

Battling Snakes and Demons in Australia's Outback

Aussie missionaries Les and Sally Freeman have given their lives to reach the neglected Aborigines.

Most Americans fondly remember Steve Irwin, the Australian wildlife lover and gregarious host of *Crocodile Hunter* who wrestled reptiles on camera and then died in 2006 after an attack by a sting ray. He was the epitome of Aussie spunk. Yet I've learned there are Aussie Christians with the spiritual equivalent of Irwin's daredevil courage.

A prime example: Les Freeman, a 31-year-old Pentecostal preacher who has been planting churches in Aboriginal areas of northern Australia for nine years. He doesn't wrestle crocs, but this tough guy and his brave wife, Sally, have battled snakes, demonic curses and environmental hardships to take Christ's love to a neglected mission field.

"Barbaric things were done to these people. In the early days, Australians taught that the Aborigines could not come to Christ because they were animals. Men would actually come out from church and go out shooting black fellows." –Les Freeman

Not long after Les and Sally pulled into the Aboriginal town of Borroloola in 2001, their

two-year-old son was bitten by a deadly king brown snake, one of the world's most poisonous creatures. The boy went into a coma, his blood pressure began rising and a doctor told Les to prepare for the worst.

The Freemans refused to believe the doctor's prognosis and clung to Luke 10:19, which promises authority over "serpents and scorpions." Miraculously their son was spared, and the Freemans had five more children over the next nine years—and raised them in the dangerous Outback while they learned Aboriginal culture.

"The devil was trying to get us out of this town," Les told me during an interview in Sydney last weekend. He planted another Aborigine church in the town of Robinson River in 2005. His goal is to bring the gospel to these unique indigenous people who were marginalized and mistreated when whites settled in Australia many years ago.

Wes, a native of Victoria, in southeastern Australia, first visited Aborigines when he was 18 during a church mission trip to the Outback. At that time he heard an "almost audible" call from God to serve as a fulltime missionary to the Aborigines, he says.

"But I kept rejecting the idea," Wes admits. "I couldn't understand the people. I didn't have the cultural knowledge. I couldn't even tell whether the people were drunk or not. But finally I decided to give my future to God." Eventually, after

their wedding,
Wes and Sally partnered with an organization called Australian
Aboriginal
Outreach Ministries and moved to Borroloola.

Their son's brush with death was the
first in a series of intense spiritual attacks. Once, someone
put a curse on
Les and his leg began to swell. He has confronted visible
demonic powers. He's
had disturbing nightmares. And he's buried 15 people he led to
Christ because
the life expectancy of Aboriginal men is so low.

Yet God has worked miracles to give the
Freemans access to Aborigines, who are entrenched in
witchcraft and
superstition. A 100-year-old tribal elder saw a vision of an
angelic being who
told him that Les would tell him how to get to heaven. That
man's conversion
gave Les and Sally credibility in the town. Another Aboriginal
man who was
known for his violence received Christ and became a model
convert.

"Many other people have been healed, and
many have been delivered from mental illness," Les says. "But
it's not always
dramatic power encounters. Sometimes it is easy. The people
make a stand for
Christ and get delivered quietly."

The need in the Aboriginal community is
huge. Sociologists say the gap that exists between white
Aussies and the
dark-skinned Aborigines is the largest cultural divide in the
world. A nomadic

people, Aborigines have changed little over the past few hundred years. The cruel treatment they received in previous generations has led to rampant alcoholism and a high suicide rate.

“Barbaric things were done to these people,” Les says, noting that professing Christians participated in the atrocities. “In the early days, Australians taught that the Aborigines could not come to Christ because they were animals. Men would actually come out from church and go out shooting black fellows.” (The Australian government issued a formal apology for crimes against Aborigines in 2008.)

Thankfully there are extraordinary heroes like Les and Sally Freeman who are willing to risk everything to heal the pain of these misunderstood people. And if you are willing to brave king brown snakes, demonic curses and maybe a few killer crocodiles, Les has a job for you.

“This is my lifelong calling, and I plan to train missionaries to present Christ in a meaningful way to Aborigine culture,” he says. “If we had 100 couples we wouldn’t have enough.”

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