

Finding God During a One-Year Airport Layover

Some people dread airport layovers that last longer than an hour. Imagine a layover for more than one year where you're unable to eat for days at a time, and are forced to drink toilet water and fend off sexual predators.

Nigeria-born Elizabeth Woleta was left stranded for more than a year in a terminal in Moscow's Sheremetyevo International Airport after her passport was stolen in March 2007. The 15-foot section of this unique airport is considered a "legal no man's land"-it is couched between Russian and international territories and is governed by neither. Despite her peculiar predicament, Woleta, now 31, found Christ when a missionary told her God loved her. She later used her unique situation to minister the gospel to people from more than 50 nations.

"It's just the grace of God, " she told *Charisma*. "I don't know how, [but] I was saved by that grace and that same grace had to continue and moved me to preach the Word of God to as many as I could."

Woleta says she hadn't had a relationship with God before her airport experience and described herself as a "tortured" soul who had never experienced love or affection from any human. So

when

missionary Brian Dodd told her Jesus loved her she immediately prayed the prayer of salvation.

“Elizabeth was there with a whole pile of Watchtower Society publications, and I looked down and said to her, ‘You shouldn’t be reading those,’” Dodd said. “She looked down at them, got up, picked them up and threw them in the garbage can, just like that. In a few minutes she had prayed to receive Christ.”

Woleta told *Charisma* that despite numerous attempts to get help from airport officials and travelers, no one had treated her kindly for the first six months she was in the airport.

“Brian ... showed me an example that Christ really cares for us,” Woleta said. “I was sleeping on the floor. Brian came and sat on the floor with me. He actually conversed with me and laid hands on me.”

When Dodd returned to the U.S. he immediately began working to find a way to help Woleta leave the airport. He and some of his companions also smuggled food in for Woleta and sent her a cell phone. Despite their efforts, Woleta would go days with out eating and sometimes resorted to drinking water from the toilet. Seeking some form of sustenance Woleta turned to the Word of God.

“[People would] see me reading a particular book for

quite a long time. Since I ... didn't have enough to eat, I didn't have to get up to go and urinate," she said. "In fact, I'd sit in one position for more than six hours just reading the Bible. Others would come to find out what's making me read that Bible. I actually preached the Word of God to them."

She'd even use her cell phone, which could only receive calls and send text messages, to ask Dodd and others to translate Bible verses so she could minister to people who spoke in other languages. Though Woleta said she did not keep count, she estimates that at least 50 people accepted Christ after she witnessed to them in the airport.

Woleta admits that she also met people who weren't receptive to the gospel and some who would offer her food in exchange for sex. When she rejected them, they told her she'd die of starvation, but she'd always reply that God would provide for her as He did for those in the Bible.

"Each time I prayed I saw God's handwriting in my life," she said. "God would always answer my prayers. Sometimes I would really pray and say: 'Oh God, I'm hungry now. I've gone three days, and I have nothing to eat. Please help me as You give food to Your prophet Elijah when You sent him on a mission.'"

"Sometimes when I'm sleeping, because of hunger, I'd wake up and find someone had put some food by my sleeping bag

where I was
sleeping at the airport.”

After one year, Woleta was able to leave the airport after
Dodd coordinated with the United Nations High Commissioner for
Refugees to have
her returned to Nigeria, where she continues to host Bible
studies. She said
she was given a crash course in the Bible during her ordeal
and now knows it
was the Word of God that sustained her.

“The Holy Spirit of God actually helped me to
understand the Bible, which actually has been my food all
along,” she said.

“Even now that I’m here [in Nigeria], I continue to thank God
for what He
has done in my life.”