

# Opportunities to Affect: In Reading Groups

By: Jo Ann Sharkey

## **Three Cups of Tea: One Man's Mission to Promote Peace...One School at a Time**

by Greg Mortenson and David Oliver Relin

### **Before you read:**

In *Three Cups of Tea*, the authors recount the story of Greg Mortenson's failed attempt to climb K2. His failure, however, led him to the impoverished village of Korphe, nestled deep within the mountains of Pakistan, where he encountered a warm community who welcomed him and nursed him back to health. Mortenson, despite having no resources of his own, felt indebted do anything that he could to serve the village that brought him back to life. He left Pakistan with a promise made to build a school for the girls and boys of Korphe.

This promise led to an amazing effort to fight poverty, counteract terrorism, bridge religious and cultural differences, offer opportunities through education and employment, and ultimately, bring hope. What began as one man's struggle to end the injustices he encountered led to the formation of the CAI (Central Asia Institute). This amazing story of hope now includes the efforts of thousands of concerned people from the United States, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and around the world, united to bring education to a group of people who had been excluded from society by their lack of learning and their poverty.

As you study the "Stories that Affect" article this month, think about the story of Cooperative Baptist Fellowship field personnel—the Harrells, Jessy Togba-Doya, and Dee Donalson, as well as others who bring peace and hope with the opportunities of education they strive to make available to all.

### **Reflecting on culture:**

- In what ways were you impressed by the culture of the villages of Pakistan and Afghanistan?
- Reflect on the story that occurs at the end of the chapter entitled "Haji Ali's Lesson." After paying a steep bribe to keep his new school from being destroyed, Haji Ali explains that, "Long after all those rams are dead and eaten this school will still stand. Haji Mehdi [the extorter] has food today. Now our children will have education forever" (page 153). How is education valued by the people who are often denied the opportunity to receive it?
- How can education particularly affect the women in the villages?
- Were you surprised by any of the stories relating to women and education in the book? Did the stories change any of your perceptions about life in a Muslim country that you may have held before reading?
- Did you find any similarities between Islam and Christianity or cultural similarities between the Middle East and the United States? Did these similarities surprise you?

## For group reflection and discussion:

- Mortenson's declaration, "I respect Islam" (page 62), creates trust in his burgeoning relationships with the Muslim men and women in Pakistan. This respect later leads to the termination of the *fatwa* (Islamic legal ruling) against Mortenson and his construction of schools. Discuss how the openness he has in dealing with a foreign culture allowed Mortenson to successfully complete his mission, as well as make several powerful allies.
- Mortenson and Relin recount the disturbing tales of the influx of *Wahhabi maddrassa* or fundamentalist Islamic schools that are financed by wealthy religious and political leaders from Saudi Arabia (pages 242-43). These stories illuminate the ability of radical Islam to take control in impoverished communities. Evidence shows how more than 80,000 madrassa students become Taliban recruits. These madrassa schools target indigent areas that public school systems have failed. Discuss how the CAI's program to build schools directly combats terrorism and violent religious extremism.
- Abdullah Rahman, a severely disfigured taxi driver, served as a guard at the Military Hospital Library, protecting "three locked cases of musty hardcovers that somehow survived the time of the Taliban, who were in the habit of burning any book but the Koran" (page 282). Discuss the implications of the destruction of books, libraries, educational resources, and schools. How do you think that Mortenson and the CAI's goals are (or should be) received in a country that had experienced such violent oppression?

## Relating to our mission:

- Mortenson constructs schools for people groups who have often been marginalized by their own government and country. How can this story connect to our mission to reach people who have been neglected or rejected?
- *Three Cups of Tea* is a story about an effort in a specific part of the world to a particular group of people. The skills needed to work with that people group are partially what make Mortenson's story a success. How do you think similar efforts to combat poverty and to fight terrorism and violence through education could be made in other countries? In our own country?
- It is simple to read *Three Cups of Tea* and feel moved by the interesting stories of culture, religion, travel, war, poverty, and education. Yet we are called to do more. What can we do as individuals as well as a church in response to what we have read?

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## next month:

In his book, *Loving Monday* (InterVarsity Press, 2006), John Beckett offers a model for incorporating the Bible into professional business practices. Beckett recounts his story of establishing a business that balances financial success with the Christian life.