

NIGHTLIGHT

August, 2009

"For every day that our work is delayed, a woman, child or juvenile is forced to suffer in the chain of human trafficking for an additional 1440 minutes. Therefore we must work as quickly as possible, working in terms of minutes not days."

This statement written on the wall at the Anti-Trafficking Department in Bangkok has convicted me. I complain a lot that there is not enough time in a day to do what I need to get done. I forget the luxury I have to choose and yet too often, the things that eat up the 1440 minutes are not the things of significance, but rather those that make my life more organized, comfortable and manageable. 1440 seems inadequate and insignificant in my busy schedule.



Time is Not Hers to Own



A victim of trafficking and sexual exploitation does not own her minutes. They do not belong to her to manage. A few minutes can be hell or a moment of escape through alcohol but the endless 1440 minutes day after day are not hers to choose.

Buying Her Time

Last night the outreach team went to a bar we had been to many times. Women were dancing on the stage trying hard to look sexy for the few customers scattered around the bar. One young woman reminded me of an eleven year old in heels and a bikini trying to be an adult. The sexy poses seemed out of place in her seemingly undeveloped body. She was working hard to entertain a man. Her minutes were already owned by the man groping her.

We bought drinks for 4 other women, buying their minutes to speak to them. "One" was already tipsy and had a dazed "I'm not really here" look on her face. She asked me if I liked the sexy show. I struggled with how to answer this question. I don't want them to feel ashamed and yet the truth is no, I don't. I paused and I told her, "Thai women are beautiful but I don't come to see the show. I come to make friends. I want to give honor to women." She grinned and she gave me a big thumbs-up. She said, "Women are better than men. Men have dark hearts." "Not all men," I told her. I have a husband and he is a good man. He gives honor to women." Another enthusiastic thumbs-up. I added, "But men who come here and pay for women are acting selfishly." She nodded enthusiastically, thrilled that I understood but then told me that she had one American who was nice. "It is easy to be nice while on vacation and spend lots of money but what is he like back home?" I asked. She nodded. She wants to go to massage school. She got up to dance but her eyes increasingly dulled by the alcohol stared at me off and on throwing her off balance. I tried to look back with hope and acceptance but the alcohol was doing its job of erasing these minutes from reality and she was switching to the seducer.

Om had a feisty personality. She wasn't used to doing the sexy dancing and doesn't like it. She had been in a bar where she rode a mechanical bull while in a bikini to entertain the men. She explained that the men didn't like her as much because she is big and it is harder for her to get money. She's been doing this for three years since leaving computer classes. She is hoping to finish the classes but is afraid she has forgotten a lot already. At 20, she has a lot of potential. But the minutes turn to days and then to years and her time is

slipping away. I encouraged her to do it so she can have a better life than this. She asked me to bless her. I gave her hug and a prayer asking God to bless her and show her the way out so that she can finish her schooling and live a better life than this. She grinned and waied me in the Thai way of expressing gratitude.

A Moment to Feel Human

On the street, two African women stood waiting for customers. My co-worker asked, "How are you?" "Not good," one answered, "I don't have a Bible." I laughed as "E" pulled one out of her bag and handed it to her. Word gets around. The African women always ask for a Bible. "Thank you, you have given the best gift of all," she said. "Pray for me. My boyfriend is in jail on drug charges." I prayed for her, the other woman and the man in jail and gave them hugs.

"Syl" another African stood near the street. I almost missed her. Her sadness made her almost invisible in the consuming darkness. I took her hand. She looked around nervously. "Are you being watched?" I asked. No answer. I reminded her I had given my number and told her "When you feel safe call me. We can help. You don't have to stay in this. There is a way out." I hugged her. As I began to move away, she grabbed my hand. A longing, a grip, a reluctance to let go of those few minutes in which she is a human and not a commodity. She was afraid to talk. A deep sadness made me linger. "Call me."

Just A Few Minutes

A few minutes. That's all we really have with them on outreach. Just a few minutes to bring hope, restore vision and dreams, and remind them of their value and humanity. But just a few minutes is enough for a hug. Just a few minutes is hope in the midst of hopelessness, a word to reclaim their true identity, a light in the darkness. A few minutes is just enough time for the door of freedom to crack open. 1440 minutes. It can feel like eternity to a victim. A few minutes on the other hand can intercept darkness and bring hope to the rest of those 1440 minutes. When darkness engulfs the women they will have hope because they have seen the door to freedom. Given a few more minutes of our time and they just might find courage to walk through the door to freedom. 1440 minutes. Its nothing or its endless. What we do with it makes all the difference.



Do you have a few minutes? Just a few? If so, lift up a prayer for all these precious women. If you have a few minutes maybe buy some jewelry that is created by the survivors. It only takes a minute to forward this e-mail to someone who might be interested in supporting this work. Time is precious and it slips by fast. What we do with it makes the difference. Thank you for sharing your time with us in prayer, in encouragement and in support.

Blessings,

Annie Dieselberg

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