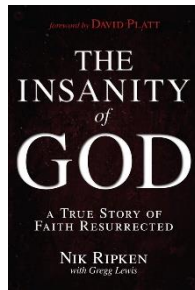


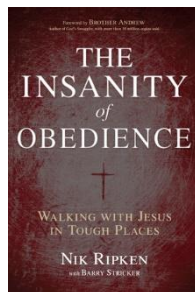


## Internationals in Your Community – Thoughts from *The Insanity of Obedience* by Nik Ripken

Kentucky missionary and author, Nik Ripken, has written two books which have much to say to Kentucky Baptists about ministry to internationals. The first volume, *The Insanity of God*, shares riveting stories of believers around the world who have not only survived, but thrived in persecution. This book was made into a movie by the same name and released in the summer of 2016. The first national showing drew so many that a second national showing was scheduled followed by a national simulcast of the movie. It is now available on DVD.



Ripken's second book, *The Insanity of Obedience*, reflects much of what he and his wife, Ruth, teach in churches around the world. There is much from this book that will inform Kentucky Baptists as we minister to internationals.



Of persecution, Ripken says: "It became clear in our interviews that the ultimate goal of the persecutors is always to deny people access to Jesus." Ripken challenges us to understand that believers unwittingly become complicit "with the persecutors by simply refusing to share their faith." He makes his readers uncomfortable when he says "*When we witness to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, we identify with those in chains. When we refuse to witness, we identify with those who place the chains on followers of Christ.*"

Ripken points out that many American Christians are thankful to live in a country where we have freedom to worship and often hear this stated in public prayers. Ripken says, however, "*It is interesting that public prayers are rarely uttered thanking God that we are 'free to witness!'*" He reminds us that, "Being a witness for Jesus has little to do with political freedom. On the contrary, our willingness to witness has everything to do with obedience and courage."

As we consider the ministry opportunities to share Jesus with internationals, if we fail to reach out to them, we must answer the hard question Ripken raises at the end of chapter 3: "What if the worst persecution today was having little or no access to Jesus? Am I a persecutor when I keep my faith to myself, only within the environment of the church?"

We must not perpetuate the persecution faced by so many in other parts of the world by failing to witness. God is entrusting Kentucky Baptists with a global opportunity. Will we be obedient?

Ripken says that we should ask ourselves, "Why am I not being persecuted?" The answer is not because we live in America. The answer is that we are not witnessing. Ripken demonstrates in the *Insanity of Obedience* that Jesus Himself told us to expect persecution when we witness for Him. According to Ripken, hardship is sure to come when the message of Jesus is received. "Clearly, there is a high cost for not sharing our faith: there is an eternal consequence for those who have never heard. At the same time, there is a high cost for sharing our faith as well! The inevitable result of a bold witness is persecution."

Ripken defines persecution as "a negative reaction to the incarnate presence of Jesus among His people." Negative reactions can take many forms and come from many sources. But we must not deny people access to the gospel by failing to witness because of fear of persecution. Ripken makes us consider whether we are we census Christians, member Christians, practicing Christians, committed believers, or hidden Christians. This is food for thought when we view the level of apathy in many of our churches.

Ripken points out that wars in places like Afghanistan, Iraq, and other places may indicate "a failure by the Body of Christ to sacrifice and obey in taking the gospel of Jesus to those hard places. As a result, the cost in blood for the disobedience of the church might be greater than the cost in blood for obedience." He emphasizes that his comments are not meant to be controversial but to point out that "*the price that the peoples of the world pay*

when followers of Jesus are disobedient to take the gospel to all peoples is staggering.”

So, God has sent the nations to Kentucky. Will we be obedient to welcome them? Share our homes and lives? Share Jesus?

We celebrate the potential witness that may take place around the world if we are faithful to witness to the internationals in our midst. But we must consider the potential harm if we fail to treat internationals with kindness, meeting needs, and changing attitudes. Not only are there eternal consequences for those who never hear the gospel, but there may be international diplomatic consequences as well.

Many of us fail to reach out to the internationals in our midst because we are afraid. Listen to what Ripken says about fear. “Fear is devastating. Fear paralyzes. Fear causes people to run and hide. Fear is a black hole that will deplete joy from the soul of a believer. Fear is a deadly enemy of the church. *Your fear is the greatest tool you will ever give to Satan. Overcoming your fear is your greatest tool against Satan.*”

One of the greatest challenges Ripken provides in *The Insanity of Obedience* is in regard to our witness with Muslims. “Western believing families must allow Muslims access to their homes, watching us as we model how believers love and raise their children, love and honor their wives. This is transforming – but will Western Christians and workers open their homes to those families with little witness and without Christian behavior. Lost people are messy, and most Christians do not want them around their children!”

How would you answer this question: “How many non-believing families have visited your home for a meal this past year?” How would you respond to this observation and question: “Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists tell us universally that ‘America is the loneliest place they have ever experienced.’ How will you change their perception?”

On his website, Ripken challenges western believers to get involved. He says: *It is a great*

*honor to walk across the street to share Jesus with your neighbor. A large percentage of people in America, along with most of the Western world, do not believe that Jesus is the Son of God, nor is He the only way to eternal life.*

Ripken continues, “God is also bringing the nations to our doorstep. Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus and all other religions are flocking to America. In many cases we have not been faithful to go to them, so God has brought them to us – giving us a second chance to reach them for Jesus. Jesus has called us to go locally and globally. It is the height of folly to take Jesus across the oceans while failing to share him with our neighbors who live just across the street.”

“God’s command for us to go to the nations is just that; it is a command,” says Ripken. “Please don’t wait until you get a special call to take the gospel of Jesus Christ to all of the people groups, as we have already been commanded to do just this. We all are commanded, but under the power of the Holy Spirit we understand which place on this planet, being close to home or far from home, we are under the command of God to take the gospel.”

Pray for the internationals that live in your community. Pray for believers to be kind and welcoming. Pray for opportunities to meet people from other countries and invite them to your home, community events, and your church.

Learn more from Nik Ripken at: [www.nikripken.com](http://www.nikripken.com).



Read more Kentucky missions stories in the 2017 Master Article Rise Up and Shine – [kywmu.org/ebo](http://kywmu.org/ebo)