

Brave Hearts in a Desperate Land

ROLLAND and HEIDI BAKER ventured to Mozambique armed with faith and little money. Today they have planted hundreds of churches in a nation overrun by Muslim gangs.

On Sunday evening, November 6, 2005, missionaries Heidi and Rolland Baker ministered at Harvard University Memorial Chapel, where 600 university students from Harvard, Yale, Gordon College, and Boston University were gathered to hear what the Bakers had to say about God. When the missionaries arrived, a student came up and said, "I want to meet the God Heidi speaks of, but my mind is too strong."

Heidi called for one of the church leaders who was hosting the meeting to go to the young man and hug him. Later, this same student shook his hands passionately in the air as he cried: "I feel God! I feel God! He is so strong!"

At the end of the meeting, Heidi gave an altar call urging students who felt like orphaned children to come forward. Students streamed down the aisles, weeping. Some were saved and some healed-but all appeared to be touched in some way by the presence of God.

When the Bakers left the meeting at 1:30 a.m., students who had experienced God's presence were lying on the steps outside the chapel. A leader approached the Bakers and said: "You don't understand. It's probably been decades since anything like this happened in Harvard University."

The Bakers say they have seen the power of the gospel grip the

hearts of the uneducated and the intellectual, the poor and the wealthy, Westerners and villagers in Mozambique.

Rolland Baker told Charisma: “The gospel isn’t how fast we can get out there and, out of zeal and dedication, save the world. The gospel is: We’re lonely and powerless without Him, and nothing is satisfied-not our money, our needs, much less the issues of our heart.

“The gospel sets people free. That’s true anywhere, not just because we’re in Africa. The simplicity of the gospel is Jesus and Him crucified.”

A Test of Faith

Three weeks before the Harvard meeting, Heidi lay dying from a methicillin-resistant staph infection in a hospital in Johannesburg, South Africa.

“The devil’s been trying to kill Heidi for years,” Rolland says, noting that this was the seventh time she had been hospitalized with a staph infection, a disease the doctors attribute to her work with street children in Mozambique. Rolland canceled all his scheduled appointments for a month to be with Heidi. As his wife lingered near death, he sent word about her need for prayer to people all over the world, and many joined the Bakers in interceding for Heidi’s healing.

Heidi recalls, “God said to me, ‘Become My habitation.’”

The presence of God was so strong in her room, she says, that the nurses didn’t want to leave. A beautiful white dove

appeared at her hospital window each morning and each night, cooing and reminding her that God was indeed near. Still, her body did not respond to the antibiotics.

One doctor told her, "You can write your tombstone!"

Though Heidi joked to others about this doctor's poor bedside manner, his remarks made her firmly resolve, "I'm not going out like this!"

Heidi checked herself out of the hospital two times. The first time she flew to Pemba, Africa, where hundreds of Mozambicans came to the airport to greet her and sing and dance for her healing. Although she was experiencing incredible pain, she preached to a tent full of people from the Makua and Makonde tribes.

That evening, 55 Makua ran forward to give their lives to Jesus. The Bakers were thrilled with the souls saved, but Heidi's body remained wracked with pain, and following the meeting she flew back to Johannesburg for further treatment.

After returning to the hospital and taking antibiotics for another month, Heidi still had not recovered. The doctors told Heidi there were more advanced drugs in California-her only hope for healing.

Heidi packed her bags and told the medical staff, "I'm going to see a Specialist in Toronto."

She checked herself out of the hospital for the second time and flew to Toronto, to the Toronto Airport Christian

Fellowship, home of what is now known as the Toronto Blessing. Heidi lay on the floor with a pillow, soaking in the presence of God, too sick to get up and participate in worship.

When it was time for her to preach, she felt she had to stand. Weakened and suffering with intense pain, she began her message from Zechariah.

“The fire of God pulsed through my body,” Heidi says. “I was literally healed as I preached. There was no pain by the end of the service-it disappeared.”

At the end of the meeting, Heidi danced across the platform in thanksgiving to God. Rolland claims tenacity is part of the DNA of a good missionary. “If faith is not exciting to you, don’t sign up,” he says.

Heidi agrees. “Tenacity is part of the kingdom. King Jesus will win, and we stand on His side.”

Ministry Abroad

Tenacity of faith and love for Jesus are the hallmarks of the Bakers’ missionary lifestyle. Rolland, 56, and Heidi, 45, met in 1980 in a small charismatic church in California, where they discerned that they were called together to help bring revival among the poor. They married six months later and have since traveled as missionaries to Hong Kong, England and Mozambique.

Their work in Africa began in 1990, when Rolland saw a Time magazine article that described the poverty in Mozambique,

naming it the poorest country in the world.

At the time, the country was involved in a prolonged civil war, and it wasn't until 1995, after a cease-fire was declared between the Renamo (north) and the Frelimo (south), that the Bakers were invited by South African missionaries to go into the war-torn country. They and their friends loaded a few supplies into a red Nissan truck and drove to the border of Mozambique.

To their dismay, the truck sputtered and lost power until, finally, the engine stopped just in front of the border gate between South Africa and Mozambique.

Suddenly, helicopters began flying over them, and people started yelling. The truck in front of them was riddled with bullets from bandits. But as soon as the bandits left and the air cleared, the truck the Bakers were in mysteriously started, so they were able to continue their journey to Maputo, the nation's capital.

The countryside they saw on their way was desolate in the aftermath of the civil war. There were no hospitals or ambulances, but many lay sick or injured as a result of the conflict.

The Bakers struggled to begin a church and an orphanage in a rundown building. In these grim conditions, the Bakers say, God displayed His power over poverty one day by multiplying a small amount of chili and rice-originally intended to feed only four people-to such a degree that it was sufficient for not only the Baker family but also 80 orphaned children.

Through the years, God has multiplied more than chili. Since 1995, the Bakers' small church has increased to more than 6,000 bush churches, five indigenous Bible schools, and four children's centers that house, clothe, feed and educate orphans. Their Iris Ministries has sent small missions teams to more than 15 other countries.

Recently, the Bakers partnered with missionary Lesley-Anne Leighton of New Zealand, whose Holy Given Iris International School of Missions met in Pemba for three intensive months of training last summer. Students from all over the world gathered daily for classes under a huge tent in Pemba to study alongside the Mozambican students and pastors and to train "on the job" with them as they ministered in the bush during the evenings and weekends. In 2006, the school will be held two more times in Pemba, and in 2007, it will be offered in São Paulo, Brazil.

Every Iris Ministries pastor, whether he leads a church in a city or in the bush, is encouraged to adopt at least 10 orphans. Local widows are summoned to feed and care for the overflow of homeless children who flock to the love offered by the Christians.

The greatest challenge, Heidi told Charisma, is discipling the large number of converts. But the Bakers have a plan.

"We send teams into villages and streets in different provinces two to three times a week," she says. "They show the Jesus film, preach and pray for the sick. Usually most of the village comes to Jesus.

"We bring one brand-new Christian from that village into our

Bible college, which runs for three intense months for four years in a row. We also have what we call encounter weekends, where we get them free, filled and trained.”

Miracles are multiplying as well-Jesus has opened hundreds of blind eyes and deaf ears, enabled many who were lame to walk, and raised 53 people from the dead through the prayers of different indigenous pastors, including Surpresa Sithole, Iris International director of pastors. Surpresa, whose name means “surprise” in English, was born to two witch doctors in Mozambique. Now God not only uses him to perform miracles but also has allowed him to experience one himself. He speaks 14 languages, many of which, including English, he received supernaturally.

The miracles are a big part of the Bakers’ method for winning Muslims to Jesus. Heidi says they do it “by signs, wonders, and caring for the orphan and the widow. It’s love and stopping for the one.”

According to her report, however, their target audience is not immediately receptive. “At first the Muslims throw rocks,” she says, “but once they see signs and wonders and practical love they can’t resist. My ministry team are 8-,10- and 12-year-olds. Barefoot children in raggedy shirts lay hands on the crippled and they walk.”

Recently, Heidi took some of these children with her to minister to synchronistic Muslims. “They’re not a happy bunch,” she says. “My kids were ducking rocks, and one hit me low in the back. I jumped up and said: ‘Bring me the deaf! Bring me the blind!’”

The team was led through the darkness to an old man who was both lame and blind. He got saved and then said, "I have a headache."

The Bakers' children prayed over him. He was still blind and crippled. Heidi told him, "When you are healed tomorrow, send me a runner."

Heidi returned to their meeting place and again asked, "Anybody else blind?" A blind man was brought to her and she said, "I bless him in the name of Jesus."

Heidi says when the blind man screamed, "Ahhhhh! I can see!" the villagers finally stopped throwing rocks.

The next day, Heidi says, a runner came up to the car she was sitting in with the Muslim man who owns Pemba and reported: "The blind man can see! He's in his farm working."

The owner of Pemba grabbed Heidi's hand and stuck it on his head, tears running down his face. "Pray for me!" he said.

As miracles proliferate in the Bakers' ministry, so does their expectation for the future.

Says Heidi: "I have this vision to take in 1 million children. We want to take in more AIDS orphans. I see 1 million children, each in a home, becoming government officials, teachers and ministers. His house is not yet full.

"[We'll accomplish the goal] by each one caring for one, loving one, stopping for one. That's still our heart. He wants to remove orphan spirits and let [the children] know they're

adopted and loved. He really desires to bring all of His children home.”

C. Hope Flinchbaugh is the author of Daughter of China (Bethany House) and Spiritually Parenting Your Preschooler (Charisma House), both available at . For more information, visit . Send tax-deductible gifts to Christian Life Missions, Attn: Iris Ministries Inc., P.O. Box 952248, Lake Mary, FL 32795-2248.

Prayers of an African Mother

Heidi Baker first met José Novella when he attended a conference at Arco-Iris, Iris Ministries children's center in Maputo, Mozambique. At the time, Baker needed a new leader for the center. “The Lord pointed José out under a tree, and I started talking to him and praying with him,” Baker says.

José's father was a pastor who died during the Marxist communist era. His mother, Rita, took over their church, but because women rarely lead in Mozambique, she suffered persecution for both her leadership role and her faith.

Worse, her son José totally left God and went to Swaziland, where he became a bandit and gang leader. Rita began to intercede for two things—revival in Mozambique and that her son would return to God and get married.

When José turned back to God in 2000, Rita—who had had dreams of her son working with children—told José about Arco-Iris. José went there and sat under a tree. That's when God indicated to Baker that José was His choice to lead the

center.

José agreed to help Heidi and her husband, Rolland, and the Bakers gave him and his bride, Linda, a big wedding. José's mother died a week later. Before her death, she said: "All I wanted was to see my son get married and to see a revival in Mozambique. My life is fulfilled."

But her prayers have reached beyond her own son to the children he rescues from the street, including four boys who were adopted by the Novellas. Heidi found one of them, 9-year-old Charlot, in a cardboard box. He was dying of pneumonia and had been raped many times.

"He was not what you would call an altogether lovely child in the natural," Heidi says. "That boy was tormented. He screamed, fought, bit and kicked. I'd hold him, and he'd kick and scream until he'd fall asleep in my arms."

"I had a doctor there and he said, 'Don't get attached to that little boy because he's going to die.' I said, 'That little boy is going to live and not die. ... I'm going to love him back by the grace of God.'"

"I held him and rocked him, held him and rocked him [for] six weeks-until the glory of God hit that little body and healed him of pneumonia and healed him of the memory of being raped and the memories of being beaten and God poured a pulsated life into that little guy. That's the gospel- the simplicity of love."

José, now 42, told Charisma: "We're finishing a big room in my home with bunk beds, and I want to take in 10 more boys ... from

the streets.

“In my life I want a big heart, like God. And more love-to love those rejected and love them into the kingdom of God. When I’m an old man, I still want to be a father. I don’t want to change that because people are dying, and they are fatherless.”

Three years after Heidi found Charlot, she saw him at an Iris Ministries grade school graduation. He received an award for having the highest marks in the whole school.

Says Heidi: “That’s the Father’s heart. God takes you from the garbage, from your pain, your despair, and He holds you in His arms and looks at you with a twinkle in His eye and says, ‘You are precious, beloved, beautiful.’ You kick and scream and bite, and He says, ‘I love you.’

“You don’t know how to breathe and you’re sick because of the darkness, and Father says, ‘I love you,’ until you stand and run for His glory.”