

Missionary Kid Answers Call to Combat Human Trafficking

A young girl's family history in missions became a new calling helping trafficking victims in Italy after a grown-up Erika Tello, from the U.S., led a Transform 2012 outreach to trafficking victims.

"When I was a little girl, household stories included true tales of adventures in a remote jungle tribe—the tribe where my grandparents were missionaries for over 20 years," said Erika, adding that she made a commitment to Christ early in life and had her own adventures as a missionary kid when her parents served overseas.

"My rich heritage in faith and missions became more than stories about pet monkeys and witch doctors when I began to make it my own," she said. "I read the climax of a biography about a missionary who was said to have proclaimed the gospel with his last breaths to the very men whose arrows killed him.

"It touched a chord that not only brought tears but deep conviction that there would be no better way to spend my life than in missions, taking the gospel to the hard places where it had not been heard."

Erika felt an initial calling to missions when she was young, she said, and God continued to confirm it in following years as she participated in missions trips and church leadership, as well as attending a Bible college to receive training in full-time ministry.

While at the Bible college, she met her husband, Jon, who shared her conviction to be a missionary. They began pursuing placement, but God had plans other than their own and shut the door on what seemed to be the perfect opportunity.

Instead, Erika and her husband spent the next six years gaining skills and experience in the workplace. During this time, Erika said, she realized that while God had strengthened her drive for justice and compassion—from a missions trip working at an orphanage to a college internship working with foster kids in Chicago—she lacked the knowledge needed. She returned to school and earned a master's degree in social work.

Finally, they again pursued overseas missions work. This time the doors flew open and Erika and her husband joined the OM Italy team.

“Despite the calling years ago and the miracles that clearly confirmed this was God's will, I had a lot of doubt,” Erika said. “While my husband had a detailed job description, I had none. The unknown terrified me, and the actual act of leaving my life to go where He was sending me came down to a decision to obey God, while clinging to the truths in Lamentations 3:21-24. I desired to use the tools and experience God had given me to reach out to marginalized peoples wounded by traumatic experiences.”

However, it wasn't until Transform 2012, six months after the Tello's arrival on the field, God's plan began to be revealed. Erika was asked to lead a Transform team that serves victims of sex trafficking. As a result, she had her first encounter with a woman who was a victim of sex trafficking, and was inspired to launch what is now the OM Italy anti-trafficking ministry.

Just like the missionary whose story brought her to tears, Erika is now serving God in some of the hardest places and circumstances the world is facing today.

“I look forward to what God will do to transform the lives of those enslaved in such hard places in Italy,” she said, “as we proclaim Him there in the days to come.”