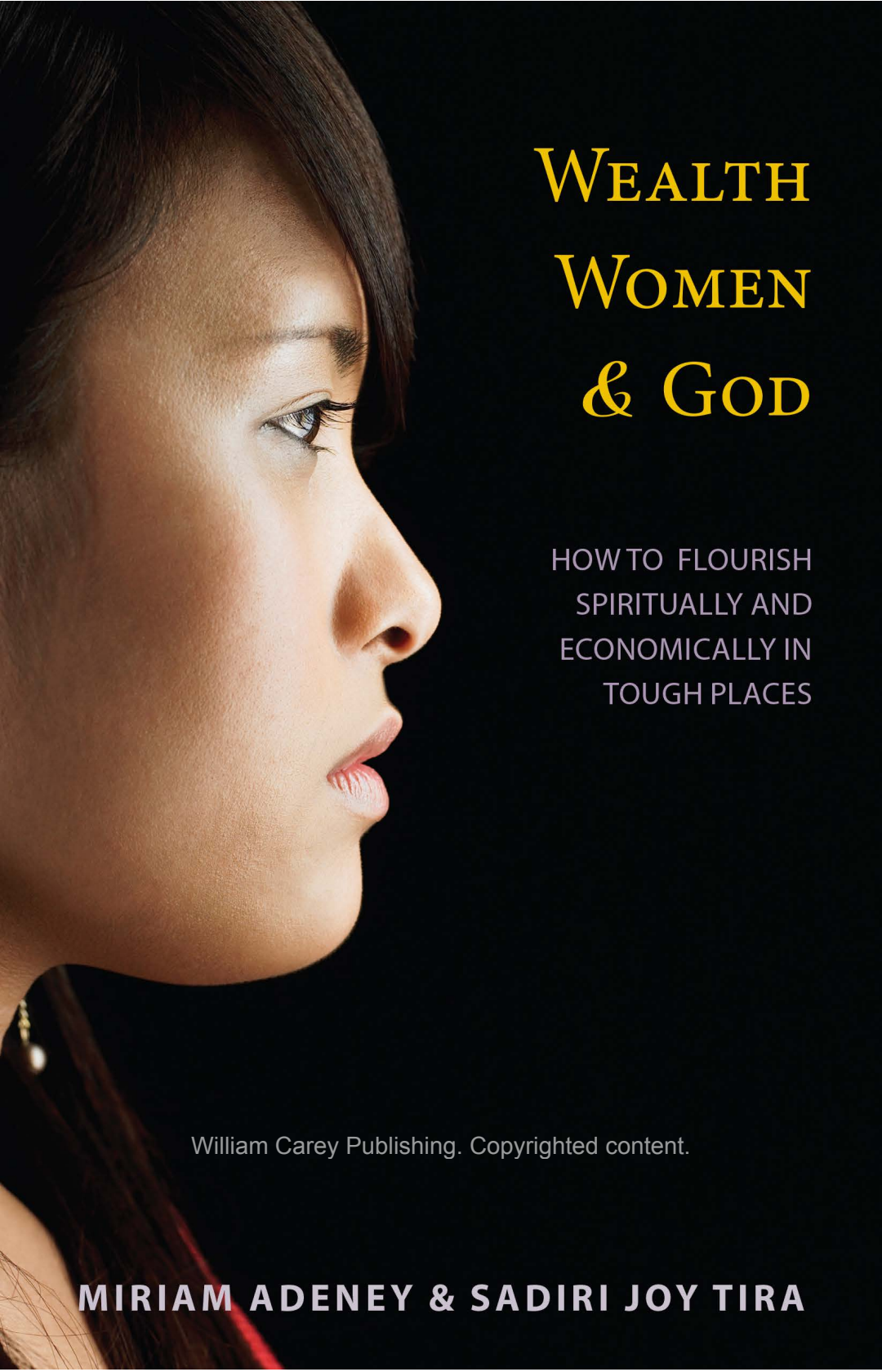


Wealth Women & God

HOW TO FLOURISH SPIRITUALLY AND ECONOMICALLY IN TOUGH PLACES

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MIRIAM ADENEY & SADIRI JOY TIRA

Wealth, Women, and God: How to Flourish Spiritually and Economically in Tough Places
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Chapter One
The Maid

Up every morning at 4:00 a.m. Thirty minutes' walk to school, and at the end of the day thirty minutes' walk home to a poor farm overflowing with children. Rice paddies. Banana trees. Cows chomping weeds. *Carabaos* (water buffalos) wallowing in mud holes. From a tourist's perspective, the Philippine province of Pangasinan may be picturesque. But to Chelsea it was boring. Same old, same old.

Still, she kept on with those daily walks and in due time graduated from high school. Since there was no money for college, she earned a nursing aide certificate from a technical school.

"But there is no good work in the Philippines for nurses' aides, even if you work hard," Chelsea comments. "The salary is too low. There is only enough money for you yourself. You can't support your family."

What about all those younger sisters and brothers on the farm?

"Go abroad," an aunt advised her. That woman was already working in Kuwait. "You can find a job, and you'll earn plenty."

In order to help her parents and siblings, she agreed.

This book grows out of the stories of migrant working women like Chelsea. Beyond these women's individual experiences, the narratives open a window into a larger world—namely, the 200 million people who are currently moving from

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the country where they were born to another country: students, refugees, businessmen, immigrants, but most of all laborers who need jobs. A human tsunami is flooding across borders. These migrations are reshaping our world. They will make a difference for all our futures.

If, as it seems, God is scattering the peoples, how should we respond? What can we learn from these "global nomads"? How might this huge multinational exchange affect Christian witness? Discipleship? Church formation? Theological education? Service to the needy? Advocacy for the oppressed? What new ethical and theological challenges arise?

This book gives glimpses of God's grace at work through some of the least powerful people in the great sweep of human labor exchanges today. We could just as easily study men in middle management who are part of this global diaspora, but we have chosen to focus on working women. Similarly, we could zero in on any region in the world, but we have chosen to direct our attention to the Arabian Gulf.

All who read this will ultimately be faced with the question, what can *we* do? In the end, that is why we have bothered to invest time in researching and writing this book. Titillation is not our goal, nor even compassion that will burn out, but rather understanding that results in action.

Chelsea's story provides some hints. It is a good place to start.

For three and a half years, Chelsea worked as part of a large Filipino cleaning crew in the compound of a Saudi Arabian princess. But she chafed at the restrictions there. Only nineteen years old, Chelsea bubbled with life. Yet the maids were forbidden to hold mobile phones unless they were given permission. They had to be covered completely. They were not even supposed to

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talk together. Freedom always had been important to Chelsea. Now she felt stifled. "We were in bondage," she says. "We could not have fun. It was not allowed. Life was so boring."

Sometimes when her employer was not home Chelsea would go up on the rooftop and look for a Filipina on another roof. If she saw one, she would wave and yell, "*Kababayan!* (Fellow countryman!)" Anything to transcend the boundaries.

Yet when she finally returned to the Philippines, she had gained something besides money that would make a dramatic difference in her future. She had picked up the Arabic language. Desperate to communicate, she had put out the effort to learn a little every day, using gestures to ask questions, paying attention to body language, and reviewing what she learned. When she left Saudi Arabia, she could speak and she could understand.

DAYS OFF UNLIMITED

After nine months at home with her family and the cows and the *carabaos,* Chelsea applied for another job in the Gulf. This time she became a personal maid in a private home. Yet it was not long before she felt stifled once again. Her employers didn't trust her to use the phone, or to go out, or even to stay in the house alone. Chelsea complained to friends who worked as maids in other homes. One day a Filipina named Dari challenged her to open herself to the love of God.

"I also know Jesus," Chelsea protested. "Why do you think badly of me? I'm strong enough in myself."

Dari posed a challenge. "If you are in the Lord, he will touch your employer. And you will be free. Do you see me? I'm always going out to Bible studies. And I can sleep over in my friend's house."

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Why? Chelsea said in her heart. *We are both women. We are both Filipinas. For me it's work, work, work in the house. I cannot see the beauty of the world. I cannot talk with my friends except when I can snatch a rare moment. Then I wake up and do it all over again. Then I go to my room alone and wonder, What is life about?*

"You may know Jesus, but does Jesus know you?" Dari continued.

Hmm. Does Jesus know me? I'm not sure. But maybe I can take a step. Chelsea challenged God: "I will accept you if you do something for me. I want freedom. My friend is free to go out to church, but my employer does not allow me to go out."

With this challenge, Chelsea says, she submitted to Christ as Lord in November 1997. She started reading the Bible. She invited Dari to pray for her. "If our God is really alive, he can answer my prayer and give me the freedom that I want. If God is alive, he will allow me to go to the church."

She asked her employer for time off so she could go to church. The time was granted. Then she asked Dari, "What do people wear in your church? Skirts or what?"

"Anything!" Dari answered.

Chelsea remembers her first church visit. "I thought it was a crazy place. People were shouting and crying." But she wanted to return, and her boss gave permission.

The second time she attended, she heard someone remark, "Wasn't that great training last week!"

What training? Chelsea wondered.

When she learned that fellowship and teaching continued on into the evening, she decided she needed time off not simply for the worship service but for the whole day. This proved too much for her employer, who became stricter. No longer could

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Chelsea communicate with friends on the phone. Nor was she allowed to leave the house.

"Why, Madam? Your husband is going to mosque. Why can't I go to church?" Chelsea asked.

"You can pray in your room," the woman replied. "You stay home. Otherwise I'll send you back to your country. I don't need you. I'll deport you."

Lord, if I don't have a job anymore, how about my family? Now, Lord, this is the time for you to do something for me, Chelsea said under her breath. Then she turned to her employer and said, "OK, if you want me to go, I'll pack my things." She was calm. She had peace that God would do something. *I will trust you. I will trust you,* she repeated over and over while she cleaned and washed.

Three days passed. Then her boss called her in. Chelsea shivered. Maybe this was it. Her boss surprised her, however. "OK, I'll allow you a full day off!"

Chelsea jumped up and embraced the woman.

Yet the struggle was not over. Her boss's curfew was seven o'clock. Some people prayed in the church until midnight. Chelsea wanted to join them. *Lord, I need the day off unlimited. Not with curfews,* she breathed. Although she was nervous about requesting the end of curfews, she did. At first her employers objected because they knew some people do wrong things on their days off. So Chelsea always told them exactly what went on in the training and the Bible studies. They relented.

"Now to the max I was fellowshipping, going with brothers and sisters, praying, Bible studying. I was satisfied, with great joy," she says.

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