

## TAKING UP THE CROSS FOR THOSE LESS FORTUNATE -Rachel Mathes

I guess I should start at the beginning, always a good place to start. Well my beginning was softball. A funny beginning, but you'll see where I'm going with it.

For as long as I can remember softball has been my life, sure I've done other things played other sports, but softball, now that's something that made sense to me. I never really planned on being a pitcher, but thanks to my dad, that's where I ended up. I learned a lot about softball and life in my years of playing. How you aren't always going to get the calls you want and when you do something spectacular, you just have to act like you've been there. It also brought me through some tough times and closer with a lot of really great people and friends. It got to the point where if I didn't get up at 5:30 in the morning to pitch, i just couldn't function.

Last fall I quit softball.

The problem was, I was addicted to softball. Some people are addicted to worse things, and you all know what you are addicted to, but for me softball did it. To this day I still love the feeling of a glove or throwing a ball 60 mph. But God used something I love to guide me back to Him. You see, I went to Concordia not wanting anything to do with that whole Jesus crowd. Not wanting to go to Church every Sunday.

All I wanted to do was play ball, and I could do that at Concordia. But fall of my freshman year I got hurt, sprained my wrist during fall season. Then trained twice as hard to show Coach that I could do it I could be there for him in those tight situations. Trained all winter, just to fracture my foot in pre-season training in February. But for some reason my coach saw something in me, I kept training even with a huge metal boot on my foot. I didn't go with the team to Florida, but instead trained, in anticipation for spring season. That season was one of the best of my life, I only started two games, but man was I there for the team when they needed me.

I also started building my faith, thanks to a really great friend and a professor, who both reminded me that God has been with me since the day I was baptized. I started going to Church and wanting to pray. It was in those times of being hurt that I really relied on God even more for the strength to keep going.

I went out of the season on kind of a shaky game. I trained all summer and learned a new pitch. I even shaved a minute off of my mile time. Got back to school in fall and things were going alright, but my heart just wasn't in the game. I was lost and confused.

Then God stepped in.

He showed me His love one night at a student lead worship service. I knew that I needed to start serving Him, not by consuming my time with softball, but by using the other talents He had given me. Like working with kids, and serving others, and my art. A friend shouted to me that night as I was leaving (a softball teammate in fact). She told me that she couldn't think of someone more fit for the task of going to India and sharing Christ. That night I gave up softball and began my new life as a servant of God. I needed to get rid of that addiction, or

distraction, if you will. In Ecclesiastes 3:3 it says "There is a time to die." That night my old distracted self died for Jesus Christ, because He first died for me.

In India there are distractions yes, just like any other place in the world. But for me on this trip of a lifetime, I seemed to be more at peace with God than ever before in my life. I didn't have my cell phone or the internet or a ball and glove to start a pick up game whenever I wanted. I didn't have a huge closet overflowing with clothes, or a fridge and cubboards full of food whenever I was hungry. I had a half suitcase filled with my own possessions, and a carry-on with one change of clothes, two Bibles, a journal, some pens, tums, and some snack bars. The other 1 and 1/2 suitcases were full of supplies we brought to the boys and girls, and the special needs homes. Did I mention that each checked bag weighed almost exactly 50lbs? I just wanted to paint a little picture of how I lived while I was in India. Yes, we stayed at hotels while we were there, and they were very nice, high quality living. But unlike here when I was bored I didn't just

flip on the TV, instead I flipped open my Bible. I felt as if I needed to learn more, read more, and praise God more so that I could set an example for those kids that we went over to be with. Those kids aren't looking at you because you have the coolest clothes on or the latest hair styles, but because you have the love of Jesus Christ. They just want to play with you, and touch you and be loved by you. I was there to share that love with them and share the joy I've found in Jesus Christ. I was there to show them the strength they have through Him.

It is so hard to walk down the street and see families laying on the road side. To see the struggles of hundreds of children who have lost their families because of the Tsunami or because their family just could not afford to keep them. It is hard to watch an awesome man of God laying in his death bed after doctors found cancer that had spread from his pancreas. But the amazing thing is to see that God has a plan for everything.

But an even more amazing part about the plan to help these struggling people is that WE ARE THE PLAN.

Matthew 5:14 says, "You are the light of the world."

God gives us His light to share with everyone, not just a select few. We are His plan to spread the good news of Jesus Christ and the salvation of all people who believe in Him. He did not come into this world, and die on the cross for us to choose who we think should have eternal life. He died on the cross so that all would have eternal life. It is our duty to share that, to help carry each others burdens, to make other's lives a little less of a struggle.

It wasn't just me over there in India, but it was everyone who supported, donated and prayed for the trip. I took a piece of you all with me.

The only way I've found that helps me to understand what direction God wants me to go, is to pray about it. Our one on one time with the Creator.

We can have a plan for our lives we can try to live out that plan, but if that plan is truly not where we are suppose to be, we just won't feel right about that choice we've made.

Whether it is choosing to say one thing or the other, or acting a certain way, or maybe it is about where God wants to use you to spread His love? Whatever the case we need to be ready to listen and take action.

After returning from India I knew that I needed to continue God's plan for me in overseas mission work. I had the choice of India or China. After some prayer and logical thinking I chose China. But for some reason I just had India eating away at my heart, and constant reminders of it. I started to get flustered, and just kept praying and praying, and asking for advice from friends. All they said they could do for me was pray. So a couple weekends ago I went on a women's retreat. Then finally I just let myself go, threw away all the brain work I had put into this and focused on what God was putting in my heart. I was able to talk to a wise woman by the name of Audrey, she had gone on the India trip before, which made it even easier to connect with her. She told me, "Notice yourself smiling, and that will tell you what your heart truly wants. Rachel, when you talk about India, you smile."

What she said and awesome prayers with other people was the turning point. So I called my leader Alan and told him, "I'm in for round two."

I'm not saying that how you bear your cross is giving up the thing you love most in life, if it can be used to glorify God, or that you need to start going on overseas missions, I just want you to listen to what God is telling you. Take up your cross and bear the burdens of others around you.

My heart is in India,  
where is God calling you?