

Where Being Born a Girl is Like a Crime

It was spring 1998, and already it was stifling hot as my friends and I drove through the packed streets of Cairo, Egypt. But our hearts were full of thanksgiving—we had just concluded a training institute on intercession at which God had moved powerfully. We were stopped at a traffic light when a sight just outside our car window caused me to burst into tears.

“What’s wrong?” my friends shouted, thinking I was in terrible pain. I waved my hand to indicate I wasn’t sick, but I couldn’t control the weeping and spontaneous intercession. My friends then saw what had captured my heart: a woman clad entirely in black. In this oppressive heat she wore a khumer, a heavy black tentlike dress that enveloped her from the top of her head to her ankles.

A long black veil covered her face, and long black gloves and black tights masked any other skin that might be showing. If that were not distressing enough, she held the hand of a young boy who guided her across the street like a seeing-eye dog.

We watched as he instructed her to step off the curb and follow the crowd of people who crossed the street with them. When they reached the other side of the street, the boy commanded her to step up onto the sidewalk.

I’d never seen a human being dressed in such an oppressive way. When the light changed, our car moved on and the “lady in black” faded from sight—yet five years later, I still see her with the eyes of my heart.

Who was that woman behind the outrageous apparel? I’ve wondered this as I’ve prayed for her during the years. Is she beautiful? Young? Old? Was she carrying a heavy yoke? Was she

being abused, like so many women in that part of the world? Did anyone love her?

As I prayed for her, she became a symbol to me of women all over the world who are oppressed and hopeless. I've cried out to the Lord, "What can I do to make a difference in the lives of women like 'the lady in black'?"

Simply Because They're Female

I've always had a burden for oppressed women. In December 1999 my husband, Leonard, and I founded a ministry now known as Window International Network. Our mission is to use strategic prayer initiatives to transform and impact an area of the world called the 10/40 Window, an imaginary rectangle spanning the globe from 10 degrees to 40 degrees north of the equator, including North and West Africa and the Middle and Far East.

Nearly 4 billion people live in the 68 geopolitical units in the 10/40 Window. These are some of the poorest and most spiritually dark places on the planet. The headquarters of all major non-Christian religions—Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism as well as atheism and indigenous religions—are located in this region.

In many of these cultures, there is no reason to rejoice when a girl is born into a family. Girls are valued far less than boys—not just in Muslim cultures, but in other cultures, too. From the moment they are born, girls often face a life of oppression and hopelessness. They are abused, abandoned, kidnapped, enslaved and tortured and can be killed before birth, during birth or even after birth—simply because they are females.

In this area of the world, women live with brutality, degradation and violence. In the West, women and girls have many opportunities to hear the gospel, but in the 10/40 Window, they have little opportunity to hear it even once.

Unless the body of Christ reaches them, hundreds of millions of girls and women will live and die without ever knowing about the love and sacrifice of their Kinsman Redeemer.

It is difficult to imagine that at the tender age of 2, girls in some 10/40 Window countries are butchered through a procedure called female genital mutilation (FGM). FGM is a barbaric method by which part or all of the female genitalia are removed.

I remember being horrified reading about FGM and other degradations that women and girls endure. In November 2001, my beloved Leonard went home to be with the Lord. As a widow, I realize that if I had been born and lived in certain 10/40 Window countries, I could have met a terrible fate—being a part of Leonard's burial! In some cultures, widows are burned alive when their husbands are cremated.

Throughout areas of the 10/40 Window, a woman is brutally murdered if she even glances at another man who is not her relative, however innocently. A teenage bride is set on fire or doused with chemicals if her husband's family doesn't consider her dowry large enough.

Girls as young as 7 are sold into prostitution by parents who are too poor to survive any other way. Infant girls are killed moments after they are born—unwanted simply because they are female.

A naive civilized person would think this barbarism of girls and women is an X-rated movie derived from the figment of a warped person's imagination—but it's not. These are just a few examples of the kinds of ungodly treatment females endure in this part of the world.

God Orders Our Footsteps

Window International Network travels into many of these countries on what we call prayer journeys. On one such trip to

“pray on site with insight,” a group joined me in traveling to a country that had been closed to Americans for several decades. One day our tour guide gave us the afternoon off.

We took several cabs and drove through this squeaky-clean city. Some of the men on our team had heard rumors that about 200 students at the city’s university were wearing Christian crosses. They wanted to prayer walk the university and see if we could spot these students. Aware that we had to meet our tour bus by a certain time, we had to move quickly.

We tried to enter through the university’s main entrance, but the guard directed us to another gate. University campuses in this part of the world are not like those in western countries where visitors can enter at will.

One of our team members, who had limited knowledge of the national language, tried to negotiate our entrance. Suddenly, a man came out of nowhere and screamed at us in English with a booming voice, “You! Get out of here now!”

We left immediately and decided to prayer walk another area outside the university. As we walked two by two, it looked as if we were casually talking back and forth—but we were actually praying. This is called conversational prayer and one aspect of a prayer journey.

As my prayer partner, Wayne, and I were praying, God sovereignly directed us past a girls’ school just as two young women were exiting the building dressed in black khumers. I thought about “the lady in black” and noticed that these two women were not veiled and seemed happy.

I couldn’t resist saying, “Hello.” When they responded, “Hi,” I was so excited that I asked how they were doing. In perfect English, the young women responded, “Fine, how are you?”

Both of the girls started following us. Wayne reminded me that I could not stop and draw attention to us; we had to keep

walking. I appreciated his words of wisdom. Suddenly Wayne looked back and said, "Beverly, the entire school of girls is following us!"

I turned around and saw several hundred girls following us! Oh, how I wanted to stop and ask them questions, but Wayne cautioned me that we had to head back to our tour bus. We were drawing a large crowd, which was very dangerous in a country where we desperately needed to keep a low profile.

Once my foot landed on the steps of the tour bus, I began to weep. I cried out to God on behalf of these beautiful young women. One of our team members exclaimed, "Beverly, the girls have followed you to the bus." I got up and started throwing kisses to them.

They ran after our bus throwing kisses back to me. I asked God to send them dreams and visions about Jesus, to provide Bibles in their own language, to bring believers across their paths, and to help them fulfill the calling and purpose He has placed on their lives.

That night we flew to another city in the same country, also to pray. During the flight, we read an English-language newspaper and found out exactly why the Lord did not allow us entrance to the city university. Not 15 minutes after we had been at the university gate, every university and school in the country rang a unity bell against the United States.

Imagine if we had been caught on campus during that time! God had supernaturally used the intimidating man with the booming voice to protect us.

Praise God that He closes doors in our lives that no man can open! It was just one of many miracles we witnessed during this trip and others.

When Window International launched that year's focus—praying for "Women and 'the Girl Child'" in the 10/40 —I took a prayer

team to intercede in four Arabic-speaking countries. God did incredible things in each nation.

We heard amazing stories of how women and even young girls are now following Jesus and evangelizing the lost. They have entrance to their culture in ways we do not and are God's clandestine arsenals in the 10/40 Window to reach their nations with the gospel.

The Church Is God's Answer

I recently saw a disturbing video of preschoolers in the Middle East—boys and girls—declaring that they wanted to grow up to be suicide bombers. God used this video to put more of an urgency in my heart that we must reach the 10/40 Window nations with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

According to World Evangelization Research Center, the annual income of the church in North America is an enormous \$70 billion. How much of that are we allocating to the area of the world that is the most spiritually needy—the 10/40 Window?

We have a choice: We can pray, go and invest the finances needed to reach these precious people with the gospel, or we can send our sons and daughters to be killed while defending righteousness against the tyranny of dictators and evil fanatics whose consciences have been seared.

How does God want to use you, your family and your church to impact the women and the girl child in the 10/40 Window? Will you sincerely pray and ask Him?

You may feel you cannot do anything, but I believe He has a role for you. One of the greatest things you can do is to offer simple consistent prayers for a girl or woman you have never met, in a land you may never visit.

As you pray and get involved and join millions of other Christian women doing the same all over the world, you will

blaze the way for these precious ones to know that Jesus Christ loves them and that He is their Lord and Savior. I'm confident that if we work together, we will see the 10/40 Window reached with the gospel of Jesus Christ in our generation.

Beverly Pegues is president and co-founder of Window International Network and has co-authored several books, including *A Call to Prayer for the Children, Teens and Young Adults of the 10/40 Window (YWAM)*. She is the coordinator for the *Praying Through the Window Initiatives* and has organized international training efforts and prayer strategies since 1993. For more information, visit her online.