

Heidi Baker: 'A Modern-Day Mother Teresa'

The children called Heidi "Mama Aida," Portuguese for "Mama Heidi." When I arrived in Mozambique in 2005, I discovered Heidi and Rolland Baker's multi-country missions ministry—Iris Global—cared for at least 1,000 children there and thousands more around the world. A few years later, that number rose to 6,000, and a few years after that, the number ballooned to 10,000. Heidi's vision is to take in a million orphaned children before she goes home to be with the Lord.

Heidi doesn't fit the stereotype of a missionary working in substandard conditions in the Third World. During one of our dinner meetings, her tailored black dress, Prada sunglasses, designer handbag (full to overflowing) and the way she gingerly placed the linen napkin on her lap before eating were all indicators that she enjoyed fine things. She could have been dining at one of Los Angeles' finest restaurants, but she was in Mozambique spending Christmas in soaring tropical temperatures and eating cold chicken.

As she talked, Heidi became more and more energized—and I became more and more fascinated with her story. The Bakers started with absolutely nothing—no money, no contacts in the country and no staff in 1980—but what they accomplished was extraordinary. All over Mozambique and Malawi, thousands of churches had been started, and thousands of orphans were being fed, clothed and loved through Iris. Various medical clinics, Bible colleges, small businesses and construction projects had sprung up in every direction as a result of their labors. Iris was also working in more than 30 other countries, including Sudan, Brazil and India. The number of children they were taking in grew by the day.

Heidi told me her motivation was love: "We are trying to do

one thing: We are trying to learn how to love. This is our job. It's our only goal. We are a bit of a mess, but we are trying to learn how to love. This is what our work is about. It's about incarnational love, and love looks like something. To a mother whose child is dying from malaria, it looks like malaria medication."

After Heidi finished telling me about the various kinds of work Iris was doing, Rolland chimed in: "I don't want anyone classifying us as a humanitarian organization."

"What do you want to be classified as?" I asked.

"A revival—out of control—moving like fire across Africa," he says.

Driven by Holy Ghost Compassion

Heidi and Rolland felt called to the poor, even though their first trip abroad hadn't been exactly what they expected. A trip to Bali, Indonesia, in 1985 yielded little fruit and left them discouraged. They decided to develop a more strategic plan to reach people and prayerfully concluded that creative arts would be an effective gospel tool. Heidi decided to take dance and drama team to Asia.

Heidi and Rolland rallied a group of college-aged students for a six-month mission to Asia, and the creative arts strategy saw immediate fruit. A message of God's love impacted large crowds of people who were saved en masse. When they returned a third time, they found a warm embrace and were invited to lodge with the wealthiest family in Bacolod City, an otherwise extremely poor city, in the Philippines.

A wrought-iron gate guarded the huge house at which they were staying. Kids congregated there, begging for help. Many were sick with parasites and tuberculosis (TB), coughing up blood. When Heidi and Rolland stepped out of the car, a few of the children cried out to them. One of the girls wore nothing but

ragged clothes that were falling off her too-thin body; tears were running down her upturned face.

Heidi went to the small girl and took her by the hand, leading her to the car and driving her to the market to buy her a new dress. When they returned to the house, they took her inside, bathed her and fed her. When the host came home and discovered the girl there, he let out a gasp of indignation: "Don't you know their parents pay them to do that? It's a big ruse. You're not supposed to help people like that!"

Heidi and Rolland were devastated. They had seen something they hadn't seen before—real suffering—and had met a real need. It was a different experience, and it captured their hearts.

"Jesus healed the sick," Heidi says. "He fed the people who were hungry. He cast out their demons. He didn't just do a crusade. He didn't just count numbers. He cared for the actual person."

Stacey Campbell, co-founder of Be a Hero, says she has never met a person so abandoned to God as Heidi. "I have personally observed her in the midst of precarious situations, such as calming people down during violent riots, boldly preaching to witch doctors holding venomous snakes and cradling dying children in her arms," she says. "In every situation, she is fearless. The Bible says there is no fear in love. Heidi is truly in love, first of all with Jesus, and then with the least, the last, the lost and the broken."

A Fearless Move to Mozambique

Heidi is indeed fearless. When Rolland read Heidi a *TIME* magazine article about rebels blowing up Red Cross trucks in Mozambique, Heidi felt a sudden desire from God to go. In 1995, the Bakers agreed she would move to Mozambique while Rolland stayed in England to finish his graduate studies at King's College London.

When Heidi headed out, she had only enough money for her airfare to South Africa and a vehicle she would use to drive the six or seven hours to Maputo, Mozambique. She had no idea what she would do when she arrived. She didn't have a place to stay, and she didn't know anyone in the country.

Heidi wound up staying at a local Bible college a friend had told her about. Everywhere she went, she noticed multitudes of street kids. Soon she was seeking them out, trying to talk to them. Of course, she couldn't speak Shangaana, so as she sat with them on the war-torn streets, she made it a goal to learn their language.

The kids showed her the places they slept at night, usually in an alley or under a shop's awning. A few of them slept at the government-run orphanage. An acquaintance told her the government wanted to get rid of the orphanage, the largest in Maputo, because they didn't have sufficient funds to run it. Heidi's acquaintance asked her if she and Rolland wanted it. How could they say no?

When Heidi saw the orphanage, she was shocked and tempted to wonder if there could possibly be enough hope and love for this place. She had never seen conditions like these: The children had bloated bellies and bumps all over their skin from scabies. They lived in conditions hardly fit for animals—no wonder they did not know how to smile.

Heidi started visiting every day, spending most of her time in Mozambique at the orphanage, and she always brought food. As the weeks and then months passed, she made as many small repairs as she could. The kids were delighted with the blond woman who gave them candy; even more, they were relieved to have someone who played and laughed with them instead of hurt them. Soon, the Bakers assumed total responsibility for the center and began completely remodeling the place. She loved seeing lives transformed; it gave her such incredible joy, and the kids had a world of potential and were coming to life

before her eyes. Everyone was blossoming, but they had no idea of the challenges just ahead with Heidi facing burnout.

Turning Point in Toronto

Heidi had been a missionary for years without a furlough. Those physically demanding early years without a break were beginning to take their toll.

Months after moving to a new center, Heidi came down with pneumonia. She was so weak she needed to leave Mozambique. In 1996, she flew to Toronto, Canada, where there was a church and missionary rest home. She also planned to visit the Toronto Airport Christian Fellowship, which had been experiencing ongoing revival services for over a year. She was so sick she had to be helped into the church for the worship service. She laid down on a pew in the back, so exhausted that it was all she could do to listen.

The next day, Heidi recalls, her body began to grow warm. The heat came in waves, as if she were taking steps closer and closer to a raging fire. Soon she was drenched in sweat. She says her body started vibrating, as if she were shaking from the inner core of her being.

In that moment, she says she saw in her mind's eye Jesus come to her. He was surrounded by a huge multitude of children. Just looking at them and the need they represented made her tired. She was surprised that Jesus didn't say, "Just rest, honey," as everyone else was telling her. Instead, she says Jesus showed her even more need. Deeper and deeper, she says, she gazed into His eyes until all she could feel were the depths of His pain. He suffered because His children were suffering.

"I died so that there would always be enough," Heidi says Jesus told her. She knew He was speaking about everything—physically, spiritually and emotionally—for every one of them.

Then, she says, He took a piece of flesh from His bloody side and handed it to her. "Give it to the children," Heidi recalls Jesus saying. As she held the piece of His flesh, she says it suddenly transformed into fresh bread in her hands. In the vision, she handed a piece to the child who was in front of her. The bread multiplied, growing bigger the way yeast causes dough to rise, and she had enough to feed every single child.

As the vision continued, Jesus had a cup in His hands. Heidi says He asked her: "It's a cup of suffering and joy. Will you drink it?"

Suffering and joy. Everyone wanted the joy, but the suffering? Heidi had experienced suffering to an extent. She told me she didn't know if she could have said "yes" if she knew what the future held.

In the vision, she took the cup, drank of a wine both bitter and sweet and then turned and gave it to the children. They all drank. There was enough for every one of them, and she knew instantly what message she was being given: Even though there was more need than she could even imagine, Jesus was telling her He could meet the need.

When the vision ended, and Heidi finally got up from the floor, she says she discovered she was completely healed of pneumonia. The chronic fatigue was gone too; it never came back. Heidi has been running full strength ever since.

Something else happened in Toronto, something that would set the course of Heidi's life for the coming years. When the guest preacher, Randy Clark, spoke about spiritual hunger, Heidi began to weep.

"Are you hungry?" Randy asked. "Do you want what God has to give you? He can give you fresh bread from heaven to satisfy." She couldn't believe what she was hearing. It was what she had seen in her vision the day before!

"Yes," Heidi cried, running to the front.

Randy stopped speaking for a moment. He had never seen the blond woman who knelt in front of him, and Heidi didn't know him either. "God wants to know," he said to Heidi. "Do you want a nation?"

"Yes!" she sobbed, throwing herself prostrate on the carpet. Randy told her that the deaf would hear, the lame would walk, and the blind would see. She has even seen over 54 people raised from the dead, mostly in Muslim areas.

Heidi knew it wasn't just Scripture Randy was repeating, but that God would do these things in Mozambique. Heidi had yet to witness the blind see or the deaf hear. But she had arrived in Toronto sick, and she was leaving healed; she knew God could and would do for others what He had done for her. "Heidi Baker is the most amazing Christian I know," Randy says. "Her story is one of love, compassion and supernatural power."

On her way home to Mozambique, Heidi determined to begin seeking out the blind, fully expecting to see miracles. A year or so after Heidi returned from Toronto, she went on an outreach to a bush village in the middle of Mozambique. They had arrived in a small Cessna plane, landing in the middle of a small field with mud huts all around. Almost immediately a few of the women asked her to follow them to one particular hut. They walked for what seemed like miles until the sun was almost setting.

It was dark inside the little hut, but the darkness didn't matter to the blind and ill woman inside. Heidi looked at the sick woman standing in front of her and spoke softly to her in the woman's own African dialect: "The Jesus who loves you wants to heal you." As Heidi prayed for her, she fell slowly backward, as if she no longer had the strength to stand, and she lay there on the solid dirt floor. Heidi continued asking God to fill and heal this dear woman who had no option other

than Jesus.

When the tiny Mozambican woman gasped, Heidi knew something was happening. The blind woman seemed to be looking at—and seeing—Heidi, the petite woman who was now kneeling beside her, clasping her hand, still praying. Heidi watched the woman's eyes turn from white to gray to dark brown. The blind woman was no longer blind. She could see, and she was healed. This is only one of the many miracles Heidi has seen since.

Multiplying the Ministry

Part of Heidi's miraculous story is clearly seen in Iris' response to a natural disaster. In February 2000, a cyclone swept across Southern Africa, creating severe floods across multiple countries. Mozambique was one of the hardest hit. Many people were stuck in trees or on rooftops for days without food or water as they watched the bloated bodies of animals and people float below them.

The cyclone displaced hundreds of thousands of Mozambicans and killed almost 1,000. The government did not offer any shelter to the thousands of displaced citizens, so people were forced to sleep on the roads and in gardens. Many died from a lack of available medicine. There was no drinking water available to anyone, and a bag of food, which would generally cost \$8, rose to almost \$50—too much for the severely poor who had just lost everything.

The United Nations called upon Heidi and Rolland and their organization to help provide emergency assistance to affected Mozambicans. Because Iris was one of the largest on-the-ground networks, it was more organized than any of the international groups and was prepared to offer food and emergency supplies. This type of service went back to what Heidi and Rolland learned in Asia: providing ministry that extended far beyond the spiritual, ministry that encompassed every aspect of life. In Heidi's words, "It's what love looked like." By serving

people and helping meet their most basic needs, the Bakers were demonstrating God's love and care.

During the floods, Iris fed thousands of people every day. Eventually, Iris gained access to the entire country. As the Bakers spread the word about the Bible schools they offered, young men and women flocked from their waterlogged villages to receive training and eventually returned home to plant churches. That led to explosive church growth, and Iris churches mushroomed into the thousands.

Bishop Joseph L. Garlington Sr., senior pastor of Covenant Church of Pittsburgh and presiding bishop of Reconciliation, has known Heidi for 16 years. "I first saw her lying prostrate on a dirt floor in a Nigerian church," he recalls. "Her demeanor was essentially self-effacing, and I only learned about her depth a few years later. She challenged me then, and she challenges me now. As famous as she is, the light shining on her is not brighter than the light shining in her, and an unobservant person will fail to see it."

When asked about the physical healings Heidi now so often sees in the bush of Mozambique, she replied that while physical healings were part of the whole, they were not the only part. She went on to define a love that is tangible—an action rather than words, an action that flows from compassion.

"If we just saw people who experienced physical miracles, it wouldn't make any sense at all," Heidi says. "That would not be enough. It's about character, love for the dying, the sick, the broken. Compassion and mercy are God's heart. Miracles are fruit flowing out of intimacy with Him. The miracle of love has to be the central thing. We have people who are still blind and still crippled, but we can love them. It's about caring for people. We build them houses." And they helped in crises.

Casting the Vision

Heidi wants to take in a million children before she dies. With so many people looking to her as their mentor and spiritual mother, she may be closer than she realizes.

Some of Heidi's adopted sons and daughters whom she raised have gone out to other countries. One of her Mozambican sons married a Korean girl he met in Mozambique, and they now lead the Iris base in South Korea. Others have gone to the U.S. to visit and sometimes speak in churches where Heidi has contacts. The Bakers' biological and spiritual children are flourishing and are huge additions to the organization.

"Few people on earth have the capacity and the zeal to love like Heidi Baker," says John Arnott, of Partners in Harvest and Catch the Fire. "She loves like unquenchable fire. Her poured-out life has transformed Mozambique, Southern Africa and, indeed, the entire world."

When I left Mozambique, Heidi and Rolland were both healthy, though they were still trying to learn to balance work and rest. The future looks bright as additional Iris programs continue to spring up all over the world.

Did Heidi know what lay ahead when she heard God say she would be a missionary—the joy unspeakable but also the sorrow and pain of self-sacrifice? She would drink from the cup of joy and suffering, but she would use the pain and allow it to drive her back to solitude, to love, to something altogether foreign and separate from the scorched desert places she often found herself in.

God asked her for everything, and she gave it all, and in return, she received living water, joy and new life that came every time she gave hers away. To thousands of children and to a needy Western world, she has given a love that feels like coming home.

David L. Hogan, a missionary to Mexico and founder of Freedom Ministries—known for raising people from the dead—has known

the Bakers for many years and counts it an honor to call them friends: “Their love for Jesus is wonderfully displayed in all of the countries they minister in. I have seen firsthand the results of the message they bring and its miraculous results.”

Cassandra Soars is the author of *Love Like Fire* and has published national magazine articles on a wide range of topics, including international trade, foreign aid and life in Mozambique.

Heidi Baker shares how God touched her and gave her a vision at a revival service on Sid Roth’s *It’s Supernatural* at .

To learn more, read this...

In *Love Like Fire: The Story of Heidi Baker, Mother to Nations* (Charisma House), Cassandra Soars shares the awe-inspiring stories of how God used Heidi to transform Mozambique. Find this book at , or wherever Christian books are sold.