

created in God's image

Ans van der Zwaag is involved in an outreach ministry amongst female sex workers in South Africa. She writes of her experience and the challenge to see these ladies as God does, created in his image.

"Good things surely couldn't happen to me!" Betty exclaimed.

Betty is 23 years old and has twins, aged four, who live with her mum. With Betty's permission I am telling her story.

About six years ago Betty's father died in an accident and the family was in turmoil. Betty, being rebellious and angry, took to the streets to 'earn' some money.

After leaving her family Betty went to Hillbrow, a densely populated inner suburb of Johannesburg, South Africa. In Hillbrow she worked for a couple of years as a sex worker. When she started to meet with me for counselling she let me see glimpses of her sadness. Her way of thinking and her words were consistent: Betty believed "surely good things couldn't happen to me".

Betty wasn't very open to hearing about God in the beginning, but bit by bit she was able to release her anger.

She was afraid to love her children, so she had distanced herself from her

family. After six months of counselling she has moved back in with her mum and her children, and they attend a local church and youth group.

Sharing the love of Christ in brothels

Rahab is an organisation which works with sex workers and abused women and children in Hillbrow, Johannesburg.

"Created in God's image": it is with this scripture verse in mind that I go on outreach into the brothels with the staff of Rahab.

Women such as Betty are invited to attend counselling, join computer, cooking and sewing courses or just come and have a chat. Through this we have the opportunity to tell the girls about the love of Christ, and show them that there are other possibilities to pursue besides being a sex worker.

I go praying that God will help me to look past the stench of urine, past the girls who are half dressed and still in bed, past the dirty condoms on the floor, the dirty dishes and rubbish, and the smell of cigarette smoke.

It is only when I pray for God's love and compassion through his Spirit that I am able to look past all this, and see some glimmer of what God had in mind when he created these girls.

It is often life experiences which bring these women to this point. Through poverty or abuse they have been robbed of their ability to think through choices and consequences. Their mind is fully occupied with questions such as: "Will I have enough money to have a roof over my head tonight?" and "Will I be able to have food for today?".

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Ans visiting an AIDS hospice.



One of many brothels.



Women appreciate tracts about God's love and grace.

lost hope
rebellious
sinful
sadness
afraid
ashamed
brothels
sex workers
poverty
consequences
anger
outreach
abuse
angry
Jesus
"Do you know what I am doing?"
"Will I have enough money to have a roof over my head tonight?"

about visiting brothels to tell women about Jesus,

Their basic needs are not met - it is called poverty! Lots of them have contracted HIV.

It seems helpful to give the women a gospel tract like "You matter", "You are special" or "Love, the real thing". One time, when I returned a second time to the same brothel, the tract was stuck on the wall page by page. When I look around, I often see a picture with a prayer on the wall.

Jesus died for these women

The girls I have met do feel ashamed. One asked me "Do you know what I am doing? I am too sinful!" They seem to have lost hope of ever even thinking that change is possible - hope that only Jesus Christ can give.

"I am too sinful!" They seem to have lost hope of ever even thinking that change is possible - hope that only Jesus Christ can give.

The truth of the gospel is that there is no sin so big that God can't forgive us when we come to him in repentance. "You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly." (Romans 5:6)

This good news applies to sex workers as well. Why? Grace is for all. Jesus came for the sick, not for the healthy.



Ans visits an AIDS patient in contact with Rahab ministries.

Having been involved in prison ministry in Australia, and now working here in Johannesburg, God has surely continued to teach me about what those words, "Created in God's image," mean. He has challenged me to look beyond what my eyes can see and I pray that he will challenge you also in Australia to look through his eyes at people who are different from us!

Ans has been in South Africa since the start of 2005. She works with a church and has a pastoral and Bible teaching ministry amongst disadvantaged women.



Pray

Almighty Father, we thank you that at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.

We pray for those around the world who suffer from poverty, are affected by HIV/AIDS, are unemployed, homeless, involved in prostitution or the victims of rape and crime. Release them from sin's hold so they may know the joy of the forgiveness of their sins and the promise of eternal life.

Please raise up Christians to share your gift of hope and grace with them. May their witness be a powerful testimony to your love and compassion. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

hope
 created in God's image
 forgive
 love
 truth
 change
 good news
 gospel
 prayer
 grace
 compassion
 "You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly." (Romans 5:6)
 "You matter"
 counselling
 repentance
 "You are special"
 SUS
 love