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The other unreached people group

The 10/30 Window will be the one to watch in 2012 | *Mindy Belz*

Most of us know the 10/40 Window, that geographic band between 10 and 40 degrees north latitude that's home to the largest unreached people groups—and the poorest and most spiritually impoverished—in the world. Its billion account for the majority of the world's Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists.

Fewer of us have heard of the 10/30 Window, and I'm grateful for a recent orientation session from two experts, Eric Larsen and Jonathan Taylor of Global Youth and Family Ministries. They believe missions are both geographic and generational, and they have dubbed the 2.4 billion of the world's population between the ages of 10 and 30 as the 10/30 Window. Taylor told me these youth constitute "the largest unreached people group in human history, larger than the 100 largest geographically defined unreached people groups combined."

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World population quietly hit a tipping point in 2010: Over 50 percent of people around the globe are now under the age of 25. It's perhaps no coincidence that in the year following we saw youth rise up in Arab Spring revolts, and other less noted protests in China, Burma, Uganda and elsewhere have featured youthful roustabouts raging against aging, entrenched government leaders. I have seen too the sheer potency and discontentedness of youth in Afghanistan, where people under the age of 30 make up 75 percent of the population.

Beyond the shifting demographics are two other guiding realities: The extension of adolescence, where puberty begins earlier (in 1900 its average of onset was 14.5 years of age; today it is 10) and marriage and other signifiers of adulthood arrive later and later. And an emerging global culture in which youth around the world have more in common with each other than they do with the adults in their own culture. Theirs is a

shaped by media, by technology, and by the predominance of English as the language of the internet. A 14-year-old in Kathmandu is more likely to speak English and to use it frequently via Facebook and YouTube than his 40-year-old parents, who haven't had an English lesson since 8th grade and don't have much time for the internet while running a store. This, said Taylor, "at least blurs if not practically speaking obliterates the generational boundaries that once divided previous generations."

Towering alongside these new trends is what Larsen calls "the systemic adult abandonment of the young." The very things that unite young people divide them from adults. They learn the day's conversation topics from a social media website, not the dinner table. They go to YouTube for direction on how to change the oil in the car, not Dad. If they have a question about who took the first walk on the moon or what is an HPV vaccine they're more likely to google it than to ask in the car on the way home from school.

And clearly parents have turned away from youth, particularly in the West (and often in pursuit of extending their own youth). Even in our Christian circles adults often are no longer a treasury of wisdom and experience for children but a directory of services. The Christian school or the homeschool curriculum educates and disciplines them, the youth group entertains them, and clinical experts are there to rehabilitate them when they fall.

"We used to guide our children into the pool and teach them how to swim," says Larsen. "But this is the generation of parents who walked away. We've pushed our children into the pool and we aren't in the water with them."

Larsen's plea is simple and direct: "We are calling on an entire adult population to turn its hearts to the young."

His plea is not only to parents but to what he calls a covenant community of adults who will recognize the value of training the next generation in things at all levels—and not as in "we hire some people and we say we have done it."

Larsen believes it's significant that the Old Testament ends in Malachi with the promise of the prophet who will "turn the hearts of fathers to children and the hearts of children to their fathers ..." (Malachi 4:6) and that the New Testament begins with the birth of a baby, an infant saved by Himself born to parents who today would be considered part of the 10/30 Window.

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