women are the hidden face of the persecuted church. When most people think of those persecuted for their faith, they think of imprisoned pastors and tortured evangelists. But according to Open Doors International, a ministry launched 50 years ago by evangelist Brother Andrew to provide Bibles and other support for persecuted Christians worldwide, women far outnumber men in the persecuted church today. In many cultures, simply being born a woman means a denial of basic human rights. When one of these women converts to Christianity, it only compounds her problems.

“Christian men in oppressive countries are often jailed, tortured, or killed,” Jane explains. “But in several countries, women aren’t considered important enough to warrant that kind of treatment. Instead, they’re often denied housing, jobs, literacy training, and education. Many are beaten not by their government, but by their family members.”

Open Doors estimates 200 million Christians worldwide suffer interrogation, arrest, and death for their faith in Christ, and another 200 to 400 million face discrimination and alienation. When the ministry’s workers began to notice a distinct female face to this issue, they launched Women of the Way, named for Acts 9:1-2, in 2000.

Who are the women of the persecuted church? Some are Egyptian wives legally abused at the hands of their husbands. Some are widows of martyred husbands, such as Angela and Miriam. Others are those left to fend for large families while their Christian husbands are imprisoned for years. Many of these women face great economic hardship because, due to the fact they’re women, Christians or both. They’re denied access to housing or employment. In many countries, acts of violence or discrimination against Christian women are legal, leaving them powerless to fight back or flee from persecution.

While the women in the persecuted church may have very different lives from those of women in the U.S., Jane Huckaby asserts there are core similarities as well. “They want to make a difference in their world,” she explains. “They want their children to grow up godly. They want friends. They want to look nice for special occasions.”

To illustrate her latter point, Jane tells the story of when Anneke Companjen, wife of Open Doors International President Johan Companjen, went to Sudan to visit a woman named Mona, who had a husband in prison and six children to care for. They lived in a structure with a dirt floor, had to walk miles for water, and all slept in the same bed. After a long, difficult journey, Anneke finally got to Mona—and noticed she’d painted her toenails bright red. “Mona wanted to be presentable. That was



important to her,” Jane explains. “Some people might think that was a waste of money, but most women get it. It’s that desire to look good for your guests, an appreciation of beauty. And it’s universal among women—even in the midst of such poverty and hardship.”

Women Helping Women

While the issue of religious persecution can seem too big to tackle, Jane is quick to point out women in the U.S. wield more power and influence today than women have enjoyed at any other time in history. “The key question is, what are we doing with that power?” she asks.

Through various ministries, Women of the Way empowers American women to alleviate the pain of our suffering sisters overseas. Utilizing Open Doors workers in other countries and key relationships with nationals, Women of the Way delivers Bibles, children’s Bibles, and Bible study materials that focus on how Jesus showed and taught respect for the women of his day. These workers and nationals also teach literacy courses, thus enabling many women to read God’s Word for the first time. In countries where women are unemployed or underemployed, Women of the Way teaches vocational skills. For example, Open Doors workers taught some persecuted women in Vietnam to make purses and in Mexico to make bracelets. Open Doors USA purchased these items and sold them domestically to help fund further projects

On a more grassroots level, Women of the Way has 200 members in seven chapters throughout various U.S. cities and churches. These women are provided videos, books, a monthly newsletter full of updates and prayer requests, and ideas for raising awareness and funds for the persecuted church. As they meet, Women of the Way members focus on six goals outlined in the acronym LISTEN. At each meeting they *Learn* more about the problem through the testimonies of persecuted women provided by Open Doors. They *Intercede* for suffering women. Whether it’s out of their pocket or through fundraising efforts, they financially *Support* countless material needs for these women, as nearly all of Women of the Way’s work is funded through donations. Members are committed to *Tell others* of the problem, whether that’s their daughter, Sunday school class, local newspaper, or politician in Washington, D.C. They also *Encourage* the women of the persecuted church with letter-writing campaigns and greeting cards, which often are delivered by hand. Finally, they *Network* with other ministries to maximize their reach.

“This year, our group is learning about the persecuted church in China,” says Roxanne Bushen, facilitator for the Women of the Way chapter in Holland, Michigan. “It’s been a blessing to pray for, support, and learn what the Lord’s doing around the world. Godly sisters in countries like China can teach us so much about faith in Christ and perseverance in suffering.”



Being Part of the Solution

Women of the Way sponsors a few trips yearly so women can see firsthand the breadth of the problem and offer encouragement through hugs, personal prayers, and shared tears. “We know how much touch means to hurting women,” Jane Huckaby says. “And when we give them an opportunity to share about their suffering, it’s pure therapy for them.”

Women of the Way works with a country’s nationals to ensure the safety of the women visiting, as well as that of the women being visited. Small groups of women—who are screened and trained—stay for only a week or two at a time so they don’t garner attention from officials.

A dozen women from Pastor Rick Warren’s Saddleback Church in California traveled to Chiapas, Mexico, for a Women of the Way-sponsored trip in June 2005. “God broke my heart for persecuted Christians on this trip, and that will have a lasting impact on me,” says Darlene Gee, one of the participants. “I now share as much as possible and try to raise awareness of persecuted Christians not just in Mexico, but everywhere.

While in Chiapas, where 35,000 Christians have been driven from their homes over the years and others have been beaten or killed by religious fanatics and mafia-like groups, the women were granted entry to a prison where 34 evangelical Christians have been imprisoned for more than seven years. “Visiting those men in prison was about the most humbling experience of my entire Christian walk,” says Karen Spain. “I couldn’t help but be reminded that could be any one of *our* husbands, brothers, or fathers. We need to continue to pray for these men and their families.”

The women also met with the wives and families of the prisoners, delivering toys, books, food, and other supplies. Open Doors provides ongoing support for these men and their families by providing legal assistance, food, cooking essentials, and transportation for the wives to visit their husbands in prison

“These are women with the same longings, desires, and fears as you and I,” Anneke Companjen writes in *Hidden Sorrow, Lasting Joy*. “They are mothers, daughters, sisters, and aunts. Some are young, some are old; others are aging too quickly for their years. Some are rich in hope; others contend with relentless depression. Above all else, they very much need our prayers.”

In fact, prayer is the most prevalent request Open Doors and Women of the Way workers hear when they visit people in persecuted areas. “We often sit with families who live on dirt floors with a well in the middle of their living space, and we ask them, ‘What can we do for you?’ The first thing they ask for is prayer,” Jane



Huckaby says. “While it’s not the only thing we have to offer, it’s often the best thing. Prayer changes lives, it changes nations, and it changes us. It’s the number-one ammunition against this battle of persecution.

“There’s so much that needs to be done and that can be done for the women of the persecuted church,” Jane adds. “We’ll do it one country at a time, one city at a time, one chapter at a time, one woman at a time—whatever it takes to bring hope and freedom to our sisters.”

How to Get Involved

Want to help women in the persecuted church? Start here by praying for:

Pakistan

- Safety and discipleship of Muslim women who have given their lives to Jesus Christ
- Opportunities for many uneducated Christian women to learn how to read
- Shelter and hope for women who endure beatings and humiliation

China

- Provision of food, God’s Word, and support for wives of imprisoned believers
- Overturning of the law prohibiting the teachings of Jesus to anyone under the age of 18
- Training supplies for courageous Sunday school teachers to reach the next generation for Christ

Egypt

- New laws to prevent women from being beaten by their fathers, brothers, and husbands
- Participation by more people in family training seminars to teach men and women mutual respect and Christlike love
- Availability of Arabic devotionals for women of the church
- Establishment of a Christian human-rights advocacy office



Columbia

- Training (Bible studies and vocational skills) for Christian female heads of households who live in high-risk areas
- The safe house for young boys and girls who are targeted for recruitment into guerilla groups
- Emergency financial support and counseling for families of assassinated believers

For more information on Women of the Way and Open Doors USA, go to www.opendoorsusa.org. This article first appeared in the November/December 2005 issue of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN magazine.

Thought Provokers

- *How has your perspective of the persecuted church changed by reading this article?*
- *What did you think was the most shocking fact about the women of the persecuted church?*
- *Jane Huckaby says, "Women in the U.S. wield more power and influence today than women have enjoyed at any other time in history." How can you use your power and influence to help alleviate the suffering of the persecuted church?*



FEATURES



News You Can Use

Today's headlines can help you positively impact your world.

by Lori Roeleveld

I love the news. Like my black coffee, I like it unadorned, straightforward, and hot. So I begin my day with the local morning show, catch the national evening news, then top off the day with *Nightline*. I read a daily newspaper and two weekly local papers as well as the Sunday edition. My Internet homepage is programmed to report world and national news headlines, and my car radio is tuned to my favorite news station.

Recently, though, my media consumption became a concern. I began suffering from higher levels of anxiety, headaches, and insomnia. After a thorough exam to rule out physical causes, my physician suggested all my devotion to world events was taking its toll. I realized I was paying more attention to the problems of the world than to the Problem Solver I served.

Then I read an article on intercessory prayer that highlighted a prayer group that meets weekly in a nursing home to pray through the newspaper. The members share clippings they collect through the week and pray for the people and events in the articles.

Suddenly, my avid interest in the news no longer seems like a condition, but a calling. Being an informed Christian is no longer an end in itself, but a means by which I can serve through prayer. If you're a similarly afflicted newshound, consider that God may be calling you to regular intercession for the world. Here are some guidelines to help you.

1. Spend more time in God's Word and prayer than in the news media. My day now begins and ends with the Bible, not the daily headlines. This helps me remember it doesn't all depend on me but on God! It also provides a regular check-up to keep things in perspective. God's Word helps me remember that while headlines come and go, God's truth is everlasting. If I have time to read the paper and watch the news but haven't spent time in God's Word, my priorities are confused.



2. Spend a portion of the television newscast praying for people and daily events. I still tune in to the local and national news, but I keep my Bible, a globe, and information regarding the missionary work in each country handy. Two excellent sources of prayer info for every country are *Operation World* by Patrick Johnstone and Jason Mandryk, or the *Personal Prayer Diary*, published by Youth With A Mission. I jot notes on potential prayer items and switch off the television after the major stories and the weather. I choose to avoid the second half where reports often are sensationalized spin on the health or science news of the day. I get the same reports from the newspaper where I can focus on the facts apart from the emotionally charged impact of video news.

Spending the rest of that half-hour in prayer serves several purposes. Praying immediately gives God an opportunity to inform my opinions before I form them. I consult with Him as to what should and shouldn't concern me. Interceding on the spot means the items are fresh on my mind and won't be forgotten later

3. Use the daily newspaper to pray for and develop a love for your community. Several times a week, I pray through the items in the newspaper. This can mean prayer for politicians and governments or for victims of earthquakes and landslides. I pray for firefighters, police officers, criminals, and victims alike. Prayer may involve requests for healing for accident victims or wisdom for local teachers and administrators of the public schools. I've prayed for the families of those listed in the obituaries—for comfort and healing. Other times my prayers focus on the poor and the homeless or the teens of my community.

At one Christian school, news items are brought up regularly during morning staff devotions. Individuals introduce headlines from the local paper—an injured toddler in critical condition or the family of a soldier who has been killed in Iraq—to the group for prayer.

Praying through the newspaper has become an exciting opportunity to grow in love for my community and to open myself to the possibility God may wish to use me as an answer to some of these prayers. Besides praying, I've taken actions ranging from personally encouraging someone I know to writing editorials expressing the Christian view on a local issue.

4. Resist letting the news shape your worldview. An interesting exercise on any given day is to ask myself how God might have laid out the newspaper. Would that movie star's love life be on the front page, or would the deaths of thousands in an earthquake overseas have topped the news instead? It's funny how often the world's priorities slip in and become ours.

I became sensitive to this issue through my friend, a missionary with Wycliffe Bible Translators. On furlough in the United States, her heart remained with friends



living in the war-torn Congo. Barb was frustrated that U.S. news coverage of this catastrophic event often was relegated to a small item on a back page.

Now when I read the paper, I ask myself how an event affects missionary work in that area. Does it impact the church in that country? Will persecuted Christians suffer more because of this event? Will Bible translation work be interrupted? Or does this event open the door for Christian workers to come into a closed country and share the gospel?

Most mission agencies have websites where information is available for the countries in which they work. Numerous websites contain information on praying for the world, including www.operationworld.org, www.24-7prayer.com, or www.persecution.com.

5. Take an occasional media fast. This helps keep my media habits in check and provides a regular period of refreshment. Like a Sabbath rest, it's a good reminder that I don't make the world spin, God does.

An exciting benefit of being relatively uninformed during these periods is that I'm more likely to listen to other people relay the events and their opinions *before* I share my own. It's opened my ears to opportunities I would have missed when I was always "in the know" and ready with an answer. I've benefited from listening both to seekers and believers share perspectives that have enriched my own.

I frequently remind myself that God exhorts me to "always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have" (1 Peter 3:15b). But He doesn't say I have to have an answer for everything!

There are many ways to share your news-based prayer ministry with others. Offer to pray through the news with an elderly or shut-in friend. Pray through the news with your older children. Help them develop the habit of intercession and teach them about God's work in the world. *Window on the World*, by Daphne Spraggett with Jill Johnstone, is designed for family prayer on world issues. Start a group that meets to pray through the news. The perspective of others will expand your own.

You can also use the sections of the Sunday paper as guidelines for prayer: When you read the comics, ask God to make you a joyful person; let the home section remind you to pray for the homeless; let the editorials prompt you to ask God to inform your opinions.

You don't have to be a recovering news junkie like I am to begin channeling the news you ingest into prayer action. Waking up to the prayer potential of the news helps me sleep much better at night!



10 Ways to Pray

1. Preselect Scriptures to have handy to pray for leaders, nations, or people groups (Psalm 46:8-10 or Ephesians 1:17-23).
2. When disastrous events occur, pray for Christians in that country to be strong, bold, and comforted. Ask God to use the event to further His kingdom and bring Himself glory. Pray for new openness in the unsaved as well as courage for believers to spread the gospel.
3. Pray for relief workers, firefighters, police officers, and ambulance crews that God will help them handle the stress that accompanies their job. Adopt your local fire or police department and pray for their safety, salvation, and success.
4. In wartime, pray that God will protect women in the war zone. Pray for women who have husbands and sons at war.
5. Pray through birth announcements. Ask God to reach each child with the gospel.
6. Through court reports, pray for wisdom and integrity for lawyers and judges. Ask God to use prison as an opportunity to reach inmates with the gospel. Pray for justice to flood our court system.
7. Sports reports provide an opportunity to pray for Christian athletes to reach maturity in Christ, to be strong in the face of temptation, and to be salt and light to their teammates and the kids who look up to them.
8. Use advertisements to pray for jobs for the unemployed. Ask God to give local merchants generous hearts to help the poor in the community. Ask God to bless those with upright business practices.
9. Use the entertainment section as a reminder to pray that Christian artists, writers, actors, and musicians will be a voice for God in this world.
10. Use the area church listing to pray for church leaders to be people of integrity filled with the Holy Spirit. Pray that local people of faith would bring glory to Christ in the community.

*Lori Roeleveld, a freelance writer, lives with her family in Rhode Island. This article first appeared in the **January/February 2005** issue of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN magazine.*



Thought Provokers

- *What would your husband or best friend say is your attitude toward the news?*
- *In what ways do you think the news shapes your worldview—both positively and negatively?*
- *In what ways can you use the news to impact the world?*





Daughters in Darkness

You can be a shining light in the sexual slave trade.

by Rebecca Price Janney

A psychologist who's spent much of her career working with middle-class abuse victims in the U.S., Diane was in Brazil in 2002 to train local Christian leaders on how to help victims of violence and sexual abuse. That's when a Brazilian pastor approached her and put the predicament of so many of his countrywomen in stark relief. In the small fishing village where he and his wife served, he told her, *all* the men were alcoholics, battered their wives, and sexually abused their daughters. "Can you tell me how to help my people?" the pastor asked.

"Never had I been confronted with such extensive abuse and a lack of resources," remembers Diane. She soon learned Brazil isn't unique. Across the world women are abused and sold into slavery in record numbers.

Confronted by the enormity of the problem, Diane started working with organizations including World Vision and International Justice Mission (IJM). Today she provides training and counseling to those on the front lines of the effort to rescue exploited girls and women in places like the Dominican Republic, Myanmar, and South Africa. TCW recently sat down with Diane to learn more about this global problem and how American Christian women can make a difference.

What did you say to that pastor in Brazil who asked you how to help his people?

After my stunned silence, I told him, "Your very presence in the village brings hope." He and his family demonstrate in the flesh that a different way of life is possible. Change will grow out of his very existence because no one can now say *all* the men are abusers and *all* the women are abused.



Despite these glimmers of hope, the problem is still very real. The global sex trade is a 12-billion-dollar-a-year industry. On the world's black market, human flesh is one of the top three commodities. It's modern slavery in epidemic proportions.

I recently read a profoundly disturbing book, *The Natashas: Inside the New Global Sex Trade* by Victor Malarek, which tells the story of thousands of women and girls from all over Eastern Europe who are lured by the promise of jobs and then sold for sex by organized crime.

How did the situation get so awful?

In many places, violence and incest are part of the culture. Since abuse is so rampant at home, thousands of girls run away to the streets to "escape." Sex trafficking in Brazil is second only to Thailand. Girls are sold off the streets and into the international slave trade, with many exported to Asia at eight or ten years old.

Why isn't this evil stopped?

In his book, Malarek contends that sex slavery is the most important human-rights issue of the twenty-first century. The U.S. has a human-trafficking initiative that seeks to shed light on the problem, but politics keep us from holding other nations, especially allies such as Germany, accountable. Meanwhile, a female is sold every ten minutes in the developing world. Many nonprofit organizations work tirelessly in this area, but the scope of the problem is so vast that a coordinated worldwide effort is necessary to aid these women and girls.

How do you help?

I train social workers so they understand what trauma is and how healing occurs. I also help them care for themselves so they can endure for the long haul. The need is overwhelming; the evil is hideous and frightening. It's easy to begin with good intentions and burn out because you don't understand the emotional, relational, and spiritual work that's necessary to endure.

In the future, I'd love to take in teams of psychologists and social workers to teach and train these helpers. I've started The Place of Refuge, a trauma and training center in inner-city Philadelphia, which I hope will be replicated in urban centers around the world.

Although you work with the caregivers, have you met any of the victims?

Yes. In Myanmar I met six young mothers with small children. I was not unlike them some years ago. They had babies, they loved them, and they wanted them to grow up strong and healthy. They lived in a project outside the capital city with no



running water, little to no sanitation, and rampant disease. Their access to education and job skills is very limited. With tears they told their stories. All of the women had been infected with HIV/AIDS by their husbands and then abandoned.

One of them had her niece with her. Her name was Zin Mar and she was about nine. She was too sick to go to school. Her aunt cared for her as both her parents had died from AIDS. I worked hard to get her to smile, but she wouldn't. She broke my heart with her sad eyes and sick body. As I left, I gave Zin Mar a rose, and she smiled. For me, she represents the girls and women of the world whose lives are being destroyed by evil. That motivates me to do all I can to help.

Most women can't offer the kind of assistance you provide. How can we help?

You can educate yourself about sex trafficking by reading books or inviting representatives from organizations as such IJM to speak at your church. You can write your legislators, urging them to support strong measures against trafficking. I also encourage short-term mission trips to see some of the work abroad and help build homes for aftercare for rescued victims. Christians can provide money for resources and to help caregivers attend conferences in the U.S.

Prayer is also important. Christian women can intercede for those involved in this horrible situation and for their caregivers. The church has a long history of confronting societal plagues and freeing captives. What if, in one of the darkest hours on this planet, the church rose up united and became known for her work with those who are being sold?

Can you give an example of what can happen when Christians get involved?

There was a 14-year-old girl, "Manna," from south Asia, who ran away from home to escape a physically abusive brother. She met a young woman who befriended her and promised her a job. Instead, she forced Manna to become a prostitute. When Manna resisted customers, she was beaten. She endured two nightmarish years as a prostitute.

A few years earlier, IJM had saved a young woman from that brothel, and now she led the Christians back. They rescued Manna and three other girls from a soundproof dungeon. Now Manna is safe in an IJM aftercare home and is going to school to become a social worker. IJM also helped bring the brothel keepers to justice; they're currently in prison

Manna says, "God took me from that place to be here. I'm requesting God to let IJM save even more like me. What is impossible for men is possible for God." There are so many girls out there like Manna; we can ask God how he would use us to help them and their caregivers.



How have you coped with the intense levels of suffering you've witnessed in your work with traumatized people?

Working with evil takes its toll, and my endurance is in direct proportion to my personal relationship with God. He's taught me something about who He is and how to worship Him even in the midst of confronting gross sin. I'm slowly delving into the depths of the Cross and all that it means. Christ has shown me His great love for this world and given me a piece of that love for people of every tribe and nation and tongue.

I rise early every morning to read and pray. God has given me faithful friends with whom I pray weekly. He's given me supportive pastors and a church community that intercedes as I travel. I love Jesus Christ more than words can ever tell and know that the debt I owe is incomprehensible. The privilege of sharing in his burden and the fellowship of his sufferings is an honor.

Shining Light Organizations

- The Place of Refuge, 215-885-1835, www.placeofrefuge.net
- The International Justice Mission, www.ijm.org
- Shared Hope International, www.sharedhope.org
- Initiative Against Sex Trafficking, www.iast.net
- World Vision International, www.wvi.org

Hotline

- 1-888-373-7888; this trafficking information and referral hotline is staffed 24 hours a day and can help someone determine if she's encountered a victim of trafficking and can connect victims to assistance organizations.



Books

- *On the Threshold of Hope: Opening the Door to Hope and Healing for Survivors of Sexual Abuse* by Dr. Diane Langberg
- *Good News About Injustice: Witness of Courage in a Hurting World* by Gary Haugen

*Rebecca Price Janney, PhD, lives with her family in Pennsylvania. This article first appeared in the **November/December 2006** issue of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN magazine.*

Thought Provokers

- *Before reading this article, what did you know about the sexual slave trade? What new information did you learn?*
- *One of the rescued victims quoted Luke 18:27, "What is impossible for men is possible for God." What are the implications of this verse in light of the pervasiveness of the sexual slave trade worldwide?*
- *In what ways will you be a shining light in the sexual slave trade?*





Everyday Heroes

Meet three women who are making a difference in our world.

by Vicki Cox, Amy M. Tatum, and Kyle Sackowski

For nine months of the year, Tamra Pearson has three children calling her “Mom.” But when summer comes, she listens for the lilting voice of a fourth child—Alyona Burak.

Since 1997, the Pearson family has opened their hearts and home to a girl from another continent. Alyona is one of 600,000 children who inherited a horrific legacy from the nuclear reactor explosion at Chernobyl 15 years ago. Alyona’s environment is dangerously polluted—except while she lives with the Pearsons. Summertime in the U.S. gives her immune system time away from her contaminated environment, and a chance to thwart the threat of leukemia and thyroid cancer, two diseases that run rampant among the native children.

The Pearsons learned of children such as Alyona in 1994 when a member of their church sponsored a Belarussian child through the Children of Chernobyl organization. The nonprofit group seeks families to care for children ages 8 to 13. It funds the child’s airfare and insurance, and provides moral support during their time in the U.S. The program’s goal is to help healthy children stay that way.

And today, thanks to Tamra and her family’s efforts, Alyona is a healthy, vivacious teenager—a far cry from the bedraggled nine year old Tamra met in 1997. Alyona was terrified by strangers and a language she didn’t understand. “I loved her instantly,” says Tamra, “but at the same time I thought, *What have I gotten myself into?*”

At first, helping Alyona wasn’t easy. Communicating that first summer was a painful page-by-page journey through a Russian/English dictionary. Alyona missed her mother and wanted to return to her village. But the Pearsons didn’t give up. “Sometimes I’d get a glimpse of the light in her,” says Tamra. “It was so beautiful. I knew we were doing the right thing.”



As Tamra exposed Alyona to new experiences and taught her about American culture, Alyona's English became fluent, and this once-picky eater began trying many new foods. She's still a willowy size 0, but Alyona gains about 10 pounds during her stay. The results of a clean environment, good food, and an understanding family are encouraging. Her thyroid tests show no potential cancers.

Between summers, with no phone or reliable postal service, Alyona's host family has little contact.

"It's hard to send her back," says Tamra. "But she's from a loving family who cares enough to send her here. That's the ultimate gift of love. I feel honored each summer to be entrusted with the precious gift of Alyona."

HOW YOU CAN GET INVOLVED:

Children of Chernobyl

United States Charitable Fund

P.O. Box 6232

Youngstown, OH 44501

www.chernobyl.org

Headline News

A native Puerto Rican, Camille Solberg understands the need for information to reach Spanish-speaking communities in the United States. After moving from Puerto Rico to Spain and then to Washington, D.C., Camille finally settled in Wisconsin with her husband 11 years ago. Since she's been there, she's noticed an influx of Hispanics to the area—particularly in the last three years. These immigrants—most of whom speak no English—are left stranded when it comes to finding jobs and learning about the U.S.

"There was nothing to help these people become acclimated to a different culture. I wanted to find a way to help other Hispanics make a life for themselves while sharing the gospel with them," says Camille. Out of her desire to empower and minister to the Hispanics in her area, she began the first Christian Spanish newspaper in her state—*La Voz Cristiana*, or *The Christian Voice*.



The paper launched in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, this past spring with the help of Alex Arroyave, who runs a similar paper in California. Camille discovered Alex through an Internet list server of Christian newspapers and publishers. He taught Camille how to introduce the paper to the community by showing her where to distribute it and what types of articles to print. Following his suggestions, Camille began writing the paper out of her home.

“The paper’s primary goal is to share the gospel message—which is printed on each edition’s front page—while providing news updates, political information, and employment opportunities,” explains Camille. “I’ve even been invited to press conferences at the White House to get information and write articles on issues that affect Hispanics.”

To fund the paper, Camille contacted local churches who gave willingly—they also wanted to help Hispanics connect with the community. “It’s fabulous to be in a place that has a need God lets you fulfill. I teach school, host radio programs, rear four children with my husband, and have many other responsibilities, but if just one person becomes a Christian because of this paper, it will have been worth it.”

After the eight-page monthly paper is printed, Camille and other volunteers distribute it for free to churches, restaurants, gas stations, and libraries. “I don’t want anyone to have to pay for the paper. I think the gospel’s free to all people, so free it goes.” The paper’s been well received by the community, and Camille hopes to increase the current circulation of 1,000 when she gets extra funding.

“It’s incredible when I hear of changes in people’s lives—especially someone accepting Christ—because of something they read in the paper,” says Camille. “I thank God for using me this way.”

HOW YOU CAN GET INVOLVED:

To start a similar paper in your area, contact Alex Arroyave

c/o Witness Publishing

605 State St., El Centro, CA 92243

760-337-9200; Fax: 760-337-0088

Or email Camille at Vozchristianawi@aol.com



Building Bridges Between Cultures

As a Thai American, Janet Balasiri uses her culture and heritage to help other Asians at Indiana University leave their comfort zones and learn about Christianity. Janet's a minister for InterVarsity Christian Fellowship—an evangelical campus mission—and teaches students from many different backgrounds about Christ. "Talking with students about their families and embracing their native culture are important in leading them to a relationship with God," she says.

Janet grew up in Indianapolis in a traditional Thai family with Buddhist roots. When she was 10, her father died in a traumatic car accident, and she began to question her spiritual beliefs. When she grew older, against her mother's wishes, Janet went to a Christian church where she discovered she could have a relationship with a personal God through Jesus Christ. After graduating from college, she joined InterVarsity to help other Asians who also grew up in a Buddhist home.

Working out of her home and raising her own salary, Janet's sacrificed many material riches for the reward of helping an ethnically diverse campus bond together through Jesus Christ.

Roger Lin, an InterVarsity member and senior at IU, says, "Because Janet's an Asian American leader and close to my age, I'm comfortable talking about my background and studying the Bible with her."

While Janet mentors many Asian Americans to help strengthen their faith, she also leads a multiracial Bible study on campus to evangelize and teach students to draw together in God despite their ethnic differences. Janet also facilitates questions and teaches many white students about Asian heritage by holding potluck dinners at her home. As the cultural barriers lessen, students are able to unite in their common beliefs.

Others who learn about Janet's hard work are impressed with the difference she's making on campus. Her mentor, Donna Dong, said, "Janet's a vibrant Christian and strong role model to minority students. The fact that she lives out her faith and goes against the stereotypes about different cultures not wanting to mix gives people a more accurate view of the Christian faith."



HOW YOU CAN GET INVOLVED:

InterVarsity Christian Fellowship

6400 Schroeder Rd.

P.O. Box 7895

Madison, WI 53707-7895

608-274-9001

www.ivcf.org

For cross-cultural ministries, email Terrell Smith at tsmith@ivcf.org

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Thought Provokers

- *Which of these women reminds you most of yourself? Why?*
- *What is a way you can impact people from another culture in your own country, as these women did?*
- *How can you increase your involvement with people from other cultures or countries?*



FEATURES



A Recipe for Freedom

How a women's ministry stirs up hope for the women of Afghanistan.

by Edie Witner

While driving through Holmes County in eastern Ohio, it is not uncommon to see beautiful rolling hills dotted with cattle, sheep, and even llamas. But to tourists, the most intriguing sight of all may be the Amish people, traveling along in their horse-drawn buggies, plowing the fields, or selling their furniture and crafts. They are everywhere. In fact, Holmes County has the largest settlement of Amish in the United States.

The Amish are a people who hold to the traditions of their forefathers, including pacifism. And so, one would think that this rural part of the United States would be largely disconnected from the turmoil of the terrorist acts of September 11, 2001, and the ensuing war against the Taliban and Al Qaeda. This, however, is not the case.

Set in the heart of Amish country is a 500-member nondenominational church called Berlin Christian Fellowship, which is filled with a group of enterprising women who are eager to share their faith and love with the women of Afghanistan. And they're doing it in the form of a book—a cookbook, to be exact. Their colorful tome, *A Well-Watered Garden Cookbook*, is the culmination of more than a year of prayers, hard work, and God's surprises.

Behind the Veil

In the summer and fall of 2000, when the Taliban's persecution of the women of Afghanistan was becoming more apparent to the outside world, a handful of Berlin Christian Fellowship women gathered to pray and fast for their upcoming women's conference. During that period, one of the women, Naomi Gingerich, had a dream. She dreamed of an Afghanistan woman clothed in a dark, full-length veil—only her eyes were exposed, and there were hordes of other veiled women behind her.



“As I looked into the woman’s eyes, I saw tremendous sorrow, despair, and hopelessness,” Gingerich recalls. The bleak look on the woman’s face pierced her heart so much that she could almost feel the despair herself. In the dream, she asked the woman, “Why don’t you take the veils off and be free?” But she received no answer, just a blank stare of sadness. This dream inspired Gingerich to research the plight of women in Afghanistan and to later suggest that a time of prayer for them be included at the women’s conference.

During the conference, Gingerich told the assembled women about the dream and spoke about some of the persecution the Afghanistan women were suffering. Then they prayed.

As Erma Yoder listened to Gingerich, something profound stirred deep within her. “It broke my heart to hear about the bondage those women were in,” she says. “I wanted to help set them free.” She continued to pray for the women of Afghanistan after the conference, longing for a way to reach out to them.

Miraculous Ingredients

Soon after the conference, Yoder had the idea of creating a cookbook that could be sold to raise money for the women of Afghanistan. She held the idea in her heart until one Sunday morning several weeks later when her pastor, Tim Troyer, spoke to his congregation about pursuing their dreams.

“It’s as if he were speaking directly to me,” she says. “I realized at that moment that my dream of helping Afghanistan’s women by creating a cookbook was given to me by God, and it was something I had to pursue.”

Several other women joined Yoder in spearheading the cookbook. In November 2000, they began eagerly collecting recipes from members of the congregation. They posted notices on the church bulletin board, announced their mission during Sunday-morning announcements, and passed out forms for people to write recipes on. The entire church was excited as they watched the women’s ministry pursue its goal.

The book’s title—*A Well-Watered Garden Cookbook*—was inspired by Isaiah 58:10-12, which speaks of satisfying the needs of the oppressed and rebuilding a devastated community.

Remarkably, the book was in its final stages of production when the tragic events of September 11, 2001, shook the world. The book was finally released in December 2001, just weeks after the U.S.-led war on terrorism had begun in Afghanistan. If nothing else, the extraordinary timing of events confirmed God’s hand in the project.



After production costs, all profits from the book go to the women of Afghanistan. The women's ministry of Berlin Christian Fellowship pray that the sales of this cookbook will help Afghanistan's women and girls achieve liberation from the tremendous persecution they have suffered in the past. Currently, the women's ministry is directing funds from the cookbook to aid groups that are working with a school for women and children. The group is also laying the groundwork for indigenous businesses, such as small bakeries, which will enable Afghan women to support themselves and their children.

One step of faith was all it took to bring a miracle to pass, says Erma Yoder. "When we're willing to be obedient to God's leading, there is no limit to what he can accomplish through us."

Edie Witner is a writer from Holmesville, Ohio. This article first appeared in the May/June 2003 issue of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN magazine.

Thought Provokers

- *How have you seen God's timing at work in an amazing way, as the women of Berlin Christian Fellowship did?*
- *How does the women's ministry at your church reach out to women around the world?*
- *How can you use your talents, hobbies, or spiritual gifts to bring hope to the oppressed women of another culture?*



RESOURCES



Additional Resources

Books to help you further


🌀 **The AIDS Crisis: What We Can Do** by Deborah Dortzbach and W. Meredith Long (Inter-Varsity, 2006; 132 pages). Over forty million people today are living with HIV/AIDS. In 2005, three million people died of AIDS, half a million of them were children. The reality is dark, but the church is bringing light into the darkness of the AIDS crisis all over the world. Here is a book to help us see how the light of Christ shining through his church can change the course of the current AIDS crisis.

🌀 **Cross-Cultural Connections: Stepping Out & Fitting In Around the World** by Duane Elmer (Inter-Varsity, 2002; 200 pages). Whether you're embarking on a short-term missions trip, traveling for business, or just vacationing, you'll inevitably face social contrasts and different ways of thinking. Filled with real-life illustrations and practical exercises, Elmer's expert guidance helps you communicate effectively, avoid cultural faux pas, establish trust, and truly become an ambassador for Christ.

🌀 **Faithful Women & Their Extraordinary God** by Noel Piper (Crossway, 2005; 160). These are the stories of five ordinary women who trusted in their extraordinary God as He led them to do great things for His Kingdom. Learning about these women will challenge readers to make a difference for Christ in their families, in the church and throughout the world.

🌀 **It Only Takes One** by Gary Whetstone (Whitaker House, 2003; 269 pages). In this book, Dr. Gary Whetstone unveils the truth that God created you as His champion and uniquely fashioned you to fit into His master design for the universe. It's time to realize that with God, it only takes one to make a difference in this world.



 **Operation World, 21st Century Edition** by Patrick Johnstone and Jason Mandryk (Authentic, 2001; 800 pages). Johnstone and Mandryk have put together a prayer guide covering the entire populated world. Whether you are an intercessor praying behind the scenes for world change, or a missionary reaping the benefits of intercession, Operation World will give you the information necessary to bring the good news to those who have not heard it. It offers demographic and geographical information for every country in the world, as well as answers to prayer (for applicable countries), and prayer requests.

