**Lesson 4 THE YOUNG WOMAN FROM BADAKHSHAN**

I want you to imagine for a second that you are a young 18-year-old woman living in a small remote village in the province of Badakhshan in northern Afghanistan. You grew up there, and recently married a young man from the same village. Your husband is a day labourer at a nearby farm. He has work, but it’s not a steady income. Your parents died a few years ago, so you’re responsible for caring for your younger brother, providing shelter, food, school fees, and so on.

You are now six months pregnant with your first child and recently you’ve been feeling weak and dizzy. You’re not seriously ill, but things just don’t seem right, and you need to see a doctor. The closest clinic is a long journey away across a mountain valley. You can’t travel to the clinic by yourself – you need a male relative to accompany you because that’s the custom in this part of the country – but it’s the planting season and your husband is busy at work. He decides it’s important to take you to the clinic, which means he will forego his wages. There is no transportation to the clinic, and it would take days to walk, so you need to rent a car and have to use the money you’ve been saving to buy school books for your younger brother.

You leave early in the morning since it takes most of the day to get to the clinic. When you arrive, it’s overcrowded and very busy. You have to stay overnight in the village – more money spent. When you return in the morning, you wait for hours until you finally get to see the nurse.

When you get to see the nurse, she says she will need to do some blood tests to determine what is wrong – this means waiting overnight for the results, dipping into your savings again. (There goes the sewing machine you were hoping to buy in order to start your own tailoring business to bring in more income for your growing family.) The tests show that you have anaemia – a very common condition caused by a lack of iron in your diet. The nurse explains it to you, but iron-rich foods like meat and eggs are expensive, so you rarely eat them. The nurse hands you a package of pills and ushers you out of the examination room. You’re not sure how many pills to take or how often. There are instructions written on the package, but, like 70% of the people in your country, you and your husband cannot read. You hope you’ll find someone on the way home who can explain the instructions to you. If you don’t take the supplements properly, your child will likely be born early with a low birthweight… and the cycle of poverty will continue.