



Discussion Guide

The Origin of this Guide

In September of 2009, Global Women Board of Directors member Rev. Jana Williams finished reading *Half the Sky* just before the annual Global Voices Summit. She was so moved by the book that she enthusiastically recommended it. At the conclusion of the event one woman commented on her evaluation: “I had just finished reading *Half the Sky* and it seemed that everything I heard at the conference went along with the book – right on target with needs of girls and women in the world. Thank you for putting so much time and effort into the program and everything!”

Recognizing that this book was something all globally-minded persons should read, Jana was asked to write a discussion guide. And here it is! Global Women is aware that as you read *Half the Sky* you may need help sorting out all you are thinking and feeling. This guide is a tool to help you do just that. Whether you study the book alone or discuss it as part of a Global Women Group, book club, Women’s Ministry, missions group, Sunday School class, or among a circle of friends, you will be challenged by the oppression as well as the opportunities for women everywhere.

Note: the page numbers listed are for the 2009 hardback edition of the book.

Introduction

Had you ever heard of *The Girl Effect* before reading the Introduction? Watch the video at www.thegirleffect.org or watch it again if you have seen it before.

Pg. xiii

“Rath’s saga offers a glimpse of the brutality inflicted routinely on women and girls in much of the world.” After all that she went through ... kidnappings, repeated rapes, life threatening beatings, bondage ... where do you think Rath’s hopeful spirit and optimism come from? What do you imagine her view of God is like?

Pg. xiv

“...as many infant girls die **every week** in China as protesters died in the one incident at Tiananmen.” If you are old enough to remember the Tiananmen Square protests, where were you when it was happening? What do you remember feeling as you watched it play out on live television? Do you remember lifting up prayers at the time? If so, for whom, for what? Now reflect on the infant girls dying EACH WEEK in China? Where is the news coverage? Where is the outrage? What prayers have been lifted up on their behalf?

Pg. xiv

“Less than 1% of U.S. foreign aid is specifically targeted to women and girls.”

In light of the statistics chronicling atrocities committed against women and girls, what does this figure represent to you?

Pg. xv

“About 107 million females are missing from the globe today.....Every year, at least another 2 million girls worldwide disappear because of gender discrimination.”

What will it take to change this? Is government the only institution big enough to handle these types of matters? What should the role of your denomination’s missionaries in these countries be, if any? Can your Global Women Group make a difference? What steps need to be taken now?

Pg. xv

Look again at the picture of Naeema Azar and her twelve year old son, Ahmed Shah. What do you see?

Pg. xvi

“The best estimate is that a little Indian girl dies from discrimination every four minutes.”

Why do you think the mothers participate in this kind of gender- based cruelty?

Pg. xvii

“It appears that more girls have been killed in the last fifty years, precisely because they were girls, than men were killed in all the wars of the twentieth century.” On a scale of one to ten, how shocking was this information? Consider the wars of the twentieth century. Think of all of the funerals and flag-draped coffins. Who is taking note of the deaths of these girls? Who is grieving?

Pg. xvii

“More girls are killed in this routine “gendercide” in any one decade than people were slaughtered in all of the genocides of the twentieth century.”

What are the genocides of the twentieth century? What had been done to stop them? What has been done to prevent them from happening again? How does this compare to the “gendercide” that is occurring right now?

Pg. xviii

“Women aren’t the problem but the solution. The plight of girls is no more a tragedy than an opportunity.”

What do you think the authors meant when they stated this as the central truth of the book?



Pg. xx

What are the reasons development experts now say that girls and women are the key to solving societal problems? Do you agree/disagree?

Pg. xxi

“Empowering girls, some in the military argued, would disempower terrorists.”

Are you surprised by this statement coming from military analysts? What are your thoughts?

Pg. xxii

“Honor killings, sexual slavery, and genital cutting may seem to Western readers to be tragic but inevitable in a world far, far away.”

Does this statement resonate with you? Explain.

Pg. xxiii

“We hope to recruit you to join an incipient movement to emancipate women and fight global poverty by unlocking women’s power as economic catalysts.”

Are you willing to participate in this movement? Do you need more information? Is this a movement that churches should join, should lead? What about your Global Women Group?

Global Women affirms the United Nation’s Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Your participation in the fulfillment of these goals will make you a part of this movement. The 2010 Global Women (GW) *Prayer Guide* is designed to lead the pray-er to increased awareness of the global condition affecting women and direct them to specific prayer needs. This piece may be downloaded from the GW Web site (www.globalwomengo.org) or requested from the GW office (globalwomen@globalwomengo.org or 205.663.0505).

Chapter 1

Pg. 11

The authors list the reasons for the rise of sex slavery as the fall of communism, globalization, and AIDS. Were you aware that sexual slavery exists today? Would you add anything to this list? Were you surprised by any of these reasons?

Pg. 12

Do you agree/disagree with the authors’ emphasis on sex slavery as opposed to other forms of forced labor? Do you agree with their conclusion that working in Indian brothels is worse than being enslaved at an Indian brick kiln?

Pg. 13

“In a town where police officers, government officials, Hindu priests, and respectable middle class citizens all averted their eyes from forced prostitution, the only audible voice of conscience belonged to an eleven year old boy who was battered each time he spoke up.” Do you see parallels between this situation and the parable of the Good Samaritan? What differences do you see?

Pg. 16

“They may not speak to me, but I know what is right and I will stick to it. I will never accept prostitution of myself or my children as long as I breathe.”

Where does Meena’s knowledge of right and wrong come from? Where does she get the strength to stand in opposition to entire communities, law enforcement, etc?

Pg. 17

What do you take away from the experience of the Overlake School in Redmond, Washington?

“Rescuing girls from brothels is important, Krishner believes, but the best way to save them is to prevent them from being trafficked in the first place--which means keeping them in school.” Do you agree that education is the best way to prevent trafficking? Do believe girls in the United States should be educated about the risks of sexual trafficking? What about the girls in your community? What about the girls in your family? What can you say to them to minimize their risk?

Pg. 18

Do you think that the money spent by Overland students to travel to Cambodia would be better spent building another school instead? Is that cynical or practical? What would the Overland community say? What would the parents in Cambodia say?

Pg. 20

Kun Sokkea....”In such a place, she thinks, everybody must be happy all the time.”

What are some of the things that we let steal away our joy? Discuss some of the things that we take for granted.

Chapter 2

Pg. 23

Were you surprised by the Indian officer’s ideas about sex trafficking of young girls? What can be done to change attitudes like his?

Pg. 24

“When India feels that the West cares as much about slavery as it does about pirated DVDs, it will dispatch people to the border to stop traffickers.”

First of all, does the West care more about slavery than pirated DVDs? If it does, what more does our government need to do to send this message? Why hasn’t it done so already? Have you ever heard a politician refer to modern-day slavery? Why or why not? Have you ever heard a minister refer to modern day slavery from the pulpit?

Pg 26

The authors discuss the evolution of their thoughts regarding how best to deal with forced prostitution and child prostitution.....legalize and regulate vs. prohibition. Before reading this book, what were your thoughts on preventing/reducing prostitution in the U.S. and abroad? What are your thoughts now? Do you agree or disagree with the “big stick approach”?



Pg. 35

“Rescuing girls from brothels is the easy part, however. The challenge is keeping them from returning.”

After reading *Half the Sky* up to this point and then reading this statement, what thoughts come to mind? What feelings?

What kind of threats would have to be made for you to stay enslaved, to not run away? What makes some of these women stay in the prostitution industry?

In your opinion, do any women enter prostitution willingly? If so, why?

Pg. 45

How do the authors compare the Hawaiian parable of the starfish on the beach with the complicated sagas of Neth and Momm and their attempted rescues?

A current news story alerts the world to a hostage situation in Pakistan. 140 captives (including a 4 month old) are being held against their will after their freedom from indentured servitude (slavery) was won in court. The “owners” refuse to let them go and threaten to kill them if they do not get back to work. Many of these folks are trapped into lifelong indentured servitude for debts as low as the equivalent of \$8.75, (less than the cost of one movie ticket for us). How does information like this change or support the way that we as Christians in the United States spend our money?

What would redemption look like for those freed from slavery?

Investigate possible resources your church could use to educate your congregation on these issues. Check out International Justice Mission (www.ijm.org) and their resources.

Chapter 3

Pg. 47

“Reasonable people adapt themselves to the world. Unreasonable people attempt to adapt the world to themselves. All progress, therefore, depends on unreasonable people.” George Bernard Shaw

Think of societal changes you have witnessed. Did the leaders seem reasonable or unreasonable? What about you? Are you reasonable? Aren't reason and rationality highly valued in our culture? What response would you or your church have to an “unreasonable” person calling attention to a social injustice? What has been your response or your church's response to those people in the past (i.e. a civil rights leader)? Where would Jesus be on a continuum from reasonable to unreasonable? Explain.

Pg. 47

“Education and empowerment training can show girls that femininity does not entail docility, and can nurture assertiveness so that girls and women stand up for themselves.”

As Westerners, we have been encouraged in recent years to not judge other cultures by our own standards. Is nurturing assertiveness in the women and girls of developing countries offering Western solutions/values? Is assertiveness in women and girls a universal value or culturally relative?

Pg. 53

“There will be less trafficking and less rape if more women stop turning the other cheek and begin slapping back.”

How do you feel about the responsibility being placed on women? Who are the stakeholders in abolishing trafficking? Are those who do nothing guilty of the same offense as the traffickers?

Pg. 54

“Social entrepreneurs are not content just to give a fish or to teach how to fish. They will not rest until they have revolutionized the fishing industry.”

Why do the authors speak so highly of the social entrepreneur as opposed to large bureaucratic entities? Can “missionaries” fill the role of social entrepreneurs? How can Global Women Groups support this movement?

Pg. 57

How could the closure of an entire red light district in Hyderabad be counted as a failure?

Pg. 58

Sunitha, a devoted Hindu joined forces with Catholic missionary, Brother Joe Vetticatil, to start a school for children of prostitutes. Are there any groups that you would not want to partner with even if you knew the partnership would be fruitful as far as reducing slavery? Would your church or Global Women Group consider giving funds or supplies to a Muslim or Hindu group which performs a vital role in reducing slavery in their area?

Pray for Sunitha and Prajwala (eternal flame).

Pg. 49

The reign of terror in Kasturba Nagar by Akku Yadav is almost unbearable to read. It is hard to imagine this type of abuse of an entire community in our day and time. Discuss the solution that the women came up with to handle the matter. What factors do you consider when deciding if their actions were right or wrong?

Chapter 4

What are your thoughts about the Rapex invention as a form of rape prevention/punishment?

What emotions are you feeling as you read this chapter? What hope for change do you see?

“In many poor countries, the problem is not so much individual thugs but an entire culture of sexual predation.” Pg. 62

Discuss the successful efforts of Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association and Equality Now in working to change the laws and the culture.

“We in the West can best help by playing supporting roles to local people.” Pg. 66 How can you and your organization play a supporting role? What steps need to be taken to begin?

“In talking about misogyny and gender-based violence, it would be easy to slip into the conceit that men are the villains.” Pg. 67



Discuss the fact that women play an active role in the brutalization of other women and girls. Is there a difference between the love a mother feels for her child in one culture versus the love of a mother in another culture? What makes women physically abuse other women, drown their infant daughters, assist in raping women in times of war, and insist upon the cutting of their own daughters? Are there spiritual issues at play? How much is due to culture and how much is due to religious beliefs?

Two of the heroes in this chapter are Zoya and Mukhtar. Their lives seem to reflect the many complexities of inter-cultural change. What were your thoughts when you read that Zoya approves of wife beating when the wife deserves it? Pg. 69 Were you surprised to learn of Mukhtar's becoming a second wife only after the first wife expressed approval? Pg. 79 How are these two situations similar? How are they different?

“Publicity about Pakistan's harassment of Mukhtar was embarrassing to the Bush administration...” pg. 73

Are you surprised by the connection between the abuse of one woman in a Pakistani village and the president of the United States? What did it take to make that connection?

Chapter 5

How do we reconcile what the Old Testament says in Deut. 22:13-21 about stoning to death a young woman whose virginity cannot be proven and our beliefs about God's grace as found in the New Testament?

Can the stories recounted in this chapter be any more horrific? What is your theology of evil? Does it need to be changed in the face of the realities described here?

As followers of Christ, how do we live out the Sermon on the Mount?

Where does the teaching to “turn the other cheek” apply in situations like these?

A current news story involves an Iraqi born father in the U.S. who used his vehicle to run over and kill his daughter because she was becoming too Western. Could this have been prevented in our own borders? What punishment should this man suffer? What was it about the U.S. that made this man immigrate to begin with?

www.cnn.com/2009/CRIME/10/21/arizona.iraqi.daughter.struck/index.html

Pg. 83

“In Darfur, it gradually became clear that the Sudanese-sponsored Janjaweed militias were seeking out and gang-raping women of three African tribes, then cutting off their ears or otherwise mutilating them to mark them forever as rape victims.”

Have you heard the tale of King Christian X of Denmark during World War II? Hitler ordered all Jews to wear yellow stars so that they could be segregated and subsequently terrorized during the Nazi occupation. King Christian led his people to hide their Jewish neighbors in plain sight by also wearing the yellow stars on their clothing.

Imagine that you live in Darfur. You have seen the horrors and unwarranted attacks on innocent victims all around you. Considering the stigma of being a rape victim in Darfur, would you ever consider following the example reportedly set by King Christian and the Danes by “marking” yourself as a rape victim?

Pg. 84

In 2008 the United Nations declared rape “a weapon of war.” A former UN forces commander states, “It has probably become more dangerous to be a woman than a soldier in an armed conflict.”

Can we do anything about this?

Pg. 85

How did you feel reading about the warlord, Laurent Nkunda, whose men are guilty of rape and torture, describing himself as a Pentecostal pastor and wearing a REBELS FOR CHRIST button? Is this in anyway a reflection on what the world thinks about how Christians live their lives?

Had you ever heard the medical term “fistula” before reading this book? Do you think this is an issue “over there” or does it happen in the U.S. today? List three people you could tell about the occurrence of fistulas. Is there a group of women in your church or community that would adopt this issue as their cause?

Pg. 88

What are your thoughts about the authors’ recommendation that all universities require graduates to spend time in developing countries? Could this really make a difference in our citizens? Our country? In the world?

If you could leave tomorrow on an all-expense-paid trip to a developing country, what country would you choose and why?

If you believe that study abroad is worthwhile, could churches make this kind of experience a high priority for its youth? How?

Pg. 92

“The hospital even accepts gifts of airline miles, to fly staff back and forth...”

What are some other creative ways that your Global Women Group or congregation could support worthy programs such as the HEAL Africa Hospital?

Chapter 6

Pg. 93

“Preparation for death is that most Reasonable and Seasonable thing, to which you must now apply yourself.” Cotton Mather in a sermon advising pregnant women

How many children would you have if maternal death were a very real possibility?

If you or someone close to you has been pregnant, what were your feelings when you first heard the news? What fears crossed your mind as the pregnancy developed? What hopes did you have for the newborn’s life? How did you celebrate the birth? How does this differ from pregnancies and childbirth in developing countries? How is it similar?

Pg.94

Can you imagine being at death’s door and your family placing you at the edge of the village to be killed by hyenas? Can you imagine placing someone at the edge of the village to be killed? What in the culture allows this to exist?

Pg. 98



“The equivalent of five jumbo jets’ worth of women die in labor each day.”

Where is the outcry regarding the fact that one woman dies every minute in childbirth? Why is so much energy spent by our government discussing birth control and abortion in developing countries, but we hear nothing regarding maternal mortality? What is the role of the church in addressing this wrong?

Pg 99

What are your thoughts on the new psychological studies which show that “statistics have a dulling effect, while it is individual stories that move people to act?” How can you utilize this research in your efforts to reduce maternal mortality?

Pg. 106

Regarding the Zinder Clinic in Niger, what are your thoughts about women and babies being allowed to die due to the lack of \$42?

How do your religious beliefs effect or form your thoughts/practices regarding reproduction and childbirth?

Chapter 7

Pg. 109

“Would the world stand by if it were men who were dying just for completing their reproductive functions?”
Asha-Rose Migiro, UN Deputy Secretary General, 2007

What are your thoughts? Discuss the major factors tied to high rates of maternal death: biology, lack of schooling, lack of rural health systems, and disregard for women.

Pg. 116

“During World War I, more American women died in childbirth than American men died in war.”

Do you agree with the authors’ interpretation that giving American women the right to vote, “ended up providing a huge and unanticipated boost to women’s health”? What is the role of women in the political arena in developing countries where maternal mortality rates are high? Is this somehow a possible route to saving more women’s lives? What steps could your Global Women Group take to investigate this further?

Pg. 116

“In most societies, mythological or theological explanations were devised to explain why women *should* suffer in childbirth, and they forestalled efforts to make the process safer. When anesthesia was developed, it was for many decades routinely withheld from women giving birth, since women were *supposed* to suffer.”

How does this fit into your denomination’s interpretation of the creation story in the book of Genesis?

Have the issues of sex trafficking and female genital cutting been discussed in your church? Should they be?

What would be the most appropriate venue?

Chapter 8

This chapter presents some hard political truths intertwined with complex religious beliefs which directly interface with mothers and babies in developing countries. Regardless of political party affiliation, what are your thoughts on the “gag rule” (Pg. 132)? Abstinence only sex education mandates (Pg. 137)?

What is the “God Gulf” and do our beliefs/practices help maintain it? Pg. 132

“The Catholic Church’s prohibition on artificial means of contraception has very little effect on the behavior of American Catholics. But its stance endangers millions of lives worldwide.” Christian Century editor John M. Buchanan on Roman Catholic opposition to the distribution of condoms in Africa where AIDS is epidemic as noted in the August 2009 issue of *Baptists Today*.

Does the church have reason to be held accountable for “the indifference that allowed AIDS to spread around the globe?” Pg. 136

The spread of AIDS is often blamed on promiscuity in Asian and Africa. Was it surprising to find that “for women the lethal risk factor is often not promiscuity but marriage?” Pg. 138

“With the best of intentions, pro-life conservatives have taken some positions in reproductive health that actually hurt those whom they are trying to help--and that result in more abortions.” Pg. 134 After reading this chapter, would you agree that some pro-life positions have actually led to more abortions rather than less? Is there anything that your Global Women Group can do to educate your community on this issue?

The authors see a shift in the late 1990s in the way conservative Christians interact with the world. Pg. 143 What thoughts do you have about why the conservative Christian community left “isolationism” to focus on the worldwide problems of AIDS, sex trafficking, and poverty? Or, do you think that such a transition took place?

“Conservative Christians contribute very generously to humanitarian causes, but a significant share of the money goes to build magnificent churches.” Pg. 145

What issues come to mind when you read this? Consider your own church budget, your facilities. Are there any changes that can be made in order to support efforts to alleviate the suffering we have seen in this book? How do we realistically balance the funding spent on ourselves within the church and others?

“It would also be useful if there were better mechanisms for people to donate time.” Pg. 145

What mechanisms does your church, your denomination have to enlist volunteers to serve? Are these sufficient? Do you know of anyone who has volunteered through these mechanisms?

34 Million Friends ...What an incredible story of individuals making an immense difference in the world. Can this story inspire similar action by your Global Women Group? If so, who would you support? Would you consider supporting UNFPA as they did? Why/why not? Pg. 146

Al Mohler and Danny Akin, presidents of two Southern Baptist seminaries, advocate that having larger families is a Christian duty. Akin calls Bertha Smith a “prophetess” for her comments “deriding birth control as a sin” and her argument that “Muslims will take over the world because they tend to have more children than Christians”. *Baptist Today*, August 2009, Volume 27, No. 8, *Should Baptists Have More Children for the Cause of Missions* by Tony W. Cartledge.

Do these statements represent your world view? Your personal beliefs on procreation? Birth control? Inter-faith relations?



Chapter 9

What would you say to a Muslim who proposes that conservative attitudes are not based on their religion, but their culture? Pg. 150

How are early Christian beliefs on gender roles similar to early Islamic teachings? How are they different? Pg. 151

When considering that Saudi Arabia is a close ally to the United States, discuss the 2002 news report of the girls' junior high school where girls were allegedly forced back into a burning school rather than exit without head coverings and black cloaks. Pg. 151

A Saudi Arabian woman states that the west considers them victims, but that "it's Western women who are repressed, because they have to show their bodies—even go through surgery to change their bodies—to please men." Pg. 154

How do you respond to this? Are they victims? Is it us who are repressed by our "Hollywood" culture?

A Saudi female doctor states, "We don't want anyone fighting for us – and we certainly don't want anyone feeling sorry for us." Pg. 154

What do you take away from this?

"Jail is sometimes the best place for a bold Afghan woman." Pg. 156

A doctor once reportedly told President Woodrow Wilson regarding the suffragettes that "courage in women is often mistaken for insanity". The story of Ellaha illustrates the life-threatening results of a woman's defiance in today's Afghanistan. Knowing that American women did eventually get the right to vote, is it possible/probable that women in Afghanistan will be granted similar rights in the future?

"The best role for Americans who want to help Muslim women isn't holding the microphone at the front of the rally but writing checks and carrying the bags in the back." Pg. 163

What are your thoughts? Is this something that you are willing to do?

"American organizations would have accomplished much more if they had financed and supported Sakena, rather than dispatching their own representatives." Pg. 162

What prevents U.S. non-profits, government entities, and denominations from supporting existing indigenous organizations rather than creating their own programs and organizations? Do you agree that more progress could have been made in Afghanistan if Americans had invested in Sakena's organization?

Sakena's program included eighty secret schools which educated 3800 girls. Pg. 163. How likely/unlikely would you be to send your daughter to one of these underground schools knowing that the Taliban could raid the schools at any moment?

"If we took the foreign aid that goes to guns and weapons and just took one quarter of that and put it into education, that would completely transform this country." Pg. 165

How much U.S. foreign aid goes to Afghanistan for guns and weapons? Where can this information be found? Could one-fourth of that really make a difference if put into education? Who can you share this information with? Are you willing to share your thoughts on this matter with your elected representatives?

Chapter 10

Assuming one is not vegetarian, can you imagine being so poor that your family can only eat meat once a year as did Dai Manju's family? Pg. 167

How does poverty in America stack up against poverty in developing countries? List similarities and differences.

When hearing about such dire circumstances as described in this book, are the needs of America's impoverished diminished in any way? How does your Global Women Group balance support given in your community, the U.S., and other countries?

Dai Munji's story is the model of a successful foreign aid story. Pg. 169 What made it so successful? Can it be replicated? What lessons could mission agencies take from this?

Discuss the cost-effective ways to increase school attendance which include deworming the students, assistance with managing menstruation, iodizing salt, and bribery. Pgs. 171 – 173. Do the missionaries representing your denomination participate in any of these efforts? Can their participation be expanded?

After reading all of the exciting success stories, how hard was it to read the criticism of such efforts?

Would you have anything to say to Andrew Mwenda, of Uganda, who "complained about the calamitous consequences of 'the international cocktail of good intentions'" or to James Shikwati of Kenya who "pleaded with Western donors: 'For God's sake, please stop'"? Pg. 176 Is it significant that both of these naysayers are male? Should we just stop?

"Foreign assistance is difficult to get right, and it sometimes is squandered. Yet it is equally clear that some kinds of aid do work; those that have been most effective have involved health and education." Pg. 178

Did the authors provide convincing evidence that foreign aid projects are worthwhile? Even if we focus our efforts on health and education projects, how do we choose projects that will do no harm and would be of benefit to the recipients?

"Ann has a finely tuned social conscience...." Pg. 179

What can the church do to raise up men & women with finely tuned consciences? Where would you start?

Have you ever heard of the "cult of personality" and how it can have a negative impact on aid organizations? (Pg. 182) How can our mission efforts avoid this pitfall?

What can we learn from the success of Camfed?

There is no mention of God or Christianity in Ann's story. What is your idea of evangelism? Would supporting Camfed be evangelism in any way?



Chapter 11

Sixty-five dollars ...Consider the number and extent of lives changed by this one initial microloan to Saima? Pg. 186

“Microfinance has done more to bolster the status of women, and to protect them from abuse, than any laws could accomplish. Capitalism, it turns out, can achieve what charity and good intentions sometimes cannot.”

Pg. 187

Does this statement also apply to battered women in our own country? Does this give you any ideas for new ministries in your area?

Are the authors being generous when they included the word “sometimes” in the above statement? Are there situations in which capitalism may not be successful?

Some Christian denominations and parachurch organizations offer microloans. Do you know if your denomination provides a microloan program? If not, is this something that you could instigate?

Check out microloan resources mentioned in the book. Do you have a group of friends who could make small loans together? Maybe your Bunco group? Global Women Group? Sunday School class?

Consider giving funds to a microfinance group such as HOPE International (www.hopeinternational.org) in honor of someone’s birthday, Christmas, or Mother’s Day. The honoree can then choose the person who receives the funds. When the loan is repaid, they can choose another recipient. Perhaps a children’s mission group or youth group could do something similar. Would your church leadership be supportive of such a project?

“...extreme rainfall patterns—either droughts or flooding—are accompanied by a doubling in the numbers of *unproductive old women* killed for witchcraft, compared to normal years...” pg. 192

It is easy to demonize those perpetrating such murders. We hear similar stories about the Eskimos putting the elderly out on an ice floe to die when food is scarce. What would you do if your “tribe” lived in an extremely harsh environment that, at times, could not support your entire group? What is the biblical response to this survival practice? What is being done by Christian groups in Tanzania to prevent hunger and starvation?

There is a school of thought that ethics would mandate “the greatest good for the greatest number.” Thus, killing the elderly, unproductive members of the group when resources are scarce may be seen by some as an ethical choice by which the rest of the group is allowed to survive. What are your thoughts? Are these beliefs based on your culture or religion? Explain.

“Because men now typically control the purse strings, it appears that the poorest families in the world typically spend approximately ten times as much (20 percent of their income on average) on a combination of alcohol, prostitutes, candy, sugary drinks, and lavish feasts as they do on educating their children.” Pg. 192

The gender differences surrounding the utilization of resources appear to be quite significant. Can it really be as simple as reallocating funds to women? What cultural factors allow these men to spend income on, what we consider to be, frivolous, and immoral purchases? How do religious beliefs possibly support this lifestyle?

“...the Indian constitution was amended to stipulate that one third of the positions of village chief were to be reserved for women.” Pg. 197

What has been your experience/opinion regarding affirmative action or quotas?

With women making up half of the Indian population, do you think that the required one third was enough, too much, just right? Explain.

How many women hold office in your local government, national government, your church, your denomination? What are your thoughts on this?

Could our communities, companies, and/or churches benefit from more women in leadership? If so, how? If not, why?

“...the evidence from our own history is that women’s political participation has proved to be of vast, life-saving benefit to America’s children.” Pg. 198

Discuss how this came about. What prevented the former male-only leadership from setting the needs of children as a top priority?

Many missionary planning departments are made up primarily of men? Is this historically true for your denomination? Does this have any effect on how priorities are set and how resources are distributed?

Consider the significant leadership skills of Goretti. She moved from being a housebound mother of six who had never handled money to a self-sufficient business woman and community leader. Pg. 200 Imagine the thousands, perhaps millions of Gorettis worldwide who have not received a “hand up”. Consider what the combined loss of their productivity/participation means to their communities, their countries?

Chapter 12

“...cultural barriers can be overcome relatively swiftly where there is political will to do so.” Pg. 206

Where does this political will come from? Can churches play a role in shifting political will? Are they called to do so or should they not get involved?

“So was it cultural imperialism for Westerners to criticize foot-binding and female infanticide? Perhaps. But, it was also the right thing to do.” Pg. 207

If you are interested in history, research how your denomination’s missionaries dealt with issues such as foot-binding. Was there an official policy regarding how missionaries were to handle cultural mores and laws? Did missions personnel seem to follow the policy?

Currently, what is your denomination’s policy regarding the involvement of mission personnel in government affairs (i.e. advocating for laws protecting women) and/or promoting change in a culture’s traditions (i.e. female genital cutting)? Do you agree or disagree with the policy? In your opinion what role should missionaries play in these matters? Has your opinion changed after reading this book?

“Implicit in what we’re saying about China is something that sounds shocking to many Americans: Sweatshops have given women a boost.” Pg. 210

This statement is shocking. Discuss why the authors confidently make this statement. Can the same be said about children in sweatshops? What is the definition of a sweatshop?

The fair trade movement seeks to ensure safe work environments, free of child and slave labor for farmers and artisans in developing countries while providing a wider market for their goods. In light of the above statement regarding sweatshops, is purchasing fair trade items effective in alleviating the suffering of those involved? Or, is



it detrimental for U.S. shoppers to demand safe work environments in developing countries? How does this compare to Westerners speaking against other human rights violations (i.e. foot-binding)?

What advances in the rights of women have you witnessed in your lifetime? In North America? Abroad? Are men and women in our culture equal in every way? Are there still areas where the genders are treated differently in the West?

Chapter 13

Pg. 224

Molly Melching bluntly states, “Senegal seemed like a cemetery of aid projects that weren’t working?” What can we do to insure that aid dollars are used most effectively?

Pg. 224

One of the most successful efforts to end cutting, Tostan tries to always remain positive, preparing people to make their own decisions through discussion of human rights and health issues. In doing so, Tostan has been widely criticized for not taking a stronger stand against cutting. What are your thoughts about this approach? Are you aware of any groups or issues in the U.S. where the Tostan approach may be more successful?

Pg. 229

The grassroots model as opposed to the treetops model is the “crucial way forward for a new international movement focusing on women in the developing world” according to Kristof and WuDunn. What changes will need to be made to our existing means of service delivery as a church or as a country? What shifts in thinking need to take place? What challenges will the local church face in trying to shift paradigms?

Pg. 234

The tide against slavery in 1800’s Britain turned only when the citizens were painted an accurate picture of the atrocities taking place in the slave trade. List 3 specific actions you can take to paint an accurate picture of the atrocities taking place today.

Pg. 237

“The international movement for women needs freedom riders.” just as the civil rights movement needed them in the 1960’s. Are you willing to be a freedom rider? Who can become a freedom rider with you? What would being a freedom rider look like? What are the costs of becoming a modern-day freedom rider?

Chapter 14

Pg. 233

What needs to happen to start an international anti-trafficking movement based on the model of the British anti-slavery movement of the 1800’s? What part can you play? Your church, your denomination? Your community?

“So the time is ripe for a new emancipation movement to empower women and girls around the world.”

Pg. 243

What do you think about the principles that the authors propose for this new movement?

“These changes occurred because TV brought new ideas into isolated villages that tended to be very conservative and traditional.” Pg. 245

In the U.S., television is blamed for many of our societal ills. Compare the impact TV has in the developing world versus the United States.

At what age should our children be made aware of the issues of children worldwide including dire poverty, forced labor, and child prostitution? How can parents in our pews be equipped to deal with these issues in an age-appropriate manner?

If these issues have not been raised in your church, how would you suggest making this happen? Who could you enlist to help you?

Historically, what has your religious tradition said about

- a woman’s suffering during childbirth?
- slavery?
- gender roles?
- Christian activism?
- ecumenism?

What is one small change you can initiate in your lifestyle to further the causes mentioned in this book?

How much does our culture, our religion define our beliefs about family?

A new movie, *The Box*, portrays the main character as facing a major dilemma.....One million dollars to push a button and someone around the world will be killed. Someone they did not know. Are there any parallels to the comfortable lives we live today far away from the death and suffering and the lifestyle choices we make?

Based on the example of Christ’s life and the information in this book, does your church, denomination, women’s group need to reconsider how you minister to the least of these? How you live out the Great Commandment?

What are some steps that your missions group can immediately take to alleviate the suffering of women and girls mentioned in this book?

The book paints a horrific picture of the cruel and inhumane treatment of girls and women in our world today, yet it instills immense hope that change is possible. What are your thoughts on the books’ message of hope? Is it “pie in the sky” or an accurate portrayal of reality?

What would prevent you from acting on what you have learned by reading HALF THE SKY?

List 3 tasks that you can do immediately to educate others on the needs of women and girls worldwide.

Spreading the word is crucial. List five people to whom you will recommend reading this book. Why will you tell them they need to not just read but study the book as you have done?



Christ has no body now on earth but yours,
no hands but yours,
no feet but yours,
Yours are the eyes through which to look out
Christ's compassion to the world
Yours are the feet with which he is to go about
doing good;
Yours are the hands with which he is to bless men (women) now.

Teresa of Avila (1515–1582)

About the Author of this Discussion Guide



Rev. Jana Williams is Minister to Families at Weatherly Heights Baptist Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Originally from Texas, Jana is married to fellow minister, Howard, and has two wonderful children, Abigail and Zackary. She has a passion for missions and social justice issues with particular interest in advocacy for women and children. Jana enjoys volunteering as a foster mom for the Department of Human Resources and serves on the boards of Trade Fair Marketplace and Global Women.