

Warren keeps in touch with ex-hostage: Smith used Warren's book to help free herself

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

"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* in an interview published March 23. "We talk every day about verses of the Bible and pray together, and I encourage her."

Warren, appearing on CNN's *Larry King Live*, said that Ashley Smith's time with Brian Nichols, alleged murderer of four people, demonstrates "that God can use anybody." Warren added: "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, which was first published in October 2002, soared in Web site sales after the media reported how Smith read from it to Nichols. In both interviews, the somewhat iconoclastic Southern Baptist pastor deflected attention from his book's success. "There's not a single new thought in *The 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."

Marking his 25th anniversary as pastor of Saddleback Community Church in Lake Forest, California, Warren told King he intends next year to "mobilize hundreds of thousands of small groups" that have studied his book to work on creating new churches, helping the poor and caring for the sick. -*Religion News Service*