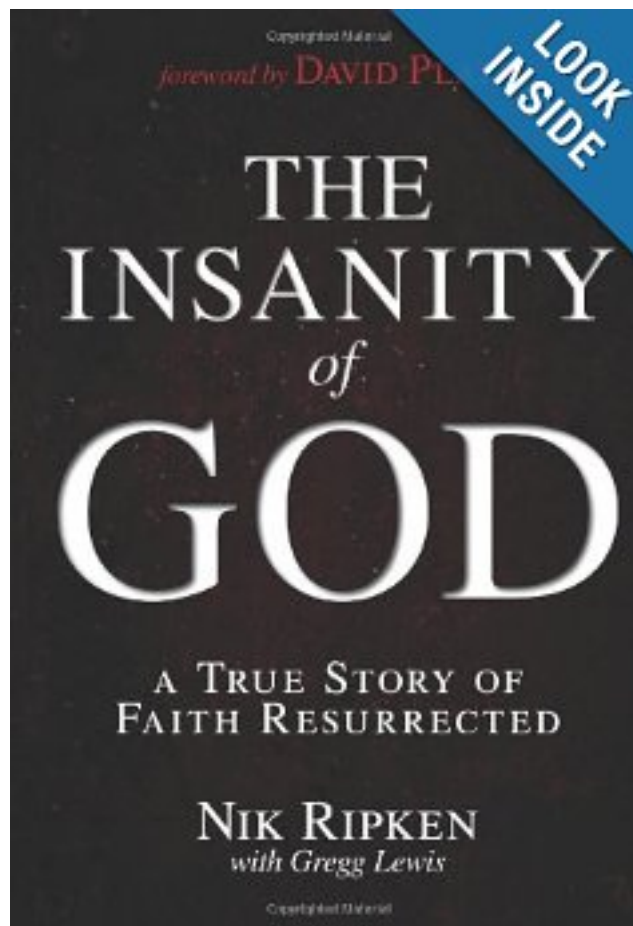


## BOOK REVIEW

Nik Ripken. *The Insanity of God: The True Story of Faith Resurrected*. Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2013. 293 pp. Barnes & Noble ebook. ISBN 9781433673085. \$10.49 Ebook.

Review by – Matthew Hirt

Published at [www.GlobalMissiology.org](http://www.GlobalMissiology.org), October 2013



Nik Ripken and his wife, Ruth, have served overseas for 30 years in various capacities and locations. Since 1991 their work has primarily been focused in areas recognized for its persecution against believers in Jesus Christ. Shortly after the death of their 16-year old son

while living overseas, the Ripkens began traveling to restricted access areas of the world for the purpose of better understanding believers who live under persecution. Their primary goal in these travels was to recapture a biblical theology and missiology of persecution and martyrdom. In their travels, the Ripkens have interviewed over 600 believers living under persecution in 72 different countries. The Ripkens are regularly invited to speak and teach at churches, Bible colleges, seminaries, and missionary orientations.

*The Insanity of God* is not simply theology or merely history for documentation sake. It cannot even be confined to the realm of missiology. Yes, Ripken does include these subjects, but they are not the focus. First and foremost, *The Insanity of God* is a living story that is global in scope. Ripken invites his readers to join him in his personal journey from rural Kentucky, to college, to the pastorate, through the process of applying to go overseas. He brings the audience overseas to Nairobi, Kenya and South Africa, and then drops with them into a Somali warzone looking for opportunities to provide aid. When Ripken's son dies, the reader experience the loss and suffering with him.

When Ripken begins interviewing individuals from the persecuted Church around the world, the readers will be driven to their knees in intercessory prayer coupled with personal repentance. If the reader is looking for resolution, a method, a system, or a strategy, this book may disappoint. The book will motivate the reader to pray for the persecuted, but maybe in a way different than expected. The reader will be challenged to be obedient to the commands of Christ in ways and situations never have expected. It is not a "safe" read. This is a story in-progress, and its ending is merely a new beginning to Ripken's ongoing work among the persecuted church.

The author opens by confessing his use of a pseudonym followed by a clarification that many of the names listed fall into that category out of a desire to maintain the security of his suffering friends. Ripken goes on to ask a series of questions that form the loose structure for the remainder of the book:

Does God, in fact, promise His children safety?  
Do things always work out for those who are obedient?  
Does God really ask us to sacrifice—and to sacrifice everything?  
What happens when our best intentions and most creative ideas are not enough?  
Is God at work in the hard places? And does He expect us to join Him in those hard places? (22)

By addressing these and other questions in narrative form, Ripken is able to paint a mental picture in a way that few storytellers are capable. The author wants the reader to experience the loss and suffering, the joy and victory that he and others in the book experience. Tears of joy and love come to the eye as a man imprisoned for 17 years is being hauled to his apparent execution, and is greeted by 1500 fellow prisoners with the same song of praise to God that the man had sung every morning. Readers will feel the harsh rebuke of a persecuted Ukrainian pastor and the fears and confusion of Chinese Christians using coded speech to communicate meeting locations and times. These lessons are intended to inspire and motivate American Christians to a more radical obedience to Christ in all areas of life. Ripken is introducing the reader to his friends. His friends become the reader's friends, and this causes the reader to desire to meet more people like them who push and stretch faith beyond the comforts of western Christianity.

One of the take-away lessons from the book is that the enemy of Christianity is lostness. Ripken explains, "The greatest enemy of our faith today is not communism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Atheism, or even Islam" (274). Lostness is the enemy that Christ's followers were commanded to combat from the very beginning of the church. In conjunction with this lesson,

Ripken encourages American Christians to stop seeing groups of people in impersonal categories, but instead to focus on individuals. Instead of thinking of “Muslims” as a generic category, consider each individual Muslim “as a lost person who is loved by God...in need of God’s forgiveness and grace” (275). The majority of Ripken’s narrative is focused on encounters and personal relationships with individuals wherein he learned those lessons. Broad categories of people represented by mere statistics are easier to ignore, but individuals make the mission of the church more personal.

Ripken also rightly gets to the root cause of persecution. He states, “The primary cause of ‘religious persecution’ in the world today is *people surrendering their hearts and lives to Jesus*” (277). Ripken goes on to explain that the easiest way to avoid persecution is to simply stay quiet—to not tell others about Christ. Those who stay silent have a relatively low chance of suffering persecution. Ripken goes on to criticize this avoidance tactic that many American Christians have implicitly embraced arguing that it is not a matter of “Do I have the freedom?” but “Will I be obedient?” Harsher criticism is leveled toward those who still choose to remain silent by pointing out that Satan’s strategy in persecution is not to starve, torture, imprison or even kill Christians, but to deny the world access to Jesus. Ripken justifiably takes this criticism even further stating that those who call themselves followers of Christ yet do not witness for them are siding with the persecutors and Satan. This criticism may seem harsh on the surface, but too often American Christians find themselves silenced by cultural capitulation.

Though quite moving, the book is not without a few possible weaknesses. Few direct answers are given to the questions that form the original framework. The answers are there, but the reader must extrapolate them from the narrative. Another frustrating thing is that the reader searches in vain to see temporal resolve. Ripken openly admits in the prologue that his

documentary has an “uncertain ending” (21). While many readers may desire a resolution at the end of the story, Ripken challenges the reader to become part of the resolution. He articulates his desire to see his readers join the “insanity of God” by laying aside everything the American dream has told Christians they deserve; he beckons the reader to be radically obedient to Christ in following Him wherever He may command them to go—whatever the cost.

One final criticism of Ripken’s closing analysis involves persecution in America. Ripken writes off the idea of persecution coming to America since persecution would likely reawaken the American church to radically follow and obey Christ, and that is the last thing that Satan would want (281). In this particular case Ripken fails to recognize that a reawakened, revitalized, radically obedient church is precisely what God wants. Throughout the book Ripken points out how Christians have not only survived, but thrived under persecution in other places. He implies that God has maybe even used this persecution to exponentially grow His Kingdom in places like China. If God allows persecution in other places, no reason exists to deny that God would allow persecution to occur in America. Many of the stories that Ripken tells would benefit American Christians in preparing for increasingly likely persecution at home. Yet, casting the notion aside as foolish seriously undermines in one paragraph much of the help offered. This is not the place for speculation on the source or form that persecution in America will come, but denying that evangelical Christians are being pressured by government and society to compromise on key values and beliefs is becoming much more difficult.

In conclusion, Ripken succeeds in providing a compelling reason for his readers to come away from the huddle of the inwardly focused American church and move into the external focus of the Kingdom of God. Through vivid storytelling and personal relationships Ripken draws his readers from the complacency and comfort of their couch to their knees in prayer for the ends of

the earth. By the end of the book readers are no longer merely spectators seeing the story second-hand, but are called to become part of the story themselves—to start their own journey of faith and experience for themselves the “insanity of God”.

Matthew Hirt and his wife serve as missionaries in an Asian restricted access context with a large mission organization. They are working to see persevering worshipers made among several Unengaged Unreached People Groups.