

Forgotten Girls

By Kay Marshall Strom and Michele Rickett | Reviewed by Kate Netzler Burch

A Tibetan girl named Sonam used to spend her days collecting dung for fuel and desperately trying to patch the worn sides of the tent she shared with her mother. That is, until something as simple as a basic cinder-block house freed her family from the elements and allowed her to attend school. Then there's Meerim, an accomplished young Kyrgyz woman who was kidnapped and forced to reject her Christian faith for an unwanted Muslim marriage. And Mai Lin, a Chinese AIDS orphan. After years of rejection by her community, she was educated and cared for at a Christian school.

Accounts like these populate the pages of *Forgotten Girls*, by Kay Marshall Strom and Michele Rickett. A follow-up to the 2003 book, *Daughters of Hope*, which describes the persecution of women worldwide, *Forgotten Girls* focuses on the need to stop the generational cycles of abuse and oppression where they begin—with little girls. Strom and Rickett use their extensive experience to help launch believers on the road to action with reliable information, achievable goals, and the passion to make a difference in the lives of forgotten girls. *Forgotten Girls* is a moving, encouraging, and practical resource for Christians concerned with advancing biblical equality and mutual community around the world.

Strom and Rickett have a combined experience of over three decades working with aid organizations in the developing world and they bring an authentic, compassionate, and authoritative voice to a complicated and urgent problem. In an empathetic but not overly sentimental manner, they tell the stories of girls and young women around the world trapped in poverty, abuse, brothels, forced marriages, and other systems of oppression and inequality. Drawing on their experience, the authors provide a thoughtful and realistic perspective about the issues girls face and how to solve them. They recognize the need to simultaneously address immediate physical hardship (in the form of food, shelter, and clothing) and underlying systemic problems, like sex trafficking, education, and cultural devaluation of females.

The book is organized around five issues essential to the well-being of girls and young women: physical needs, education, sexual protection, freedom, and spiritual life. Each section focuses on the stories of several girls from around the world and explores the complexities related to that particular issue. The authors acknowledge the interconnectedness of the issues, but challenge their readers to take a stand on whatever issue matters most to them, whether that is education, poverty, freedom, or faith.

Strom and Rickett encourage their readers first and foremost to become informed about worldwide inequality and oppression, but they also provide ways for people to take action. Each section concludes with a list of ways readers can engage with that particular issue, and the authors provide an extensive list of helpful resources at the end of the book. In addition, they emphasize the critical importance of working with local aid organizations. They encourage their readers to come alongside these organizations, whose on-the-ground work is the best resource for change.

The greatest strength of *Forgotten Girls* is its highly personal and relational nature. Strom and Rickett invite us into their lives, travels, and struggles and into the lives of the girls they meet. For those who live in Western society, especially, it is easy for the issues of sex trafficking, extreme poverty, and systemic abuse to seem removed from reality. Strom and Rickett do not spare the reader the harsh realities of these girls' lives, and while at times it is difficult to hear, it is important for us to listen. The stories are in turn heart-breaking and heart-warming, humbling and inspiring.

Forgotten Girls should be especially motivational for Christians interested in biblical equality. When we are committed to breaking down barriers between male and female, slave and free in our own country, our beliefs also demand action to help our sisters and brothers achieve equality around the world. As Strom and Rickett state so eloquently,

What we in our country take for granted should move us with gratitude to intervene for our sisters around the world. No one should have to risk her life every time she drinks a cup of water. No one should be so shackled by illiteracy that marriage at the age of ten seems like a good option—or the only option. No one should ever live such an existence that selling their child to a sex trafficker looks like the right thing to do. (154)

Neither injustice nor the values and environments that incubate it should remain unchallenged by the followers of Christ. This is what biblical equality requires and what the gospel of Jesus demands.

Kate Netzler Burch is a PhD candidate in religious studies at Indiana University and loves to chat about evangelicalism, social justice, ultimate frisbee, and dogs.

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