

Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide **By Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn**

Discussion Questions

Chapter 1 — Emancipating Twenty-First-Century Slaves

By Barbara Anderson

"All anyone should do is use their gifts in what way they can," (*quote by Natalie from the Overlake School in Washington State*)

As I read Chapter 1 and the story of Meena, I couldn't believe the strength of this young woman and others like her who endure so much in this world. As a Christian, God has called me to be a source of light in the midst of this darkness. As you read Chapter 1, what were your thoughts and feelings?

The authors do show us hope through the Overland Park School and their support of the school in Cambodia. But sometimes hope is not enough when we hear the story of Kun Sokkea. As American Baptist women, how can we bring hope to the world?

Chapter 2 — Prohibition and Prostitution

By Virginia Holmstrom

As I read chapter 2, I could almost feel the authors' despair (and even anger) about the discouragements of fighting sex trafficking. If AIDS doesn't kill those who are enslaved in brothels, then drug addiction or hopelessness or bribery of police and officials surely will. There are so many challenges that enslave victims of trafficking and prostitution. The authors make the point that we must "change the reality" of the situation in order to make a difference. For example, in Sweden, the government "changed the reality" by deciding that the prostitutes were not the problem; the johns who were buying sex were the problem. So Sweden's laws now protect the victims of prostitution and the johns are prosecuted. It's made a difference in Sweden. The authors say that other European countries have noticed Sweden's success and are moving toward that model, and, "We would also like to see some American states try to determine if it is feasible in the United States as well."

Suggested activity: Google your state laws on prostitution and see if you can learn who is arrested and prosecuted in your state: those who are prostituted, or those who buy the sex?

On page 32-33, the authors discuss the impact of the Trafficking in Persons report, known as the TIP report, which the U.S. State Department publishes annually (since 2000). The TIP report has "changed reality" by putting human trafficking on the world's agenda.

Have you seen a copy of the TIP report? The 2010 TIP report included, for the first time, statistics on human trafficking in the U.S. You can Google "TIP report" and scroll through a PDF copy, right on your computer! But I don't suggest printing it, as it is as thick as a phone book.

The *Half the Sky* authors talk about the infamous red light district in Calcutta, called "Sonagachi", on pages 27-31. I know a Christian business man who is working to "change reality" in Sonagachi. His name is Kerry Hilton, and you may know something about him, too, even if you don't recognize his name. He and his wife Annie started a business in Sonagachi. The business is called Freetset. He employs women who worked in Sonagachi's brothels. In their business, the women make jute bags. We've had Freetset Bags at our National Women's Conference in the past. American Baptist Home Mission Societies made Freetset Bags available to us this past summer. Kerry's missional business plan is to "change reality" in Sonagachi by transforming it from a community of brothels to a community where women are employed in jobs that build their esteem and respect.

You can learn about Kerry Hilton and the Freetset company and its reason for being. Visit www.freetsetglobal.com

You can help Freeset "change reality" in Sonagachi by leading your region leaders to place an order for Freeset totebags for a region convention or conference.

What are some other possible ways we might help remove the barriers that oppress women and girls, and how we might help someone climb over those barriers?

Chapter 3 — Learning to Speak Up

By Sandy Hasenauer

There are so many things we could discuss in this chapter, I find it hard to even know where to start. I think I've taken from this chapter three main points.

1. The importance of education in helping to empower women and girls to "find their voices," (p. 47). In our studies of trafficking, we've learned that one of the risk factors for women and girls to be trafficked is a lack of education which goes hand-in-hand with a lack of economic opportunity. But I hadn't really thought about the value of education in helping women feel more confident and assertive in standing up for themselves. What would it mean to a community if education were a primary focus?
2. Social entrepreneurship as compared to traditional aid, (p. 54 and following). When we read about problems in communities, our minds tend to go immediately to aid programs and aid organizations and we reach into our pockets to give charitable contributions. That's great—and definitely serves a purpose. But what about business as a solution? I think the word "business" can leave a bad taste in our mouths sometimes—especially after the recent economic crisis. But in many communities, social enterprise—business with the intention of creating economic opportunity—is what's going to help people faster and more long-term than aid. Micro-enterprise, "business as mission...." Were you taken aback or surprised by anything in that portion of the chapter? Are you a business person yourself? How could you use those skills and experience in ministry? Also, how can our shopping dollars be put to effective use?
3. I love the George Bernard Shaw quotation that starts the chapter. "All progress, therefore, depends on unreasonable people." All of us—especially women—are taught to be polite, to be nice. We've read in this chapter how that can affect women facing these issues, but I'd also turn it back on ourselves. How has that, perhaps, hindered us in ministry?

Chapter 4 — Rule by Rape

By Barbara Anderson

After reflecting on Chapter 4 and the issues of violence that women face around the world, I can't believe the kinds of violence that women face daily in their cultures. In some countries stealing an item is worse than stealing a person. How do you break culture/tradition in countries that are foreign to us? This quote was key for me: "Empowering women begins with education". Mukhtar was such an inspiration. After her violent ordeal and her life being threatened by the government, she continued to open schools, get education for girls and boys, and speak up for the rights of women in Pakistan. I think as American Baptist Women we need to continue to understand the plight of women in other countries and their traditions/culture and how it affects them. We need to pray to discern how God can use us as instruments to provide opportunities for education for girls so they can change the laws and culture of their country to end the violence. What do you think?

Chapter 5 — The Shame of "Honor"

By Virginia Holmstrom

Wow, this short chapter (pages 81-92) is packed with information and stories that connect with our "Break the Chains and Stop the Pain" emphasis on violence against women and girls. The authors dive right into the topic of honor killings, one of the major reasons for violence against women in the Middle East, and which results in 5,000 to 6,000 deaths a year. It was mentioned on page 82 that cell phone-users in a

crowd in Iraq in 2007 recorded video images of the stoning of a woman named Du'a Aswad. I googled "Du'a Aswad"; in less than a second, 64,000 links were available. While I wouldn't particularly suggest you watching amateur video clips of a public stoning, I would recommend to you a 9-minute CNN segment from London that explains what "honor killings" are and provides discussion with a guest from Amnesty International: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UGtRVugNjcY&NR=1>.

Violence against women and girls comes closer to home for American Baptists in Kristof & WuDunn's discussion of rape used as a weapon of war in Congo (pages 84-87), because we have relationships with Baptist women in that country. (Remember, though, that Congo is a huge country; the Western Congo Baptist Community with which we are most familiar is as far away from the fighting in Goma as New York City is to Kansas City.) We learn from reading page 84-87 that Congolese women, including girls of 14 and even children of 6, are raped by Congolese militias intent on flaunting their power. In 2008 the United Nations formally declared rape to be a weapon of war.

As always, *Half the Sky* co-authors end a brutally-telling chapter with words of hope and encouragement. Read pages 90-92, which tell the story of Harper, a 23-year old American woman, fresh out of college, who went to live in Goma, D.R. Congo, to volunteer at a hospital there. She started a school at the hospital for children waiting for medical treatment, and she started a program to teach skills to women awaiting surgery.

I have a dream for AB Women's Ministries: that one day our new Women and Girls Mission Fund will give us the means to commission and send to the valleys of oppression young women like Harper, who yearn to turn oppression into opportunity for women and girls worldwide. Do you also dream like this? What are your thoughts?

Chapter 6 — Maternal Mortality—One Woman a Minute

By Sandy Hasenauer

How many of you—if you're not trained medical professionals—were aware of "obstetric fistulas" prior to the last couple of years? Raise your hands.

My hand would be down.

Yes, I've had two children and there were some health issues related to my pregnancies, but nowhere did I ever read about obstetric fistulas as a possible outcome. Nope—it was, "if you go beyond your due date, we'll schedule a C-section." It seemed somehow so routine. I know there are risks—I had a good friend experiencing life-threatening complications with her pregnancy. But she was surrounded by excellent medical care and a very supportive ring of family and friends.

But that's not at all the case in many countries in the world. As I became aware of maternal health issues from a global perspective I was astounded. This chapter brought it all home to me.

I had my own annual appointment with my OB/GYN this week and ended up in conversation with the nurse practitioner about obstetric fistula and maternal health. She told me that she used to go out on speaking engagements on issues of domestic violence or maternal health, and would ask audiences, "Which is the most oppressed group of people in the world?" Only rarely would audiences answer, "Women." And yet....

I was struck by a few things in this chapter.

1. What more could the Western world (in our case, the U.S.) be doing to help eradicate obstetric fistula in developing countries? If not from a governmental perspective, from an individual—person to person—perspective?
2. What could each of us as women be doing to address global issues of maternal health? I was very taken by the discussion in this chapter of "out of the box" solutions such as uniforms for girls in school. There are a lot of facets to the problem. Are you being drawn to a particular facet as you continue to read?
3. Why do we relate better to an individual's story than to statistics or an awareness of a global problem? The studies that are stated in the book of levels of giving based on different approaches

was interesting—especially the twist about doing a math problem first. What does that mean about our own interaction with the problem? If we have difficulty wrapping our head around an issue, what might we do?

Chapter 7 — Why Do Women Die in Childbirth?

By Barbara Anderson

When I think of my life and compare my opportunities to Prudence (in this chapter) there is such an imbalance evident of the health options that each of us had. I suffer from infertility, and for years I had the best medical technology at my fingertips working to assist me in achieving a pregnancy and to sustain it (all of which my insurance pays for). Then I think of someone like Prudence who needed some basic medical attention to assist her when things went wrong; even when she finally got to a clinic, she received no respect, received treatment too late, and went home to die. The story of Prudence will always have a place in my heart to remind me that all women need and deserve adequate healthcare. Praise God for women like Edna who is using her voice and her gifts for women in her part of the world to have proper healthcare. As we give to our Women and Girls Mission Fund and continue our Break the Chains initiative, we will have opportunities to empower women like Edna, or create ministries on our own to assist women in getting the care that they need. This chapter has been a powerful one for me. What about you?

Chapter 8 — Family Planning and the “God Gulf”

By Virginia Holmstrom

Chapter 8 (pages 131 to 148) of *Half of Sky* offers challenging thoughts for us because the topic is family planning. Family planning is not a bad thing. Family planning and reproductive health services are sometimes the only medical care that women in some parts of the world will ever receive.

But, as the authors point out in the first couple of pages of chapter 8, American politics and religion can tip the scales so that family planning services are abruptly defunded, and a consequence is that those policies leave vulnerable the women worldwide who need those reproductive health services.

On page 134 of *Half the Sky*, Kristof/WuDunn write: "One of the scandals of the early twenty-first century is that 122 million women around the world want contraception and can't get it" ... and "Up to 40 percent of all pregnancies globally are unplanned or unwanted," and "almost half of those result in induced abortions."

Dr. Marian Boehr, a beloved American Baptist medical missionary in India for most of her life, now retired, is a strong proponent of family planning services. Interested persons can read her views in her book, *Medicine and Miracles Amid the Multitudes: The Adventures of a Missionary Doctor in India*.

How do you respond to chapter 8?

To begin our discussion, how might American Baptist women respond to the cry of our sisters worldwide for family planning education and services?

Chapter 9 — Is Islam Misogynistic?

By Sandy Hasenauer

Chapter 9 is, like most of these chapters, a challenging read. However, it's challenging for different reasons because, on top of the issues at hand, we have religious questions entering the fray. Personally, I thought the chapter presented a well-balanced discussion—but I'd love to have the opportunity to talk through this chapter with a Muslim woman to get her perspective as well.

That being said, there were three quotations which really stood out for me in this chapter.

1. "In general, the best clue to a nation's growth and development potential is the status and role of women," (p. 160). I found the whole idea of violence, terrorism, and fundamentalism as it related to demographics fascinating. I'd never looked at it that way before. I've never really liked the idea that women are a "civilizing influence" (because normally it's used to refer to women having a

good eye for decorating or cleaning up after men), but in this chapter, I could see the case being made.

2. "'You educate a boy, and you're educating an individual....You educate a girl, and you're educating an entire village," (p. 161). This African proverb lays the foundation for efforts around girls' education. Every chapter of this book seems to circle its way back around to educating girls somehow or another, or maybe I just see that because that's a big issue for me personally.
3. "The best role for Americans who want to help Muslim women isn't holding the microphone at the front of the rally but writing the checks and carrying the bags in the back," (p. 162-3). One of the reasons I so strongly support American Baptist international missionaries is because the ABC missiology involves supporting and partnering with local efforts, rather than going in and saying, "We know what you need." It's so hard to not rush in and take charge in some situations. I also think that occasionally we fall into the trap of thinking that we know what the needs are and have all the best solutions. But the fact of the matter is, we don't necessarily know the needs or have the solutions. And, even if we do, there are places we're just not able to be effective—we're seen as outsiders, our motives automatically suspect. That's a hard pill to swallow, but there it is. It gives us the opportunity to take a step back and support and empower others. Maybe not even "empower," since they may already be empowered and just need us to, like the book suggests, write checks and carry the bags.

How do you respond to those quotations or thoughts? What stood out for you in this chapter?

Chapter 10 — Investing in Education

By Sandy Hasenauer

The story of Dai Manju, while seemingly miraculous, is just one of many stories of what can happen when a girl is able to access education. And yet, this seemingly simple thing—something we take for granted in the United States—can be unreachable for so many millions of girls, and children in general, through our world. And it seems like it would have a simple solution as well, as the authors point out: "Build more schools!" But it's not quite that simple. The chapter outlines only a few of the many issues at work: "One study in India found that 12 percent of all schools were closed at any time because teachers had not gone to work that day," (p. 171), and, later, that empowering women (through such things as girls' education), "is particularly challenging in that it involves tinkering with the culture, religion, and family relations of a society that we often don't fully understand," (p. 177). Even within areas where schools are present, things such as the sexual abuse by teachers and the relationship of grades and scholarships to sexual favors (p. 182 and following) creates situations whereby the very aid that has been given can create additional abusive and exploitive circumstances for the girls the aid is intending to help.

But there are so many facets to the problem that can be addressed: deworming, iodization of salt, menstruation management, and programs such as *Oportunidas* in Mexico that offers cash grants for education and health care.

What in this chapter surprised you? What would you like to learn more about? What are your feelings about programs such as *Oportunidas* (which is now being used in other developing countries and, in New York City)?

How can American Baptist women become actively involved in investing in education?

Chapter 11 — Microcredit: The Financial Revolution

By Virginia Holmstrom

In chapter 11, Kristof and WuDunn cite numerous situations in which children and families are the benefactors when a woman has control of a little bit of money. I appreciated the story about Goretti from Burundi (pages 199-203) because it illustrates what a huge difference Goretti has made in her family and community by means of an initial \$2 loan. At the UN Commission on the Status of Women event in New York City this month, I learned more about the struggle of women in many cultures to gain rights to inherit property. (The discussion reminded me of the Bible story in Numbers 27:1-11, where the daughters of Zelophehad petitioned for their right to inherit their father's land.)

My specific question to you for discussion: Kiva.com provides online lending opportunities. I invested \$25 through Kiva.com to contribute to a business microloan that empowered a woman in Africa to stock her market stall with items to sell. Within several months, she had paid back the loan in full, and I turned around and lent the \$25 to a woman in Ecuador needing help to expand her business. Over and over, my \$25 has been lent to and repaid by seven different women who own businesses. Kristof/WuDunn tell us that women are more likely than a man to use their earnings to buy nutritious food for their family, buy school uniforms and supplies to send their children to school, etc. There are a rising number of online lending opportunities like Kiva. Do you think that AB Women's Ministries should promote these and encourage American Baptist women to personally invest in a microloan? Do you think we should engage in conversations with International Ministries to explore microlending to women in Baptist communities in other countries? We are contributing new microloan enterprises to an organization through some of the Break the Chains grants given over the past three years. What about offering practical ways for individual American Baptist women to empower a woman to begin an income-producing livelihood? Thoughts?

Chapter 12 — The Axis of Equality

By Sandy Hasenauer

I've read this book a few times now over the last 18 months or so, and this chapter always stands out to me as the "Yes, But..." chapter. In both examples of China and Rwanda, *yes*, women have made great strides in equality, *but* there are still so many issues in these countries that we can't turn a blind eye to. That just goes to show that there are no simple issues, right?

In any case, what a perfect follow-up to the micro-lending conversation this is. The book makes the point in this chapter that women made great strides in equality once they were allowed to have a significant economic impact on their country. And we've certainly read story after story of how an individual woman gained more personal authority in her family or in her village or community as she was able to earn money for the family and bring business to the community.

So let's continue that conversation. Look at the example of Women to Women International. Look at Kiva. Look at other organizations which do direct loans to individuals to allow those individuals to set themselves up in business. But also look at the support systems also present. Women to Women Internat'l has a school/training program built in. Cash isn't the only tool prospective entrepreneurs need—so are education, training, support.

How can AB Women's Ministries engage in this issue?

Chapter 13 — Grassroots vs. Treetops

By Barbara Anderson

Well, we are nearing the end of the book. One more chapter to go. I hope this book has been eye-opening, reflective, and has given you ideas of ways American Baptist women can reach out to women and girls all over the world.

As I reflect on Chapter 13, it is all about the power of education and empowerment; empowerment for people to be able to make educated decisions that affect their lives. As women are educated, they understand the issues surrounding the violence of genital cuttings. It is also about relationships. It is not about us coming in and telling them what to do, but about us building relationships and working with them side-by-side and educating them. Then, women and girls have the power to make their own decisions and help themselves and others. In 2007, 66 million girls do not have access to education in communities

"Half the Sky" Discussion Questions
www.abwministries.org
American Baptist Women's Ministries
Posted December 2011

around the world. I am excited when I hear young women like the members of our national leadership team of AB GIRLS and my own daughter speak. They realize the power of education and want to reach out so girls just like them can have the opportunities they have. I am so proud of the AB GIRLS ministry and the girls we are reaching and what they will continue to accomplish in the days ahead.

Share your thoughts on Chapter 13 and the book and how God may be placing a new passion on your heart. Blessings!

Chapter 14 — What You Can Do

By Virginia Holmstrom

Here we are at the final chapter of *Half the Sky*. Wow! We did it!

Chapter 14 is entitled "What You Can Do" and it gives us some good practical ideas and building blocks for further discussion and consideration as an organization. The authors voice their hope to see a broad movement emerge to battle gender inequality globally, and to push for education and opportunities for girls around the world. That movement has indeed begun and is building momentum. Praise God that we are in that movement.

Recently, I had the opportunity to attend a meeting in New York City with staff from other denominations' women's ministries to talk about expanding the "Women's Funding Network", a consortium of women's funds used to empower oppressed women and girls. Many of the funds have benefited from million dollar gift donors. Believe me, there is interest and momentum all around us to address the empowerment of women and girls worldwide.

Women, it is time. It is time for us to begin presenting to American Baptist women and church groups suggestions and opportunities to get involved and do something to help turn oppression into opportunity for women and girls worldwide.

Which of the suggestions in the final chapter do you believe would have integrity for AB Women's Ministries to follow through on? Please comment and be a part of the discussion.

But don't stop reading! There is a short appendix that follows Chapter 14, with lots of helpful websites. And you can add to that list the websites of our American Baptist mission partners, too.

This document has been adapted from the Half the Sky book discussion on the national AB Women's Ministries board, led by the AB Women's Ministries national president, Barbara Anderson (2009-2012), executive director Virginia Holmstrom, and associate executive director Sandra Hasenauer, in the spring of 2011.