

# Purpose-driven author contacts former hostage\_40405

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**By Adelle Banks**

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WASHINGTON (RNS)-Best-selling author Rick Warren says he's keeping in touch with the Atlanta-area woman who recently used his *The Purpose Driven Life* book to help free herself when she was held hostage.

"As soon as I heard about this, we were in touch by e-mail, and now we are in regular pastoral conversation," Warren told USA Today.

"We talk every day about verses of the Bible and pray together, and I encourage her."

Warren, who recently returned from a trip to Africa, also was a guest on CNN's Larry King Live. He told King that Ashley Smith's time with alleged courtroom murderer Brian Nichols demonstrates "that God can use anybody."

"Ashley will tell you, she's just an ordinary person," Warren said. "She wasn't some saint. She wasn't some preacher or some theologian.

"God uses normal, ordinary people in daily life. And if God only used

perfect people, nothing would get done."

Warren's book soared in Internet site sales after the media reported how Smith read from it to Nichols, topping USA Today's bestseller list.

In both interviews, the Southern Baptist pastor deflected attention to his book's success to God and the Bible, on which it was based, and away from himself.

"There's not a single new thought in Purpose Driven Life that hasn't been said in historic Christianity or Judaism," he told the newspaper.

"I'm just a communicator for the 21st century."

Warren, who is marking his 25th anniversary as pastor of Saddleback Community Church in Lake Forest, Calif., told King he intends next year to kick off his plan to "mobilize hundreds of thousands of small groups" that have studied the principles in his book to work on creating new churches, helping the poor and caring for the sick.

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