

Advance Praise for *Open Doors, Open Hearts*

This little book immediately transported me. . . . Rachel Kamin has collected and set like jewels in a splendid necklace over two dozen assorted real-life episodes of ordinary Midwestern American Christians set loose in China to experience the power that Jesus Christ has to open doors and open hearts. The vignettes are deceptive in their simplicity, yet awesome in their spiritual power. And inspirational! Real mission work is happening today when our children and grandchildren leave their cozy and nurturing American church homes and venture East.

*Dr. John C. Lawrenz
Former president of Asia Lutheran Seminary*

Open Doors, Open Hearts shares the stories of beautiful Chinese souls coming to Christ through their encounters with American teachers. The stories resonated with me because God worked through similar circumstances to call me to faith. These firsthand stories capture one common thread: When East meets West, they face curiosities or assumptions, trust or doubts, acceptance or refusal; both sides are compelled to think that only a miracle could help to overcome these obstacles. However, amidst the struggle and before they even become aware of his almighty hand at work, our Lord has already gotten the MESSAGE across. God's amazing grace through these encounters is so powerful that it not only brings light to the Chinese people but also fuels the faith of American missionaries. If you want to know what God is up to in the Middle Kingdom, I urge you to read this book.

*Prof. T. Z. Schwartz
Martin Luther College, New Ulm, MN*

Reading this book was like going to a Chinese restaurant and ordering dim sum: a collection of many small dishes that together make a wonderfully satisfying meal. *Open Doors, Open Hearts* serves as an inspiration to those who think only missionaries can go and spread the gospel. It serves to inspire each of us, that wherever we are we can find opportunities to share the gospel with others.

Danny Wehmeyer
Vice Chairman, WELS Board for World Missions

I was deeply moved. The teachers do a fantastic job describing the cultural differences and obstacles that need to be overcome when moving across the world to China and the overwhelming feeling that's so often, *How am I supposed to spread God's love when I can't even order dinner?! . . .* My heart was bursting as I read story after story of these lost, hopeless, miserable souls finding hope and love in Jesus. It's just absolutely incredible and inspiring to see how God's Word takes root and grows in hearts all over the world.

Hannah Klusmeyer
Former volunteer teacher in China

Poignant. . . . A great read. . . . The most meaningful pieces of the book for me had to do with a dichotomy familiar to those whose vocation it is to witness: the insecurity of a volunteer, not knowing if your work is good enough, set against the change of heart in individuals who hear the Word, not being able to thank you enough. What assurance this book provides, in first-person accounts, that God is in control and that his Word is powerful and will do what he intends it to do—through us, in us, even in spite of us!

Karen Fischer
President, Lutheran Women's Missionary Society

**OPEN
DOORS**
OPEN HEARTS



OPEN DOORS OPEN HEARTS

Stories from the Mission Field in China

Edited by Rachel Kamin
Foreword by Daniel Koelpin

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*For all teachers, past and present, who saw an open door
and walked through it.*

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Acknowledgments

Thank you, teachers and students of the Word, for taking time out of your busy lives to write down your stories. Without your sense of urgency to share the gospel message to all ends of the earth, there would be no content to fill these pages. Many souls are being reached because of your lives of service.

Many thanks are also owed to both our mission organization and Northwestern Publishing House for seeing a great opportunity to shine a light and making it happen.

Thank you, Aaron, for your support and constant flow of input throughout this process. May God continue to bless your work in China.

Most importantly—God is so good. He has been our great Shepherd, watching over and blessing everyone involved in this project.

May this anthology give glory to God and be yet another seed that is planted in the hearts of many.

Foreword

Jesus stated his life's mission when he said in the house of Zacchaeus, "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10). He included all of his followers in that mission for the lost when he gave his directive to "go and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19).

Being part of that mission floods the lives of believers with meaning and fulfillment. Guiding others to the truth of eternal life through Jesus begins in our families. It includes wives and husbands helping each other on the road to heaven and parents discipling their children in the way of faith. We often find even more participation in the mission of God as we reach out with the gospel to those we encounter in the course of day-to-day living. The Lord may bring us opportunity to share his saving Word with a hurting co-worker who has just lived through a crisis in life, a neighborhood family that has lost one of its own in death, or a close friend who has been recently hospitalized. Over the years, we begin to realize that all of this is part of our Savior's master plan for our respective roles in the evangelization of the world.

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However, since most of us can't go to all locations in the world ourselves, we perceive our part in the *worldwide* mission as being done vicariously through others. We support and pray for missionaries who are willing to go to distant lands to share the truth of Jesus on our behalf. We do jointly with many other congregations and church members what we couldn't possibly do on our own—namely, sending to countries around the world those who are willing to go in our name. Thus, our part in the directive to reach out to the entire world has traditionally been done corporately, through our churches and church body.

Still, there have been times when believers have had opportunities to do mission work with foreigners more directly. We think of the incident of Philip and the traveling Ethiopian (Acts 8)—the account that weaves this anthology together—or the story of the displaced Israelite servant girl who was able to direct the Syrian commander Naaman to the prophet Elisha (2 Kings 5) or the time when the queen of Sheba traveled north to hear the wisdom of Solomon (1 Kings 10).

Today, though, the possibility of a church member or church worker doing direct mission work with foreigners has become greater than perhaps any other time in history. With globalization that is shrinking our planet, jet travel available to multitudes, technology that is able to leap oceans and borders, and mass migrations and immigrations occurring on a huge scale, our world has radically changed.

The experiences set forth in *Open Doors, Open Hearts* present us with heartwarming examples of this mission work. Around the turn of the century, China began to support American teachers of English as a Second Language (ESL) as part of its educational program. This development provided opportunity for scores of teachers from the United States to travel halfway around the world and become immersed in experiences that they would never have dreamed of in their wildest imaginations.

These are their stories. As you read them, you get glimpses of the New Testament being lived again in our time. Just as no one could have known that the humble meeting of the apostle Paul with women of Philippi (Acts 16) or the brief encounter between Philip and the Ethiopian would impact the proclamation of the gospel to distant countries and continents, so these teachers' gospel interactions with Chinese students and chance encounters with the people of China may have impact far beyond their humble beginnings.

When reading these accounts, there are a number of things that impress themselves upon us. We're impressed with how God can use chance encounters and everyday incidents to let our light shine and provide openings for gospel witness. We're fascinated with the fact that people very much like ourselves can share in the experiences of missionaries and walk in the footsteps of the apostle Paul. We're captivated by the hunger for the gospel that exists in

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other lands when we ourselves so often tend to take it for granted. Most of all, we are awestruck by the power of God's Word and sacrament and the effectiveness of prayer which are able to transcend the barriers of feeble witness, cultural obstacles, and language difficulties to produce amazing results in hearts and lives.

As one who has been involved in mission outreach in Asia for more than 30 years, I am convinced that our synod's Chinese mission program was part of God's plan for sharing the Good News in China. While teachers of English are not allowed to teach Christianity in the classroom, it is permissible for them to share their faith during off-hours with students. It is not going too far to say that this sharing of faith is even more fulfilling to these teachers than any of the academic accomplishments they may have in the classroom. Over the course of the last 15 years, thousands have studied the gospel and more than five hundred have been baptized.

We are grateful to the Lord for moving so many dedicated Christian teachers, called workers, and church members to leave the familiar comforts of US living and go halfway around the world to share the gospel. Their willingness to participate in this effort has truly been a leap of faith and a measure of personal sacrifice. Most of them would tell you, though, that what they lost in terms of comfort and convenience, they found in terms of joy and fulfillment as they shared the Good News and saw it take root. The Savior

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told his disciples, “No one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age . . . and in the age to come eternal life” (Mark 10:29,30). When losing our life for the gospel’s sake, we find it.

The effort of our Chinese mission organization is ongoing and needs the support and prayers of Christians back home to cover recruiting costs, travel expenses, and the administration of the program. It is hoped that in reading the stories of these committed men and women we will see them as an arm of the church and provide such ongoing support as we are able.

Daniel Koelpin
Former Mission Administrator

Editor's Preface

In 2009 I was blessed with the opportunity to move to Wuhan, China, to serve as a university English teacher. I joined up with our mission agency for some training and support prior to and during my time there. While I thoroughly enjoyed teaching English, I also couldn't ignore the strong pull toward the countless opportunities I had to tell the people of China about my Savior. Everywhere I turned, there were inquiring minds that were looking for someone to talk to. They may have heard about the Bible and were seeking a deeper meaning in their lives, or they may have just been looking for an English lesson from a Westerner. Whatever it was they bargained for, they ended up getting much more.

I remember considering myself ill-equipped to be a teacher of God's Word. I worried that I didn't know the Bible well enough to be able to adequately discuss it and answer all of the questions that came my way. However, I watched firsthand as the Holy Spirit grew seeds of faith all around me, regardless of how well I spoke. I often left conversations amazed at how evident it was that the words I

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had just spoken were not mine. God was using *me*, I realized. And he still is. I am thankful for my time in Wuhan and so honored to have been asked by the leaders of our mission agency to oversee this anthology.

Our title, *Open Doors, Open Hearts*, refers to the doors that are being thrown open all over China, allowing conversations about our Savior to enter into the lives and open hearts of so many curious people. It's common for evangelists in China to think, *I can't believe how easy that witnessing opportunity was*. Even so, we know these moments certainly aren't "easy" because of anything we are doing. The Holy Spirit is always there, guiding words and working faith.

When we first sent out a letter to our friends and evangelists asking if they would be willing to share their mission stories, we had no idea what kind of response we might get. Thank God that he had big plans for this project. Story after story rolled in, and soon we were sitting amidst an overabundance of written accounts from the mission field—a collection that could truly encompass the many different facets of the work being done in China.

The stories and letters that you will read in this anthology are from the mouths of those whose lives have been changed because of the work that the Holy Spirit is doing in China. These are the accounts of American teachers who have served or are still serving in cities across China. These are narratives by Chinese friends who met American

teachers from our organization and want to share how blessed they feel to know God's truths. These are letters written by Chinese men and women for their Christian friends who have returned home to America, illustrating that although they have been separated by distance, the seeds of faith in their hearts are still being watered. I pray that the diversity of the authors in this book presents you with a richer depiction of personal experiences occurring every day in China.

As the overwhelming number of submissions poured in, I found that the stories categorized very naturally into six clear themes and that there were many parallels between these themes and the story of Philip and the Ethiopian from the book of Acts.

During my time in China, I often thought of the first words spoken between those two men: "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked. 'How can I,' he said, 'unless someone explains it to me?' (Acts 8:30,31). This interaction seemed to simplify things for me as I walked the streets of China, surrounded by millions who had not yet had the opportunity to learn about Jesus. How truly uncomplicated it was. I just needed to start sharing. I am thankful to be able to remind you of this account as it coincides with the stories in this book.

As you read, you'll notice the ambiguity used with each reference to the mission agency and church body that are represented in this book. Due to the fact that China still

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considers most organized church activity to be illegal, we need to ensure that our organization and all involved remain protected. Names of specific places and people have been changed or obscured. Each author is also kept anonymous. The authors were informed of the precautions being taken prior to sending in their submissions. I'd love to be able to give each of these talented people the credit they deserve, but instead I'm left awed by their humble and selfless hearts of service as they move the spotlight away from themselves and toward the greater purposes that this book serves.

Everyone who has had a hand in the creation of this anthology prays that this collection of stories and letters works far beyond the simple words that are written on each page. We pray that this book gets into as many hands as possible so that more may be enlightened about the hungry souls that need to be fed in China. We pray that these stories encourage those who may feel called to join this mission. If you are able—go! God will bless your work. And finally, we pray that after reading these stories, you are inspired. Whatever your walk in life, wherever your mission field, find open doors and walk through them. Build friendships. Watch as the Holy Spirit gives you strength you never knew you had.

God bless you.

Rachel Kamin

Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of the Kandake (which means “queen of the Ethiopians”). This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the Book of Isaiah the prophet. The Spirit told Philip, “Go to that chariot and stay near it.”

Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. “Do you understand what you are reading?” Philip asked.

“How can I,” he said, “unless someone explains it to me?” So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

This is the passage of Scripture the eunuch was reading:

“He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth. In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth.”

The eunuch asked Philip, “Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?” Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?” And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing. Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.

Part One



The Call

Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” So he started out. . . .

This Is Our Life

When I left the United States to teach in China, I was ready to give up my little Ford Fiesta and take on the public transportation of one of the biggest cities in China. Because I am older than the average teacher, I had prepared myself by hiking frequently and riding a mountain bike around my suburban neighborhood.

When I went to take the subway during rush hour that first morning in China, I felt confident. Along with a mass of people, I flowed through cattle gates and security screening, got carried up a flight of stairs, and then ran to my position “behind the yellow line.” As I waited in queue, I watched employees called “pushers” do just that: push the backsides of people into already bursting train cars so that the doors could close.

Two trains later it was my turn. Once I was inside, I shifted—first my arm, then my head—so that I was no longer nose-to-nose with the guy beside me.

I must have sighed, because just then I heard, “This is our life!”

I turned my head to see a young Chinese professional

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smiling at me. He was holding his arms and briefcase above his head, but he didn't seem distressed.

He started asking, in very good English, what I would soon discover to be common conversation-starting questions in China: "Where are you from?" "What is your job here?" and "How do you like the subway?" To conclude, he said again, "This is our life!"

This is our life.

Most of the non-students I have met so far are ones who have approached *me* while I've traveled back and forth between teaching jobs or while I've played with my two grandsons at the park or while I've attempted to walk my beautiful but unruly golden retriever. Everyone I meet shares the same goals: study extremely hard in order to stand out against thousands of other applicants for the best schools; find a good career and look forward to helping your parents as they age; and get married and have a child for Grandma and Grandpa to raise while you and your spouse work. *Duty* is China's god and source of happiness.

But, when I look deeper, I find more.

Twenty-five-year-old Ling moved to this city after college. She tells me she wasn't happy about the move, but her aunt requested her presence here, and her parents said yes. She was doing her duty and didn't argue that this would become her life. Ling's aunt heard about free English classes with our group. Both women attended, and both women learned some English. Ling, however, learned something

more: on that very first day of English class, she “learned God.” In the two years that followed, she learned the true meaning of her existence, and for the first time ever, she will tell you, she was happy.

Ling now dedicates her free time to Bible study and serving others. She has recently accepted a job with our day school as their accountant. Her parents, once leery of her new friends, her new outlook on life, and her meager paycheck, are slowly opening their hearts to the same “English lesson” that reached Ling. And Ling’s aunt? She was baptized six months after Ling was and recently held her wedding in the church!

Ling’s life has changed from one of blind duty with little hope to one of joyful service and eternal hope. She wakes with a smile and walks confidently on the same streets that carry so many hopeless souls. She points them out to me and says, “See, their heads are down, and they are not smiling. They do not have the happiness I have.”

We don't stop with Ling, and we *can't* stop when God is constantly feeding more people to us! For example, “Andrea” (her English name that she chose) and my daughter-in-law Jenna met at a Western-style market that Andrea’s in-laws own. Andrea comes to our study with her sister-in-law Nan. They are our most consistent attendees and bring many questions to the studies and ideas for fellowship to the group.

Then there’s Cheng, who, after seeing the cross necklace

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I was wearing, greeted me on the subway last fall. He wanted to practice his English, and we met several times for language lessons (and very awkward lessons they were, as he wanted to teach me Chinese at the same time!). However, he doesn't come to our Bible study often and, in fact, has just recently moved farther away. We continue to message each other, though, and hope to meet for a meal again before I head home. A seed has been planted, and I have to accept God's will and plan for Cheng. I pray *Thy will be done*, and I pray that I see this friend again in heaven.

Qiu overheard my son Eric and his friends doing a Bible study at a restaurant and asked if she could learn more. Now she is an energetic student and travels the greatest distance for a Sunday night class!

Kun is a coworker at my ESL school, and he brings his friend Rong to Bible study. Kun helps with a lot of in-class translation, and Rong and I are kindred souls and hope to go to a movie together soon.

Shen once saw me struggling with my golden retriever and started a conversation with, "Nice dog!" He is 34, doesn't have a full-time job, loves to play piano and Ping-Pong, and says he wants to improve his English, but . . . we're not sure where we stand with Shen right now. We haven't found all the spare time he requests from us to socialize, and he recently sent us this message: "I have been hurt by foreigners before, so I will stop coming." We continue to pray for him, and we look for opportunities to

squeeze in some Ping-Pong!

Xiaoming and Fen are close neighbors to Eric and Jenna, and they have a small child. Many new Chinese parents look for help in raising their children. They see American children as well-behaved and disciplined in following schedules for eating and sleeping. Culturally, there's little training for that here, but many exhausted Chinese parents would like to make a change. Eric and Jenna enjoy sharing *Love and Logic* parenting ideals with these Chinese friends.

So, this is our life! I've learned that it's important to get out there, meet people, make friends, and share the Good News. I can't commit my whole day to playing Ping-Pong, but I can play a little. I know I need to be prepared for anything. I watch with amazement as his Word *works*.

I am thankful that this is my life in China.