Where did all the girls go?

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Gendercide and What the Good News Has to Say About It

Is go?
AROUND THE WORLD, families face great pressure to have a son. Sons mean honor and prosperity; daughters are a financial and social liability. Desperate families respond with desperate measures and try to “select” for a son by killing or aborting daughters. Every year millions of daughters are strangled, suffocated, drowned, lethally neglected, or aborted simply because her family wanted a boy and not a girl. This is called gendercide.

Because of gendercide, girls are disappearing at an alarming rate. In 2005, demographer Christophe Guilmoto estimated that Asia was currently missing 163 million women and girls from their population due to gendercide.1 Gendercide has continued since then, and kept growing. The United Nations puts their estimate at closer to 200 million women.2 In a single generation, more women have gone “missing” from Asia due to gendercide than all the girls and women alive in the United States.

When I first encountered these issues, my heart broke. I grieved for the lives lost. I grieved for the mothers and fathers who faced such immense pressure that they felt compelled to discard their child. I grieved for the stories I heard, for the mother who declared that for her daughter it was “better for her to die” than to live in the situations of abuse and hardship her mother had faced, for the mother that strangled and buried seven daughters.

Gendercide is rooted in a belief that a girl offers little to her family in terms of social or financial benefit, but a boy offers much more. I grieved at the thought of measuring the worth of a human life in financial and social status.

But I believe the gospel can indeed be good news to families and communities facing gendercide. This isn’t about asking people to pray a prayer and “convert.” Nor is it just about rescuing unwanted girls. It’s about a transformation of individuals and families to embrace their kingdom identity as people loved by God and called to love others. For me, the understanding of good news has come to rest heavily on the idea that humans are made in the image of God. (See “The Image of God: A Dignifying Invitation.”) Each person has value because he or she is created, known and loved by God.

The good news is that you matter. You are made in the image of God, which means you have worth and dignity that is sacred and eternal. Your life is not disposable. Your value is not conditional on your status, your wealth or your gender. It cannot be tarnished.

The good news is that you can know God. God is not a far away deity who has no interest in you. He knows you and wants you to know Him. This is a radically different understanding of God from religious traditions where the gods pursue their own ends and have little concern for humans. But God cares so much about being known that He sent Jesus to show us who God is and how much He cares about us.

The good news is that others also have worth and dignity. When we come to understand our own place before God, we can extend the same grace to others. This transforms the way we treat one another, including our own families and children.

The good news is that your salvation is not your own work. God made the first move towards us. This is not a matter of struggling to please a flippant god or trying to be good enough. God declared that we are created, known and loved. He loved us first. This is why we have the gall to hope that God will enter into our brokenness to redeem us.

We can believe with confidence that God cares for these girls and their families, and that it is within His power to shine His light into the darkness that is gendercide. So let’s dive in and get a better understanding of what’s happening. Here are some of the basics.

How does this happen?

These girls have been eliminated primarily through sex-selective abortion specifically targeted at terminating a female fetus in hopes of later conceiving a male. Families with less access to ultrasound and abortion may also kill a newborn daughter, or simply withhold life essentials such as food and medical care. In both India and China, there are laws against finding out the sex of a fetus, aborting because of the fetus’s sex, and killing a child. However, the practices continue with little resistance. A girl is killed or aborted every 16 seconds, simply because she is a girl.3

How do we know how many women are “missing” due to gendercide?

The prevalence of gendercide is measured by the male to female sex ratio. A sex ratio reports how many males there are compared to how many females in a certain
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The systematic killing of members of a specific sex, virtually always used of women

The attempt to control the sex of the offspring to achieve a desired sex (in this case, a son). It can be accomplished in several ways, including sex selective abortion and female infanticide

The deliberate killing of a newborn female baby

The practice of terminating a pregnancy based upon the sex of the baby (in this case, a female)

Ratio of females to males in a population (The absence of female births indicates gendercide.)

Placing a higher value on sons than daughters (Son preference is rooted in gender inequality and is often the motivation behind gendercide.)
A study in Delhi found “that out of 8,000 cases, 7,999 aborted fetuses were female.”
more on how governments and NGOs can decrease gendercide.)

What are the consequences?

The consequences of a population missing millions of women and girls are large and far-reaching. Due to the lack of females in certain communities, many men cannot find eligible women to marry. These men are known as bare branches. It is estimated by the year 2020 that approximately 15% of young adult men in China and India will be bare branches. To meet the demand, women are trafficked to become wives of men who cannot find a bride locally. Men are paying large sums to obtain a wife. As age appropriate women become scarce, the market turns to child brides to fill the gap. Essentially, marriage becomes commoditized as women are bought and sold as a supply and demand mentality overtakes entire populations. The elimination and abuse of women has terrible consequences not only for women, but also for men, families, and communities (See “The Ripple Effect”).

Conclusion

I dream of a world where women are given a chance to exist, their innate value is respected, and they are able to fully contribute to their families, communities, and world. I believe this world would be better for all of us, and that the Church has something unique to offer in bringing it about. I lead an organization whose vision is for the restoration of families and communities where girls can flourish and gendercide is eradicated. But this is only possible because we believe that God gave intrinsic worth to each life, regardless of gender.

Never before have I been so compelled by the understanding that humans bear the image of God. This is what gives each of us worth and dignity. This is why we treat others with worth and dignity. And this is why we have the courage to hope that the God of the universe will stoop down low to whisper His love in our ear. But how heart breaking it would be to live without knowing that you have intrinsic value! That value will not tarnish or fade. It is not dependent on social status or finances or being born female. If you’ve never heard this before, it is indeed good news.

4 Give Her Life www.giveherlife.org.
5 Give Her Life’s core motivation is to follow Jesus’ example of servanthood and love for all people, families, and nations. We embrace opportunities to serve and partner with people regardless of religion.