

RELEASED

30 Days to Stand for Freedom



Devotions & Prayers about Human Trafficking from Around the World

RELEASED



30 Days to Stand for Freedom

A shared devotion by those who stand for freedom
Compiled by Julie Sanders

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Contents

Introduction

1. Now I Know
2. Lies
3. A Prayer for God's People
4. What Every Child Deserves
5. Guardians and Intercessors
6. A Prayer for the Runaways
7. How Much Am I Worth?
8. Survivors to Overcomers
9. Healing from This?
10. A Divine Appointment
11. The Ebenezer Stone
12. Freedom
13. Bought, Sold, Traded
14. The Chance of a Lifetime
15. Rise Up
16. Desperate Deals
17. Storms of Opportunity
18. Family Values
19. Far Reaching Ripples
20. Children in the Cradle
21. Refuge in Romania
22. Not Born Free
23. Made in the Image
24. Finding True Love
25. What Can I Do?
26. Illiteracy that Imprisons
27. Eyes Wide Open
28. One
29. Unnamed, Not Unknown
30. Same Tactics, New Times

About the Contributors

Additional Notes





Introduction

Jesus was in his hometown when he stood up to read to the listening crowd. “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed,” (Luke 4:18 ESV). Other versions translate the word *aphesis* as deliverance or release, communicating the idea of freedom from bondage or imprisonment, letting go of wrong, as if it had never been done. Ever since the Prince of Darkness hurled humanity onto a pathway of pain, God has been about the business of bringing release and forgiveness.

As if to stake his claim on those who bear the image of their Maker, the Evil One delights in enslaving more people today than any time in human history. Those bound in forced labor, sex trafficking, slavery, forced marriage, and debt bondage represent the variety of tactics used to exploit children, women, and men around the globe. Preying on the vulnerable, human slavery knows no boundaries of economy, politics, geography, or nationality. Certain risk factors make the soil fertile for abuse, calling on those who value life to stand for freedom.

God planted a seed of vision for *Released* in the summer of 2013. Writers from a variety of countries and a diversity of backgrounds have contributed to this devotional tool out of a common passion for freedom. With a shared belief that God offers hope for our dark world, they offer their voices and hearts through the gift of their words. In each devotion, you will find truth from God’s word, information about various forms of modern bondage, and guidance for prayer. The goal of *Released* is that people would begin to find understanding about modern day slavery and would gain inspiration for how to pray effectively.

Will you stand with us for freedom? We invite you to share *Released* freely. Wherever the words are read, may God’s love for life and liberty be known and may captives be *Released*.





Now I Know

We met when she tapped on my car window. I was waiting at the drive-thru as she hopped out of the grass along the canal. Her wide, white smile shone from her brown face, resting on fingers gripping the door. Too-big clothing hung on her body, giving away a slight form underneath and bare feet straining to deliver her plea. A small hand opened in outstretched hope, so I ordered extra food. I pulled over to park, knowing enough to resist the urge to give money and satisfy a potential handler lurking in the dark. Instead, I shared food for the moment, which she tucked away without a word of thanks, hopping back towards the canal.

Her image lingered in my mind, shouting poverty and hunger, leaving no doubt education was out of her reach. Where were the adults who should've been watching over her? I wanted to do more, but didn't know where to begin in the black hole of need we called our adopted, tropical home in Asia.

In time she shared her name, giggling as if she expected to be nameless and thought it strange we would want to know her. Each time our paths crossed, she hopped out and grabbed my heart with her outstretched hand. But that was before I knew.

Now I know. There are millions of adults and children in slavery around the world today. Some estimate the number to be more than all those in the trans-Atlantic slavery period.ⁱ Now I know almost 2 million children are victimized in the commercial sex trade each year.ⁱⁱ Factors such as poverty, hunger, education, broken families, conflict, and abuse put children and adults at risk, creating vulnerable populations as prey for perpetrators worldwide. These facts explain how the profit-driven industry has become one of the top financial contenders around the globe.

Now I know slavery is not just a foreign problem, but a domestic evil in my own country. In the Land that claims to be the home of the free, the Polaris Project estimates 17,500 foreign nationals enter the borders due to trafficking each year. All fifty of the United States have reported cases of human trafficking for labor or sexual exploitation. In my own city, interstate highway systems merge, presenting a prime location for the route of the modern slave trade.

In July of 2013, the FBI conducted Operation Cross Country, arresting 150 people in 76 American cities, seven in my hometown.ⁱⁱⁱ Over a hundred children were rescued nationally, most between ages 13 to 17, the youngest exploited by her own father. As in every nation, perpetrators exploit the vulnerable through coercion, fraud, or force. Now I know slavery is international and domestic, impacting adults and children, women and men.

Now I know my small, hopping friend was reaching out for more than bread. Like millions around the world, she reached for hope and rescue. I don't have to wonder if God knows, because His words inspire me. "May he defend the cause of the poor of the people, give deliverance to the children of the needy, and crush the oppressor!" (Psalm 72:4). When I look into the evil of global human slavery, God assures me, "For the needy shall not always be forgotten, and the hope of the poor shall not perish forever." (Psalm 9:18)

Prayer:

Father in Heaven,

Thank You for defending those who are poor, needy, and oppressed. Would You remember them now and be their hope? You see and know their cause better than I do, so I ask You to feed their faith and help them to reach out to You. Amen

Shared by Julie Sanders

ⁱ Kevin Bales, Disposable People

ⁱⁱ Unicef

ⁱⁱⁱ Johnson, Kevin. "FBI Underage Prostitution Sting" WBIR.com. 29 July 2013. WBIR. 25 Nov. 2013 <<http://archive.wbir.com/news/local/story.aspx?storyid=282362>>



Lies

“Do not be deceived, my dear friends.” (James 1:16 GNT)

All over the world, every day, lies from the Father of Lies (John 8:44) tickle the ears of lonely, unloved teenage girls, seducing them into relationships that quickly turn into bondage. The lies lure desperate families needing money into “business deals” where their children are sent off to “work” with the promise of financial reward. The lies cloaked in promises of love and rewards entangle vulnerable, desperate girls, boys, young men and women before they can truly see what is happening to them. And then, it’s too late. They are enslaved.

She isn’t the girlfriend she thought she was. She’s now a prostitute. Her savior boyfriend isn’t who he said he was. He’s a pimp. The job overseas at a restaurant doesn’t exist and the would-be waiter is now drug addicted and for hire.

And it’s not just the lies spoken to sons and daughter who are now sex slaves. It’s the lies spoken to the brothel owner. Lies that he believes are true. Lies that tell him there is no other way. He is deceived into thinking the children he employs are objects, not souls. It’s also the lies whispered in the consumer’s ear. Lies that tell him no one will know about his dirty secret. Lies that convince him prostitutes choose this lifestyle. Lies that have him believing he deserves his pleasure any way he wants it. Lies that blind him to the reality of the deep pain and evil he is inflicting on an innocent person.

Lies. All lies being manufactured by the Evil One minute by minute, hour by hour, day by day, until this very moment when we now find ourselves with 29.8 million peopleⁱ trapped in the 32 billion dollar businessⁱⁱ of human trafficking.

The good news is that above all the lies stands Jesus – the voice of truth – speaking words of justice, conviction, rescue, salvation, hope, and love.

So what better response can we give ourselves to but prayer, when combating an atrocity so evil and insidious? What will God release from heaven if we all pray for ears to hear and minds to discern truth from lies? How many would be saved from slavery?

“And you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”
(John 8:32 NASB)

Prayer:

Lord Jesus,

We ask You to give people ears to hear the truth and discern evil before they are entangled in human trafficking. And for those already caught in its grip, we ask You to release hope, rescue, conviction, justice, and love across this earth until all are free. Amen”

Shared by Eileen Sommi

ⁱ International Business Times, 10/17/13

ⁱⁱ UN News Centre, 10/18/13



A Prayer for God's People

“...If my people who are called by my name will humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and forgive their sin and heal their land. Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to prayer made in this place. For now I have chosen and sanctified this house, that my name may be there forever; and my eyes and my heart will be there perpetually.”
(2 Chronicles 7:14 NKJV)

According to the XXXChurch, 47% of Christians admit pornography is an issue in the home and 53% of Promise Keeper men viewed pornography in the last week. The word pornography is derived from the roots “porne,” which means “women in bondage” and “graphe,” which means “to write about.” The connection between pornography and sexual immorality to sex trafficking is real and is unleashing demand at younger and younger ages. It must be stopped.

The Church stands anointed to help heal those who have been plagued by the evil ravaging cities around the globe – the evil known as modern day slavery, human trafficking. Perhaps the most despicable of this evil is the plight of our children being forced into performing sexual acts for the pleasure of those who have an insatiable appetite for sexual perversion. Sexual immorality, pornography, abortion and the lack of value on human life has become a norm in our culture. Families are destroyed and generations are held in bondage. However, according to statistics, this “norm” of culture spills into the confines of our churches. Before we stand anointed to heal, we must stand in holiness and righteousness.

Prayer and action are called for in 2 Chronicles 7:14. We must be willing to recognize sin in our church body. We must relate to individuals within our church community who are held in bondage of sexual sin, perversion and pornography. We must respond to the call to turn from our wicked ways. Then, we will not only stand anointed to heal those who have been victim of this evil, but will address the issue of demand, pornography and sexual perversion existing within the walls of the Church.

There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ. We must expose sin and turn from shame filled ways. We must welcome the redemptive blood of Christ to run through the veins of our churches to heal men, women and youth plagued by the sin that feeds the demand for sex trafficking.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father,

We cry out to You on behalf of Your people. We seek Your face for forgiveness of sins we have allowed to occur on our watch and sins we ourselves have committed. We humble ourselves before Your throne and cry “Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty!” We ask You to give us spiritual eyes and discernment to see those around us contributing to this evil. We pray for truth to be revealed and for people to turn from their wicked ways. God, we plead at Your mercy seat for the next generation—the eyes of young boys and girls who have seen pornography, giving in to sexual immorality. We believe You have heard our prayers and will forgive our sin. Sanctify Your house of believers and give us boldness to call out the sin entangling our hearts. Let us walk in righteousness and holiness to bring an end to modern day slavery. Amen

Shared by Danielle Jones



What Every Child Deserves

“What if one of you had one hundred sheep and you lost one of them? Would you not leave the ninety-nine in the country and go back and look for the one which was lost until you find it?”

(Luke 15:4 NLV)

It's 8:45 a.m. and I pull up to my neighbor's house for our morning carpool. My daughter hops out of the car and runs to the porch to get her friend, like usual. A few minutes pass and, instead of her coming back out with *Sophie, Sophie's mom hurries to my car, a worried look on her face.

“Is she not coming to school?” I ask, thinking Sophie might be sick.

“I can't *find* her,” she says. “She went outside to look for the cat and she hasn't come back. That was over *twenty minutes ago*.”

I'm immediately concerned. Just a few days before, one of our neighbor's houses was randomly robbed. Visions of Sophie chasing the cat around the corner and then encountering...

I won't let my mind go there.

“Do you want me to drive around and look for her?” I offer.

“That's okay. I was just going to do that,” she says.

I tell her I'll drop my daughter off at school, then come back and help her.

I pray the whole drive, remembering how I felt one time when my son was two and wandered around the corner at a neighborhood BBQ. I thought he might be lost... forever. I remember that sick feeling of not knowing where your child is... and I feel that for Sophie now. She's not family, but she's my daughter's close friend, *and I feel that*.

I drop my daughter off and race back to Sophie's, gripping the steering wheel and scanning the sidewalks. When I pull into her court, her garage door is open and her mom is standing in the driveway. I roll down my window, my heart beating fast. “Did you find her?”

And then, the sweetest word: “Yes.” *Thank God*. The weight lifts. “She was in the backyard,” she says, still shaken. (Their cat had gotten out and climbed over the fence. Sophie had been trying to get him and hadn't heard her mom calling.)

“Do you want me to take her to school?” I offer. “I'm heading back that way.”

“Would you?” She runs her hand through her hair. “My gas is on empty.”

Sophie comes out of their garage and gets in my car, crying. “Are you okay, Hon?” I ask her. She nods in between tears. “Are you crying because you were scared?”

“No,” she snuffles.

“Are you crying because you think your mom is mad at you?”

“Uh-huh.”



I imagine the reaction I would have had, if I'd been calling my daughter, looking for her, driving around the neighborhood... and she was in the backyard the whole time. I would've been overwhelmed with relief, but I probably would have had a few words about answering me when I call or being ready for school.

“Your mom’s not mad at you,” I promise. “She’s just glad you’re safe.”

By the time we get to school, she stops crying. The minute she gets out and closes the door, I start. I cry and cry – not just with relief Sophie is safe, but for the girls out there who aren’t. For all the girls out there—11, 12, 13... younger and older—who don’t have someone frantically looking for them. For all the girls out there who run away or are lured away, then forced into the world of sex trafficking... and nobody goes to find them. Nobody even knows they are missing.

Fact:
There are countless girls (and boys)—in our own communities—who are victims of trafficking. Many have nobody looking for them. The Justice Department’s National Incidence Study reported 1.7 million children run away or are thrown away each year, with just 357,600 reported as missing to police. Those kids—alone, vulnerable, needing love, food, and shelter—are vulnerable to traffickers who know exactly how to prey on them and keep them in captivity.

Prayer:

Lord,
thank You that every child is precious to You. Every child. Please be with all children who are homeless, lost, alone, and vulnerable. Protect them. Provide for them. Comfort them and keep them safe. You see their plight, their pain, and their hurt. Please open our eyes and the eyes of the world to the risk factors kids and teens face. Help us play a part in reducing their risk and showing them love. Please heal their hearts and call them to You. Above all, help them know Your unconditional, endless, perfect love.

Shared by Genny Heikka



Guardians & Intercessors

“First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.

This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior.”

(1 Timothy 2:1-3)

It looked like a routine traffic stop. The car was made in the USA and driving east through valleys where the Civil War against slavery was waged and country music was born. State Trooper Scott noticed an improperly displayed registration and moved to pull the vehicle over. The driver’s evasive response alerted the officer to the fact that this may not be just routine.

Once stopped, the trooper confronted the Texas driver and discovered human cargo being transported along the interstate highway system. Seven unrelated individuals, ranging in age from 11 to 24 years old, were rescued that day. Money and evidence related to human smuggling were found in the vehicle. While calls were made to family members around the United States to retrieve their loved ones, unsuspecting citizens drove the same road to their schools and churches and jobs and grocery stores and soccer fields. Little did they know that an alert law enforcement officer had set seven prisoners free as they went about their day.ⁱ

One of the ways God moves in mercy for the vulnerable is through those He puts into places of authority. As law enforcement grows in awareness of the signs of human trafficking, their response has the potential to change the lives of captives and bring justice to perpetrators. The support of citizens with sensitive hearts empowers the authorities to act justly. “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God,” (Romans 13:1).

Citizens assist agents in carrying out the rule of law when they learn about risk factors, when they refrain from interference with evidence, and when they communicate concerns through proper channels. Citizens with a faith in a personal God are able to offer support to the guardians of life and intercessors for justice by engaging in the power of prayer.

Pray for law enforcement officers in the fight against exploitation and slavery:

- Astute observation in their routine duties and interactions
- Wise decision making in approaching potential traffickers
- Compassion in managing victims and requesting help
- Safety in confronting criminals who may be without conviction
- Attention to detail for the integrity of evidence leading to conviction
- Emotional strength in processing horrible circumstances
- Purity of thought from the images they are exposed to

It wasn’t the first time Trooper Scott’s observations led to freedom for would be captives. The year before, in a neighboring county, he pulled over another vehicle in another “routine” traffic stop. His action led to the reunion of three young women with their families just a short drive from where they were intercepted. One alert officer changed the lives of ten slaves. They live free today because of his insight, decisions, and action. May God guide the “kings and all who are in high positions” to be people of integrity as guardians of life and intercessors for justice.

Prayer:

God our Savior,

We know peaceful life is pleasing to You, and so we ask for Your intervention through those You appoint to enforce justice. We lift up thanksgiving for their willingness to give their lives for the safety and freedom of others. We offer supplication for their strength and integrity, their insight and wisdom. We intercede for them as they intercede for others, and we ask that You would use them to be a strong arm of safety in every land.

Shared by Julie Sanders

ⁱ “Routine Traffic Stop Halts Human Smuggling” WBIR.com. 15 Nov. 2013. WBIR. 23 Nov. 2013 <<http://www.wbir.com/>>.



A Prayer for the Runaways

It is estimated that 33% of runaways are trafficked within two to five days after leaving home.ⁱ

In 2010 the U.S. National Runaway Switchboard estimated that on any given night, there were approximately 1.3 million homeless youth living unsupervised on U.S. streets, in abandoned buildings, with friends or with strangers. Homeless youth are at a higher risk for physical abuse, sexual exploitation, mental health disabilities, substance abuse, and death. It is estimated that 5,000 unaccompanied youth die each year as a result of assault, illness, or suicide.ⁱⁱ

“Defend the weak and the fatherless; uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked.”

(Psalm 82:3-4 NIV)

Prayer:

Abba,

I thank You that You are our great defender and You deeply care for even the least of these children. I pray that You will give the church Your heart for each one of them. Turn the flight risk of each child into a fight for each child. I ask that You would change their home life through salvation in Jesus Christ for parents or guardians, by providing mentors to help guide and offer wisdom in unbelievably difficult circumstances, and by making their homes a stable environment. Not one of their cries has fallen to the ground, but each has been heard by You in heaven. Rise up, O Lord, and answer the cry of Your own heart for these children by defending their weak and oppressed lives through the mobilizing of the church. For those who are already on the street and caught in the trap of human trafficking, I cry out to You O Great Defender and ask for You to deliver them from the hand of the wicked. Open the eyes of first responders to recognize and take action when they encounter these children. I also ask that counter trafficking groups would be available and staffed appropriately to handle the increase of survivors that You, Lord, are delivering out of the hands of their oppressors. I ask that You will handpick a caretaker and father for every survivor, one who will not take advantage but who cares and nurtures them like they are their most treasured possession.

Thank you for your overwhelming love and compassion for every homeless youth, Daddy.

Shared by Robert Craig

ⁱ Clawson, Heather . “Human Trafficking into and Within the United States” ASPE.hhs.gov. Aug. 2009. USDHHS. 25 Nov. 2013 <<http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/07/humantrafficking/litrev/>>.

ⁱⁱ National Conference of State Legislatures.



How Much Am I Worth?

“No one can redeem the life of another or give to God a ransom for them
– the ransom for a life is costly, no payment is ever enough
– so that they should live on forever and not see decay.”
(Psalm 49:7-9 NIV)

Recently our family gathered in our snug home over bowls of spicy chili. My husband and I were looking into our options for replacing the ancient furnace in our basement. To help the kids understand why this was a big decision, I started playing a little “which is worth more?” game with them.

Which is worth more - an iPhone or the chair you're sitting in? A car or a house? A furnace or an American Girl doll? My seven year-old interrupted me with a sparkle in her eye – “well, I'm an American girl!” I smiled back and said, “Yes you are! So, how much are you worth?” She looked puzzled.

“How much did God pay for you?” She started to smile. “My sin?”

“Yes. He paid Jesus to buy you back from sin. You are worth so very, very much to Him.” Her face lit up with such joy that sudden tears welled up in my eyes. Oh, that she would know deep in her heart how valuable she is to God.

On any given day in the United States, around 400,000 children are in out-of-home care through the child welfare system. Typically they have ended up in foster care due to abuse and neglect, and far too often their stories of rejection and their histories of abuse do not end there.

Every one of those 400,000 children is inconceivably valuable to their Creator, but too many believe they are worthless. They have been told they are worthless. They have been treated as though they were worthless. Kids who think they are worthless can quickly become trafficking victims. “Approximately 81% of the missing children reported to NCMEC are endangered runaways. These children represent the most vulnerable children in our country... Children in foster care are easy targets for pimps.

...Of the children reported missing to NCMEC in 2012 who are likely child sex trafficking victims, 67% were in the care of social services or foster care when they ran.” [Emphasis mine] -John D. Ryan, CEO, National Center for Missing & Exploited Children Pimps have realized something that far too many Christians have not – these are the most vulnerable children in our country. These children have been neglected, abused, ripped away from anything familiar, placed in the homes of strangers, shuttled between school districts, and been told in every possible way that they are unwanted, worthless burdens.

The cross shouts out a message of their worth and value in the infinite cost God was willing to pay for them. What if the Church stood up, entered into their pain, opened our homes, welcomed them into our church families ... what if we lived out for them what good news the Gospel truly is? What if we radically love these kids before they can be preyed upon?

Prayer:

Our Father,

You are a Father to the fatherless, and today I pray for the hundreds of thousands of children in the foster care system. I pray for Your Church to see and respond. I pray that we would be so radically transformed by the good news of the Gospel that we would welcome children in Your name—even traumatized and abused children who so desperately need to hear how much they are worth to the One who created them, sees them, loves them, and paid an infinite price for them.

Amen.

Shared by Kristi Stephens



Survivors to Overcomers

“Each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable...”
(1 Thessalonians 4:14ⁱ)

How does an adult who has been manipulated, exploited and sexually abused as a child respond in adulthood to this admonition from the Lord? Many adults quietly suffer under guilt and shame because of sexual abuse in their past. Many struggle with personal boundaries. Many believe that somehow it was their “fault” that sexual abuse happened to them – even if it happened on only one occasion.

Children who suffer sexual abuse link their need for loving relationships with sex and abuse. Therefore, they often come to view themselves only as sexual objects who exist for the sexual pleasure of another person.ⁱⁱ

Is it possible for a Victim to become a Survivor of sexual abuse? Can they ever hope to become more than a Survivor? Can they ever be Overcomers? It must be possible, because God has told us in Romans 6:13c that we are to “offer the parts of your body to (God) as instruments of righteousness.”

When God looks at those who have trusted Jesus as Savior, He proclaims that in Christ, we are declared righteous. When a life is lived under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, then God sees the pure righteousness of His Son in us. We are promised in Scripture that God is faithful to perfect His work in us (1Thessalonians 5:24). Our responsibility is the daily surrender of ourselves to Him. As we surrender, He does the work of perfecting and completing us. To live life as a Survivor of sexual abuse is our first commendable goal. To focus ahead on overcoming sexual abuse is possible. When we are born again, God makes us “brand new.” We are a new creation according to 2 Corinthians 5:17. We know from His Word that we are “clean” in His eyes.

Embrace the truth that you are indeed a “new creature in Christ Jesus.” For those who have suffered sexual abuse, understand He has given you a new name, a new identity. When Jesus is your Savior and Lord, you now wear His name on your forehead (Revelation 22:4). Where once your identity seemed forever connected with the name of your abuser; where once you wore the name of your abuser, whether in reality or figuratively, you are forever changed. Jesus’ name is your identifying brand now! You are not only a Survivor, you are an Overcomer. You have His promise in Revelation 3:5 that He will “never blot out your name from His book of life,” and He will “acknowledge” your new relationship with Him before His Father. He isn’t ashamed of anyone who belongs to Him! We should not be ashamed either! The old “you” doesn’t exist any longer. Shout “Hallelujah” and walk freely as an Overcomer in Christ Jesus!

Prayer:

Father in heaven,

Thank you for Your invitation to become new in Christ Jesus. Only You can make us clean, to give Survivors hope of becoming Overcomers. I want to be identified with You. Would you help victims of sexual abuse and those in bondage now to hear Your message of freedom? Give them hope to overcome.

Shared by Andi Worley

ⁱ All Scripture references in this devotion are from the New International Version.

ⁱⁱ Continuum of Sexual Abuse, SEC & CSEC: Training Manual on the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC); Girls Educational and Mentoring Services



Healing From *This*?

There are some things in the journey of life with God that feel just about impossible to accomplish. God guided my miraculous escape from captivity as a sex slave to a man for just under a month, and I was able to survive long enough for that escape to occur before he could take me overseas.

But here is the crazy part: the physical accomplishment of staying alive wasn't what seemed impossible to me. Even the escape itself did not seem completely impossible, though at the time it felt more like a dream than a reality. I knew God would get me out. But the healing from it? When I began the actual act of walking through the healing process from all of the sexual abuse, I felt like my heart was going to be crushed under a huge weight sitting on my chest. I felt like I was alone in this world, without hope of a softening heart for community again. I felt like I was permanently stained, broken, dirty: different.

And then I noticed that, despite fighting it, God was relentless in His pursuit of my heart's healing. In Deuteronomy we are promised that, "The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged," (Deuteronomy 31:8, NIV). I was so angry at first. It felt like burning coals were being put on my heart when I thought about allowing that verse to really take root in my spirit. God allowed me to fight Him, cry till I had no more energy to cry, scream at everything because I was just that angry. And all through it, He kept showing me small miracles of love, such as a butterfly sitting on my arm at just the right time, or a phrase heard over and over again. He was with me in the horror of sex slavery and was with me just the same in this journey to become Alive and whole again through healing. And He is still with me right now.

Through allowing myself to express the horror, rage, and brokenhearted feelings with God, I felt an assurance of His presence each time I realized He did not forsake me despite my feelings. And through that, my trust in Him re-grew, and my heart began to soften.

There is healing that can and does happen through Jesus Christ. I believe this truth is one of the most important pieces in the fight against human trafficking. Once freed, a survivor does not have to remain a captive emotionally. Nothing is beyond His ability to restore.

The sex trafficking industry is "the fastest-growing business of organized crime and the third-largest criminal enterprise in the world."ⁱ What a heartbreaking statistic, and yet there is so much hope!

Prayer:

Father in heaven,

We praise You for never forsaking us, even when our hearts and minds are filled with the hardest of things. Thank You for Your relentless pursuit of us and Your healing power. We give you thanks for miracles of rescue for those in bondage, and we pray for many more for those still held captive. For those being lured into captivity, would you give them ways of escape, clarity of thought, understanding, and boldness to act? Restore the trust of those who are broken. Amen.

Shared by Rachel Louise

ⁱ <http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/human-trafficking/what-is-human-trafficking.html> accessed July 19, 2010.



A Divine Appointment

Slowly, with her shoulders slumped from the weight of her reputation and the words of those who shunned her – the woman walked to the well. She was lonely, an outcast with no friends. The only ones who welcomed her company were men who wanted to use her then discard her.

But that day, as she sought relief from thirst, she met a man who didn't care what kind of reputation she had – he was a man who wanted to meet her deepest need.

As the Samaritan woman walked up to the well Jesus said to her, “Will you give me a drink?” I wonder, does she think, “Is this man really talking to me?” She responded, “You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?” In those days Jews didn't associate with Samaritans.

But Jesus persisted, “If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water... Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”
(John 4:10, 13-14 NIV)

How wonderful, she thought. “He will give me water and I won't have to come to this well in the heat of the day trying to avoid the stares and whispers of others.” But Jesus desired to meet her on a deeper level. He asked personal questions, letting her know that he knew of her multiple husbands and present adulterous relationship. Squirming, she changed the subject as Jesus revealed the most painful parts of her life. Her hope was to distract him with other questions.

Through this conversation the woman revealed she knew the Messiah was coming – not realizing this man was Jesus. But she soon learned she was in a divine appointment with the Messiah. Jesus declared, “I who speak to you am he.”

Just like Jesus wanted to know and fill the deepest needs of the Samaritan woman (John 4:1-26), He also wants to know and fill your deepest needs. Victims of sexual slavery carry a weight of shame, as outcasts who long for healing that feels out of reach. There are no limits to the offer of living water, no shame too great to be addressed by the loving Lord who sat beside the solitary woman at the well. He sees the one who walks alone and wants to be known by that woman, child, man or boy.

Are you like the Samaritan woman, lonely and an outcast? Do you struggle with feelings of insecurity and doubt? Do you seek acceptance and reassurance from the world? Have you made mistakes but have a hard time forgiving yourself? Jesus desires to give you His source of living water. He knows your deepest needs and the deepest needs of those in bondage. Through him you will never be alone. Through Him you will always be accepted. He will give you security and confidence in Him. And He will give you true forgiveness found only in the Cross.

So sweet friend will you come to the well? Your divine appointment with Jesus is waiting.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, Living Water,

You are so great to quench our thirst with Your love and forgiveness. You know everything about us, and yet You want us to know and be known deeply, when we deserve to be discarded. Would You provide divine appointments for those who walk alone in shame? Would You give them a craving for living water and show them Your unconditional love?

Amen

Shared by Mary Boswell



The Ebenezer Stone

“Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen, and called its name Ebenezer, saying,
“Thus far the Lord has helped us.””
(1 Samuel 7:12 NKJV)

I love how Samuel reminded the children of Israel in the midst of their struggles that God is their PRESENT help in a tangible way.

This Scripture reminds us to look at the past so we can focus on future help from God. When faced with overwhelming circumstances, it is vital to remember God’s victories along the way. I find myself recounting what God has done as I pray through present impossibilities. The beautiful blessing of God being our PRESENT HELP in times of troubles is that it keeps us from becoming prideful and becoming self-directed. Our dependence must remain on God as our HELP, our Ebenezer, our stone of help.

Prayer:

O God,

You have been our help in the past, the help of so many who have been held in slavery. Though each one’s life unfolded uniquely, You have been the help of each one who called on You. Today, many more captives are overwhelmed in circumstances of forced labor, sex trafficking, or exploitation. You are still the stone of help, the Ebenezer, today. Would You call each person who cares for the oppressed to lay aside pride and self-dependence and to call, instead, on You, our source of help? Would You give us tangible reminders that You are able to bring victory over darkness? Amen

Shared by Mary Frances Bowley



Freedom

Freedom. When I think of freedom, I think of release from bondage. To be set free. What a glorious thought to be set free. Finally out. I so desperately want and hope and pray for those who are held in the bondage of human trafficking to be set free. Working towards this end causes a great deal of inner turmoil and frustration, because I want it NOW. The thought of anyone having to stay in such a horrid situation a moment longer is unbearable. I want results immediately.

However, I began to think of freedom in a different sense: Spiritual freedom. Ultimately, this is what we desire for those in bondage to spiritual darkness.

“You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.”
(Romans 6:18 NIV)

God gives the gift of eternal life and freedom from spiritual death to those who believe. When can this spiritual freedom happen? Anytime! We do not have to wait until the broken have received physical freedom for them to receive spiritual freedom. We can begin to pray for this NOW.

John 8:32 (NIV) says, “Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” We can begin to pray for truth, God’s truth, to infiltrate this dark world and shine His light all around. God is omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent. He is everywhere! He can go to the places where we cannot; He can speak to the hearts of all who are in darkness. What an amazing thought, to think of lives being transformed, even in the midst of the dark.

Let us pray that those on the inside of trafficking who know the Lord, know of the Lord, have heard the Gospel message, know of His love in some way, or have been exposed to His Word and His truth will share it with those around them. Let us pray that in hopeless moments, someone will be reminded of God’s love and lives will be touched, changed, transformed. Pray for hearts to turn to God.

Paul and Silas didn’t wait to be released from prison to pray and sing hymns to God and touch the lives of the other prisoners. It started on the inside of the prison, while they were still in chains. And what did the jailer ask? “Sirs, what must I do to be saved? ... He and all his family were baptized.” (26:30,33) Who was saved? The very one who kept others in chains. Could it be that not only victims of human trafficking can be saved, but also those who have control over them? We can pray for all those on the inside of human trafficking to find spiritual freedom. What a glorious and amazing story of salvation and spiritual freedom, all taking place on the inside. Freedom can begin right now.

Prayer:

Father,

We need Your truth. All those inside the darkness of trafficking and sex slavery need Your truth. Would You stir up reminders of Your love and arouse memories and new awareness of truth, calling victims, perpetrators, and consumers to the freedom found in You? While we long for physical release from bondage, we also ask for people to be set free spiritually.

Shared by Susan McCrary



Bought, Sold, Traded

“O my God, in you I trust; let me not be put to shame; let not my enemies exult over me.”
(Psalm 25:2)

At an age when many girls are graduating and embracing the beginning of a bright future, Tina* began a career as a stripper. As often happens in the lifestyle of sex for entertainment and exploitation, she also began to abuse alcohol and drugs. Her bright future tarnished, she spiraled deeper into addiction, embracing crack cocaine. She found herself trapped in the metropolitan city of Dallas, Texas, caught in the shackles of human trafficking where people counted her as a commodity to be bought, sold and traded.

Calls for help reached a relative in law enforcement who helped free Tina from her bondage, but not before deep scars cut into her being. Before long, she fell back into the culture of captivity, where she bought, sold and traded herself. Relapses into substance abuse opened the door for Tina to be beaten, raped, and traumatized, keeping her weak, confused, and victimized. She didn't feel worthy of help or rescue.

Finally, Tina reached the end of herself, deciding she “couldn't turn one more trick” or “jump in one more car with a stranger.” In her brokenness, she knew she must “find help or die.” According to experts, this is an accurate conclusion, as most victims don't live more than seven years once they enter their bondage; factors such as violence, risk, stress, and disease take a toll. Tina wanted to begin again, this time, reaching out for help through a faith-based women's shelter.

It was a long road, because “One you've been bought, sold and traded, you don't trust anybody.” But Tina found safety, restoration and healing in the loving staff, volunteers, and community of the shelter. Most of all, she found God's truth and redemption through Jesus Christ. A gentle mentor poured into her wounded spirit, and Tina's future began to look bright again. In her healing time, she discovered a God-given gift for art. Her talents were nurtured, and she discovered how God could bring beautiful things out of her brokenness.

As Tina's life was restored, her artistic expressions blossomed, and she began to sell the works of her hands to admiring customers. “Selling something besides my body feels like I'm loved,” she reflected. Now able to see every gift as a blessing from her loving heavenly Father, she recognizes how “He's healing my mind through the gift that He gave me.”

God has given Tina other gifts out of her years of brokenness: children. He has given her a daughter of her own, a daughter who is a precious gift from God, an image bearer of the One who made her, a girl with a bright future. Tina is working hard to break the cycle of life as a commodity. She wants her daughter to know a mom who models what it is to trust in the God who considers her beautiful.

“In you our fathers trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them.”
(Psalm 22:4)

*Pseudonym to protect the identity of the person.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father,

Thank You for the Tina's healing and for the new legacy she has begun. Would You provide for and bless her as she seeks after You? When desperate young women reach the end of themselves and can't turn one more trick or take one more beating, would You help them find You? Would You bring the healing and the ability to trust that can only be divine? Show them gifts You have given them, and help them see beauty that can come from their lives. Establish new legacies in the homes of those who were broken and are now healed. In Jesus name, Amen.

Shared by Julie Sanders



The Chance of a Lifetime

This past summer, I walked around a local college campus and asked the Lord for some direction for my husband and me. We felt ourselves at a crossroads, and I felt utterly bewildered about what direction we should take. We believed we knew what our next step should be, but our circumstances didn't seem to "line up" with our vision. Have you ever found yourself second-guessing what God has said to you?

As I walked, I seemed to hear the phrase, "the chance of a lifetime." I could see two shades of meaning in the words. The path that lay before us was a great opportunity to move into a ministry that uses our giftings and our experience. I was reassured that God was going to make a way where there seemed to be no way.

But there was another way to look at "the chance of a lifetime." Each one of us has been given this life as a gift from our Heavenly Father—"for in Him, we live and move and exist," (Acts 17:28 NLT). My life is a chance to honor the One Who gave me life, a chance to worship and serve Him, a chance to please Him. I want to pour my life out lavishly, holding back nothing from the One Who gave Himself lavishly for me.

Of course, as believers, we know there is no chance. Each person's salvation is a choice made in the heart of Almighty God. But in His kindness, He often speaks to us in language we understand.

We have the God-given chance to make a difference for every person trapped in human trafficking; let us storm Heaven with our cries, knowing His tender, loving heart is moved by the sound of our voices. Let us be diligent in that mysterious partnership we have with the King of Heaven to shape history and rescue lives.

Alex was 15 when she ran away from a difficult home life and was on the streets within a year. Two years after turning to prostitution, she worked up the courage to contact the FBI. Because of her bravery, two pimps went to jail and other underage victims were rescued.ⁱ Alex has plans to go to school and become an advocate for sexually-exploited victims. Someone, somewhere, was praying!

Let us not grow weary in asking our God to rescue these precious lives. Each one deserves the chance of a lifetime.

Prayer:

Father God,

Thank You that You hear and answer our prayers. We ask You to move on behalf of those trapped in the horrors of human trafficking. Would You supernaturally deliver the victims out of slavery and into new life in You?

Shared by Anita Craig

ⁱ "Operation Cross Country" fbi.gov. 29 July 2013. FBI. 25 Nov. 2013 <<http://www.fbi.gov/news/stories/2013/july/operation-cross-country-recovering-victims-of-child-sex-trafficking/operation-cross-country-recovering-victims-of-child-sex-trafficking>>.



Rise Up

She didn't always wear skirts, my small brown friend with eyes like dark water. Part of her daily uniform now, the loose cotton drapes covered with flower prints were once forbidden, hidden away with things like enough food, peaceful sleep, and safe passage. When war came and the soldiers with it, good things like security left and skirts along with it. The resident regime ruled with a violent hand and unrestricted lust.

She stared far away as she talked of her girlhood, but as if the memories were close at hand. She talked about wearing pants and cutting her hair short in an attempt to look masculine. In a world of war and hunger, playing the part of a boy was her best hope to avoid being taken by marauding men looking for girls to steal away. She feared being gathered up as one of the spoils of war. Unlike many others, her charade had worked, but the memories had never left. She survived and lived to see the day when she could let her short crop grow back, pull on the cool skirts she loved, and walk out from under the watchful eyes of hungry men who did things she could only whisper to me.

In those days, she confessed, she wondered, "How long?"

"O Lord, how long shall the wicked, how long shall the wicked exult?"
(Psalm 92:3)

It's a fair question for a little girl in shorn hair and boys' pants, dodging sweaty groups of strange men who have overtaken her town. It's the same question asked by many prisoners today, by those who wonder if the wicked will always boast with arrogant words (v.4). How long will the strong prey on the weak in villages where hunger lives and education is scarce? How long will fathers sell daughters in untimely marriages or exploit them in videos they sell? How long will children be made up to look sensual, to have their pictures posted on internet sites to be ordered like a common product? How long will sporting events draw those with appetites that drive the loss of innocence? How long?

Her war was not unique; it was too much like conflicts laced throughout all of history and still scarring nations in modern times. When perpetrators come to light and their deeds are found out, we may wonder if and when God will act. But His word assures us He sees every evil deed and He will rightly judge them all.

"There is no gloom or deep darkness where evildoers may hide themselves."
(Job 34:22)

"Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written,
'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.'"
(Romans 12:19)

While God is long suffering and gives every man an opportunity to turn from their wicked ways, He also promises there will be a day when all is made right, when justice is done, and when evil will meet its end. Until then, make the words of Psalm 92 our prayer.

Prayer:

O righteous God,

How long? "Rise up, O judge of the earth; repay to the proud what they deserve!" (Psalm 92:4) We want to trust You to uncover every evil done in secret and to judge rightly. Rise up, O Lord.

Shared by Julie Sanders



Desperate Deals

Have you ever been so desperate you would do anything to save your child?

There have been several times when one of my kids faced difficult medical diagnoses. At midnight in the emergency room, when she is hooked up to monitors beeping frighteningly loud and fast in a way that makes no sense, you are more likely to consider all sorts of bargains with whomever might offer healing. A deal with the devil? Sure, *as long as she lives...* as long as she recovers.

Human trafficking doesn't make any sort of sense to most of us. How do girls get into such horrific situations? How does anyone believe that selling a woman or child is ever a good thing?

And yet, somehow, somewhere, it makes sense—in the moment—to someone.

Imagine that desperate situation does not take place in a well-appointed western hospital, but rather in the poorest of Spanish speaking nations, on a dirt floor surrounded by disease, despair, and hopelessness.

Caught in a cycle of poverty and addiction, a mother does whatever she can to feed her growing family. For a while, she finds work as a maid in the home of a prosperous farmer. But then she gets pregnant again and becomes bedridden around the sixth month. She cannot work or care for her two young children, who cry out at the pain in their bellies. They scour the trash for anything edible.

They grow weaker.

The enemy grows stronger, waiting for the perfect moment to pounce.

The situation becomes worse when the youngest son gets sick. There's medicine, but it costs \$7 US, more than this poor mother has held in her hands in months, if not years.

Then, seemingly out of nowhere, a man makes an amazing offer. He will buy the medication so desperately needed to heal the young son. He will take the daughter to the city to find work washing clothes in the home of wealthy diplomats.¹ She will earn her food and lodging, while the brother recovers and the mother carries her baby to term.

"No!" we scream, as we watch similar stories unfold on film. It all sounds too good to be true! *This mother should avoid this wolf in sheep's clothing at all costs!*

But she can't. She's not thinking straight; she's weak and tired and desperate. She's willing to make any bargain to whoever offers healing and hope.

This is how a young girl in a country like Nicaragua, who hasn't yet hit double digits, might be sold into a brothel for the price of a breakfast. Imagine a seven year old, whose situation is so desperate that her value is set at a single dollar for each year of her life.

When I first met girls like this, I felt completely split, as if fifty percent of me wanted to run and rescue them, while the other half wanted to erase all memories of their plight from my mind.

But we cannot ignore the plight of families like this. We can't sweep them under the rug or wish them away. What if we were made aware of these stories so we can do *something*. Really, *what if?*



“For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.”

(Romans 9:17 ESV)

Prayer:

Father,

Break my heart for these families. Give me Your eyes and ears, that I might see and hear these stories with Your compassion, Your love. I pray for the ability to recognize when You are raising me up, and the wisdom to allow Your power to show in me, no matter how difficult or desperate the situation is... and that Your name will be proclaimed in all of my actions through all of the earth

Shared by Wendy Willard

ⁱ Nicaragua is principally a source and transit country for men, women, and children subjected to sex trafficking and forced labor. Nicaraguan women and children are subjected to sex trafficking within the country, as well as in neighboring countries, most often in other Central American states, Mexico, and the United States. Trafficking victims are recruited in rural areas for work in urban centers—particularly Managua, Granada, and San Juan del Sur—and subsequently coerced into prostitution. – U.S. Department of State, OFFICE TO MONITOR AND COMBAT TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS (<http://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/countries/2013/215533.htm>)



Storms of Opportunity

Property can be traded, purchased, sold, or ruined. When human beings are used for forced labor, sexual exploitation, organ harvesting, or bondage by inheritance, they are treated as property. In 2013 the Walk Free Foundation used information from UNICEF and the US Trafficking in Persons Report to compare 162 countries around the world in regard to modern slavery. The report considers the percentage of the enslaved people in the population, the flow of exploited individuals in and out of the country and scope of childhood marriage in each nation. Endorsed by world leaders such as Former US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair, Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott and Bill Gates, this report provides governments with valuable insight into risks and responses that will lead to greater regard for the value of life.ⁱ

According to the Report, the top ten countries where the most enslaved people live are India, China, Pakistan, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Russia, Thailand, Democratic Republic of Congo, Myanmar and Bangladesh. Using a definition that includes those victimized in human trafficking, forced marriage, slavery, and forced labor, the data reveals 29.8 million people enslaved today around the globe.

While the list of the top 10 countries exclude the Americas, this region of the world presents a unique cocktail with toxic results. Characteristically wealthy nations like Canada and the United States have abundant discretionary funds to match their demand for cheap labor, making them prime trafficking destinations. Caribbean and Latin American countries provide a source for demand, while developed crime networks of Mexico provide transit structures to feed the culture of captivity.

In the region, however, one nation stands out. With a history of slavery, a culture of exploitation, a poor government, and environmental crises to combat, Haiti is fraught with trafficking. A vulnerable population within easy access of consumers, the island nation ranks first for its risk in the Americas, and children represent the greatest number of the vulnerable.ⁱⁱ

Whether in the Americas or in Asia or Africa, Europe or Australia, or any unseen place, God warns those who would prey on the small, saying “whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea,” (Matthew 18:6).

When natural disasters dominate the Twitter feed, newscasts, and front pages around the world, like the devastating earthquake in Haiti in January of 2010, opportunity emerges. For those who would be the hands and feet of Jesus, it’s an opportunity to extend compassion to the hurting. For those who would prey on the pain of the weak, it’s an opportunity to exploit, enslave, and employ a new “property.”

The next time news of a crisis unfolds before the watching world, let us lift up a prayer on behalf of those who struggle to gain their footing and find hope.

“Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me, for in you my soul takes refuge; in the shadow of your wings I will take refuge, till the storms of destruction pass by.”

(Psalm 57:1)

Prayer:

Lord of every land,

You see the hunger and thirst and every need of each one exposed by disasters and crises. No earthquake or typhoon or tsunami or tornado or fire escapes Your view. Would You crush the movement of those who make an opportunity for evil? Would You be the refuge of those in storms of destruction? Would You remind those who watch from wealthy, nearby places that you see how they respond to the defenseless?

Shared by Julie Sanders

ⁱ Walk Free Foundation. “The Global Slavery Index 2013” [globalslaveryindex.org](http://www.globalslaveryindex.org). Walk Free Foundation. 23 Nov. 2013 <<http://www.globalslaveryindex.org/about/>>.

ⁱⁱ “Global Slavery Index/Haiti” [globalslaveryindex.org](http://www.globalslaveryindex.org/country/haiti/). Walk Free Foundation. 23 Nov. 2013 <<http://www.globalslaveryindex.org/country/haiti/>>.



Family Values

Eleven year old Shanti got off the bus and began searching for a taxi. It was already getting dark, and she needed to find a ride for the amount of money her brother had given her. Finally, a taxi pulled up beside her, and she jumped in, handing the driver a scrap of paper showing where she needed to go.

He drove her there and, seeing it was a brothel, said, “Little sister, you don’t want to go here. Who sent you here?” She replied, “Oh, I must go. My brother said that this is my duty for my family.”

The driver asked for her brother’s phone number in the village, but she didn’t have it.

Shanti got out of the taxi, holding her small bag of belongings, and walked through the door.

Fact: Many young girls in Nepal are forced into prostitution by their families. The Badi women of Nepal are some of them. “Badi girls, from early childhood on, know and generally accept the fact that a life of prostitution awaits them. Their parents and other Badi tell them that prostitution is, and always has been, the work of women in the Badi caste, and that to aspire to any other profession would be unrealistic.”ⁱ

“See how very much our Father loves us, for he calls us his children, that is what we are!
But the people who belong to this world don’t recognize that we are God’s children because they don’t know him.”
(1 John 3:1-2 NLT)

Prayer:

Dear heavenly Father,

We pray for Your mercy and love to reach children who are forced into prostitution by their families. Please send workers to teach Your good news to them, and save them from despair. Send godly business people to employ those who have no hope for a different life. Help the Badi people of Nepal to change the futures of their children by finding other work and sending them to school, instead of to brothels.

Shared by Mary Haegeland

ⁱ Cox, Thomas. [The Badi: Prostitution as a Social Norm Among the Untouchable Caste of West Nepal](#). 1990.



Far Reaching Ripples

Where there is no demand, there is no supply. The Father of Lies applies creative means to set demand into motion. Using the decisions of leaders and the waves of cultures, he casts stones into the ocean of humanity, generating ripples touching individual lives in their wake.

In 1979 China instituted a one-child policy, a cultural standard with far reaching effects. Though it's beginning to change, the impact continues. In 2013 CNN reported "approximately 30 million more men than women will reach adulthood and enter China's mating market by 2020." Supply responds to growing demand, driven by unsatisfied desires in a gender-biased society. In a climate of so many competing young men, author Rob Brooks reveals that trafficking of women in China is rising. With a single government decision, the Evil One set the stage for people in the image of the true God to be misused and oppressed.

The 2013 Global Slavery Index reports that China has one of the highest absolute numbers of modern day slaves, second only to India. This number reflects those caught up in abuses including human trafficking, forced marriage and forced labor. With fourteen countries touching the borders of this great land, the flow of culture and ideas exists alongside the flow of a supply to meet the growing demand for sexual exploitation.

"Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death."
(James 1:13-15)

Is there a nation so great, a government so strong, a business so lucrative that God cannot move against it? Will compassion and sacrifice ever win out over oppression and lust? Who is able to cause economy and power to bend a knee to truth?

"Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."
(Philippians 2:9-11)

"He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."
(Revelation 21:4)

Prayer:

Powerful God,

We look forward to the day when there will be no more death and former things like pain and crying will have passed away. We look forward to the display of Your greatness and to final victory over oppression. Please hold back a rising appetite of lust in China and turn the hearts of this great people to You. Come quickly, Lord Jesus, and show every nation on earth that You are Lord and that Your heart for peace will reign.

Amen

Shared by Julie Sanders



Children in the Cradle

Greece. The cradle of Western civilization, a land whose rich legacy has left its mark upon the world in math, science, government, literature, architecture, politics, philosophy, and has given us the Olympics. Ancient and modern collide in this country of over 11 million people. The sights are too many to list, but our favorite was standing next to the Temple of Poseidon as the sun set into the Aegean Sea. Indescribable beauty.

Greece. A land of indescribable ugliness and darkness because of the second largest criminal activity worldwide—human trafficking. Strategically nestled between Europe, Western Asia and Africa, “Greece is predominantly a destination country for trafficked victims. Specifically the different routes used by traffickers are:

- *The Balkan Route*
 - From the Balkans (especially Albania, Bulgaria and Romania) to Slovenia, Hungary, Italy and Greece.
- *The Eastern Route*
 - From Russia, Belarus, Baltic Countries to Poland and Central Europe.
- *The Central European Route*
 - From Ukraine, via Slovakia to Czech Republic and Germany.
- *The Eastern Mediterranean Route*
 - From Turkey to Bulgaria, Romania and Greece.
- *The North African Route*
 - From Africa to Spain, France, Italy and Malta”

Countless are lured here daily by the promise of work or asylum, but the reality is slavery, not just for adult men and women, but children. “Criminal organizations bring hundreds of children...to Greece, where they are subjected to forced labor, sex trafficking or sold to couples...in illegal adoption schemes.”

The plight of trafficked children in Greece was spotlighted in 2013 when a couple was formally charged for the abduction of a young blonde, blue-eyed girl named Maria. Lambros Kanellopoulos, president of the UN children’s agency Unicef, said, “There are currently 3,000 children transited through Greece by child-trafficking rings.”

Maria is one of many children who face a homeless, parentless and, seemingly, hopeless life of abuse and neglect. Who is looking for them? Who will help them? If a family member of yours were missing, would you not dedicate yourself to finding them?

We find Maria’s unresolved story to be discouraging, but we must find hope in the promises of our dear Savior. In His own words, He vows to be “a father to the fatherless.” In Isaiah 58:6-7 (NIV) He says, “Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yolk? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?”

Our God is a God of justice. When we think of Maria and countless other children exploited daily, we ought not to become overwhelmed with hopelessness, but pray for the Lord to deliver them as He promised to do.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father,

We cry out to You on behalf of children in Greece who are trapped in the darkness of slavery. We ask You to rescue them and defend them. Comfort them in their affliction. May they feel Your arms wrapped around them. Protect them body, soul and spirit. Bring them freedom and justice. Show us how You can use us to make a difference in the lives of little ones who are pawns in the hands of evil men and women. Turn the hearts of oppressors away from their evil schemes to love and compassion. In the name of Jesus we pray, Amen.

Shared by Carol and Janie Weaver



Refuge in Romania

In the past three years that she has been at Deborah House in Romania, she has accomplished very important things. In high school she was awarded first prize for a journalism contest in French; she achieved the advanced level in French language and participated in many extracurricular activities. She had excellent results and always wanted to be a doctor, so now this dream has come true. At age nineteen, she is a freshman in Medical school.

Before she came to Deborah House she lived in a poor home, taking care of her younger sister and the entire household, because her parents were often inebriated. Her family was always fighting because of lack of funds, so her mom would force her to ask for people's mercy and to beg for food from local stores or from the church. There, she begged for food and money. The responsibility to bring money home fell on her shoulders at a very young age. She was often physically abused by her mother and when her mother's health worsened, because they needed the money, she was compelled to prostitute herself. The street was her refuge, where she would escape her mother's fury and her father's abuse.

At the Deborah House she managed to lose the burdens she was forced to carry too early in life. Other girls now see her as a role model. She is very grateful for the chance to live at Deborah House, where she found a place of healing and encouragement to study. If her life had been different, she knows she would not have been able to accomplish so many good things for her future.

We believe every child born into the world is a gift from God, born with fresh potential. The birth conditions of a child cannot excuse refusal to the basic rights of healthcare, education, food and protection from abuse and exploitation. Romania is a source, transit, and destination country for men, women, and children subjected to human trafficking, forced labor or exploitation and prostitution. Every year more than 11,500 children are victims of abuse in Romania. Less than 1% of them have the benefit of specialized post-trauma assistance.

Since 2002 Missio Link International Foundation (MLI) has provided a safe haven called Deborah House. This licensed child protection service provides a unique and critically needed healing place for severely abused girls. Since its establishment, more than one hundred girls aged 6 to 18 have found a sanctuary offering them care, protection, education, hope and love in a Christian home environment. Ultimately, the goal is that each girl would reclaim her life from the shadow of her abuser.

We can find strength and encouragement knowing that, "The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold and my refuge, my savior; you save me from violence." (2 Samuel 22:23 ESV)

Prayer:

Our Father in heaven,

You are the One to whom we turn to ask for protection for the ones who are exploited and abused. Our hearts hurt for them and we beg You to search for them and help them find You. You know each one of them by name, and they are all precious in Your sight. Please have mercy Lord and deliver them from evil. In Your Son's name we pray, Amen!

Shared by Gratiela Ciortuz



Not Born Free

Everyone is born with an inheritance. A few arrive with a silver spoon, but everyone has an identity upon arrival. For many in the Sub-Saharan African nation of Mauritania, they inherit the identity of “slave.” Even in the 21st century, people continue to be born into slavery and an inheritance of bondage.

On October 17, 2013, Associated Press writer Sylvia Hui reported the results of the recently released Global Slavery Index.ⁱ The study examined a range of exploitation including forced marriage, labor by force, child militants, and human trafficking. Diverse risks for enslavement exist within Sub-Saharan Africa, where history reveals age-old practices of slavery, colonialism, poverty, corruption, and on-going armed conflicts. Rich resources feed the appetite of consumers and perpetuate a climate of exploitation. Among the 162 countries examined by the report, “Mauritania has the highest proportion of people in slavery in the world.”ⁱⁱ

While legislation in the nation exists against human trafficking, implementation of justice lags far behind. Many illiterate, low class victims remain susceptible to abuses. “People in slavery may be bought and sold, rented out and given away as gifts,” with women vulnerable to sexual assault. Most slavery in Mauritania exists as chattel slavery, meaning enslaved people and their descendants, regardless of age, are the property of their master. Without education or access to information, captives remain unaware of the pathways to freedom.

One may be born enslaved, but there is a way to freedom. Unlike an earthly master fueled by his own desires and unquenchable appetite, God offers a new identity in Christ Jesus and a heavenly inheritance. He sets no limits on those He accepts, and regardless of age or education, He invites all to dine at His table, bask in His peace, and call Him “Father.” Though men may buy and sell people to be used as objects and given as gifts, the Lord of all gave the gift of His Son to buy back those bound and born into the evil one’s possession. He loves His own with an everlasting love and prepares a place for them to join Him. This great exchange takes the shackled and makes them free.

“For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!”
(Romans 8:14-15)

“But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”
(Romans 6:22-23)

Prayer:

Heavenly Master,

Would You move in governments where slavery persists and children continue to be born into bondage? Only You can break the patterns of centuries and bring freedom. Place leaders with conviction into positions of influence, so they will see justice done. Help those striving to develop literacy among the poor, so people can understand the laws of their lands and, ultimately, read the message of the gospel. Give those who know the realities of slavery hope for freedom in their day and hope for a heavenly inheritance to last for eternity.

Shared by Julie Sanders

ⁱ Hui, Sylvia. “Mauritania, Haiti top global slavery index” USAtoday.com. 17 Oct. 2013. Associated Press. 27 Nov. 2013 <<http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2013/10/17/slavery-human-trafficking-children/3002009/>>.

ⁱⁱ Walk Free Foundation. “The Global Slavery Index 2013” [globallslaveryindex.org](http://www.globallslaveryindex.org). Walk Free Foundation. 23 Nov. 2013 <<http://www.globallslaveryindex.org/about/>>. (Source for information and quotes on this page, unless otherwise noted)



Made in the Image

“Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness ...’ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”

(Genesis 1:26-27)

I find it striking to find it right there on the first page of the Bible that we are made in the image of God. Sometimes we forget how mind-blowing the notion is. If we look at other cultures that thrived in the same days as the Hebrew ancestors, we see how revolutionary the idea is that man and woman are made in the image of God.

Tutankhamun is world famous. This Egyptian royal's name could be translated as Tut –made-in-the-image of God. It is not hard to see that the most important person in the country is assigned that honour. So if a prince or a king is said to be made in the image of God, that often means he, and he only, can bear that title. Royal and male. But Genesis tells us everybody is made in the image of God, male and female.

As we talk about the horrors of human trafficking and try to work our way through the mess and brokenness of humankind we encounter, we are constantly challenged to remember this. Whether it is the Roma child laying drugged in an adult's arms and begging at the European Parliament, a single Moroccan lady living in a squat in Brussels, a Slovak family that has fled discrimination and racism in their home country, or a Thai lady's boy working in the brothels around Antwerp, all people carry some significant worth because they are made in the image of God. No one should be bought and sold, because all of us are priceless.

I remember teaching a class on human trafficking. I brought some items we would auction: a DVD, a book, a teddy bear, a bottle of water, a chocolate bar. The children were to guess the price. Most did fairly well. Next, I would ask for a volunteer and tell the class it was their turn to tag a price for their classmate. After some initial jokes as 5 camels, or astounding figures they picked up from the world of soccer, everybody soon realized that selling people is something we do not do anymore. Yes, we know about slavery, but that is “history.”

One day I happened to pick a boy notorious for attracting a lot of negative attention. We had come to a final price and I almost pronounced “sold,” when I turned to the boy and told him I was not going to do so. He looked puzzled and I assured him he is of too much value to be sold. You should have seen the light that appeared in his eyes.

Being made in the image of God means we are made for relations as well. Father, Son and Holy Spirit are in constant relationship. We are made for community.

Traffickers often try to isolate their victims from their families. When we speak of the people we work with, we prefer to speak of our Thai friends, Roma friends, or Moroccan friends, because that is what they are. We bring help, healing, financial support, community, legal assistance, love. Numerous times we have been invited to enjoy Thai curries prepared for us at brothels, couscous meals served in a squat, or Slovakian soups. We try to see people as ones made in the image of God, in need of each other and with a lot to give.

Do you find it hard/easy to see that you are made in the image of God? Which persons challenge the belief that everybody is made in the image of God? Are you able to receive from someone you would consider to be the in need?

Prayer:

God,
We only understand a small part of what it is to be made in Your image. Your likeness gives us all, male and female, young and old, value. Teach us to look on every person as priceless and worthy of Your love. Help us to draw marginalized people into God-honoring communities where they can discover their value and find healing. Show us how to see people as You see them.

Shared by Niels Vandereyken



Finding True Love

A girl at a Christian recovery home in Kathmandu, Nepal shared a powerful testimony with a worker at the home in June 2013.

After her rescue from trafficking, she went to a transitional home. There, she remembered a friend from primary school talking about Jesus. Though she had mocked the friend at the time, she somehow felt moved to call on Jesus to deliver her after all she had suffered.

Ultimately, she ended up in a Christian recovery home, where she fell in love with Jesus as her true Savior.

In the same month of the same year, a member of the Mukti leadership team attended a church youth conference in Nepal and met a Nepali girl she rescued from a brothel in Calcutta three years before. Though this girl did not even want to leave the brothel and was very hard-hearted in the beginning, she had been transformed by the love of Christ. She even sang a song about His love in the program at the youth conference!

“But from there you will seek the LORD your God, and you will find Him if you seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul.”

(Deuteronomy 4:29)

“And later Isaiah spoke boldly for God, saying, ‘I was found by people who were not looking for me. I showed myself to those who were not asking for me.’”

(Romans 10:20 NLT)

Prayer:

Dear Lord,

Your Word clearly reveals that You are a God of justice, grace and love. You care deeply for the oppressed and desire to deliver them. Thank You for the many times in Scripture that You promise to answer those who cry out to You! You are waiting expectantly for us to call on You. Lord, please help the many people who are caught in trafficking to cry out to You for deliverance, whether they know You yet or not. Thank You for the many testimonies of those who have already done this and were delivered. The more we pray, the more of these kinds of stories will be told!

Shared by Leab Weldon



What Can I Do?

“So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying for him.”
(Acts 12:1-19 NIV, Key verse 5)

Fourteen year old *Seema's young body shook with fear and wretchedness. She silently wept with shame and home sickness as she thought about her family and how horrified they would be if they knew where she was!

Coming from a poor family, she had been an easy target for the lady who came to their village offering her a better job in the city of Kolkata. Her parents, not knowing any better, sent her off with the lady. Seema had been so happy that she was going to be able to help her family with the wages she would earn. Upon reaching Kolkata, however, the lady promptly sold her to a brothel and thus began Seema's nightmare. In the brothel, young Seema became pregnant and was filled with hopelessness, bitterness, and anger. Why was life so cruel and unfair? She did not want to have this baby whose father she did not even know!

Soon after her pregnancy, Seema was rescued and taken to an after care home. Her mind was kept busy thinking of ways to get rid of the baby in her womb. She did not want a reminder of the man who did this to her! However, as always, God in his perfect timing brought someone to the home with the model of a 10 week old baby. As Seema reluctantly held the model in her hands, her mind gradually filled with wonder! Her young hardened heart began to slowly soften; to think that the baby in her womb was a living being! She decided to keep her baby and, a few months later, gave birth to a beautiful baby boy.

Kolkata's location often makes it the source, destination, and transit point for many young girls who are trafficked. Many, like Seema, are tricked into the trade or sold off by their own family members. Even after they are rescued, since the damage done to these young girls is astronomical, they feel unwanted, worthless, with no knowledge that they are precious and valuable to the God who formed them.

You may be asking yourself, 'What can I do?'... You can commit to pray earnestly and regularly. It seemed impossible that Peter would ever get out of prison. It was the night before his possible execution and there was no way of escape as he was chained between two soldiers and locked up, with sentries guarding the entrance. Yet, when the Church of Jesus Christ prayed in earnest, God answered in an amazing way!

The problems and evil of this world may seem insurmountable and impossible to stem. Remember, however, that we worship a God who is able to do that which is impossible. We need to start by praying earnestly as they did in the early church. Pray that these dear ones who are in seemingly hopeless situations will know that there is a God who cares for them and loves them. Pray that one day this evil will be stopped! God is able!

Prayer:

Thank you, Father, that when things seem so hopeless, You are our hope. Thank you that You are able to do that which is impossible. Put in my heart a burden and a desire to pray earnestly and daily for those in bondage. In Jesus name, Amen.

Shared by Mai Andrews

*Pseudonym to protect the identity of the person.



Illiteracy that Imprisons

Tulsi was fifteen when she was abducted and taken by a family friend to the Nepali/Indian border. She was tricked into going, thinking that the two boys were bringing her to visit a friend.

When she realized what was actually happening, she quickly hid her cell phone in her clothes. The boys locked her in a small room while they went to find the bus to take them to Delhi. Tulsi quickly looked out the dingy window, reading billboards around her, and called friends back in Kathmandu. She was able to tell us exactly where she was from the shop signs and advertisements around the building. We sent for help and found her. Her rescue was directly related to her ability to read .

Fact: 75% of the girls working in the night entertainment industry (dance bars, cabin restaurants, massage parlors) in Kathmandu are illiterate.ⁱ Trafficked victims who cannot read are told they owe massive debts to brothel owners. They cannot read fake contracts, laws, or even signs around them to escape.

They believe the lies they are told, because they don't know the truth. "And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (John 8:32)

Nepali Proverb: "To educate a girl child is to water another man's garden."

Prayer:

Lord Jesus,

Please bring teachers and educators to rural Nepal to end illiteracy and exploitation. Bless those who work to further the education of young girls, give them what they need to keep children in school. Help families to see the value of educating girl children.

Shared by Mary Haegeland

ⁱChange Nepal. Change Nepal. 26 Nov. 2013 <<http://www.changenepal.org.np/index.php?page=home>>.



Eyes Wide Open

“Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.”
(Matthew 25:40 NIV)

When I read this verse recently, it struck me in a new way. If you read the context, it defines “the least of these” as those who are hungry, thirsty, unclothed, sick, imprisoned, and estranged. I’ve often imagined that “the least of these” would be VERY easy to spot, but recently I discovered that you sometimes have to have your eyes (and ears) wide open to discover their true identities.

One Sunday afternoon, I had the pleasure of sharing my lunch with three young women from my church in city centre Dublin, Ireland. We were an array of cultures, none of us Irish. We chatted through the list of normal topics: family back home, work, school, things we miss, favourite foods, and more. Looking around the table, it seemed we were four happy, healthy, comfortable people. But under the surface of smiles, this was not the case for two of my new friends.

They left and went home, but as the evening went on, I couldn’t get our lunch conversation out of my mind. I began to read between the lines, and as I added up several responses from my guests, I became alarmed about their working conditions and the accommodation they shared. Was I crazy? Was I being too dramatic? Were they in trouble? I’m in Western Europe, what kind of danger could they really be in? I was of two minds as my thoughts continued to churn.

In recent years, Europe has become a sort of crossroads for human trafficking as it holds the greatest number of different nationalities of victims than any other part of the world. They come from all over, some willingly, in search of work or better education, only to become ensnared once they are far from family and friends. Others are smuggled in with little hope of finding their escape or ever regaining their freedom.

Adult women make up the largest group of trafficking victims, and this is due to several contributing factors. In many places, they are pushed into poorly paid jobs and often suffer long-term unemployment, which forces them to places of desperation to provide for themselves and their families. They become vulnerable to traffickers promising them work and a means to earn a decent income. While sexual trafficking encompasses the largest percentage of victims, the second most common form is forced labour.

As I prayed for these girls, God began to peel back the layers and show me the truth of their situation. They were in trouble.

He gave me the space in my home and, as I invited them in, they cried. They had a hot shower, a warm bed and, for a couple months, the space to regain their footing. They eventually found new jobs and a safer accommodation, but most of all, they saw God provide...they knew that He saw them.

Prayer:

Lord,

Please give us eyes to see and ears to hear what is behind the smiles and within the stories of those You bring across our paths. Show us how to help and give us courage to speak up. Protect these women from predators who offer promises of a better life, but are actively planning their destruction. Use US to fight for the least of these.

Shared by Stephanie Kozick



One

“Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.”
(Matthew 25:40)

The dark world of human trafficking contains some daunting numbers: 27 million victims worldwide, \$32 billion in profits from the global slave trade, an estimated 700,000 people trafficked across international borders annually. It's enough to make even the most stalwart advocate want to bury her head in the sand.

But in the face of such seemingly overwhelming obstacles, there is a single number that matters. One.

I'm convinced one is God's favorite number. After all, He is defined by One. And His prayer is that we, His People, be considered as One. Jesus calls us to find comfort, encouragement, and strength by dwelling in the same perfect unity that characterizes the very nature of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

As diverse members of a single body, we are capable of turning the world upside down. Imagine if the church had come together as one under the banner of Christ to stand against the slaughter of the Jews in Nazi Germany. Imagine if we had mounted a unified response to America's slave trade, rather than partaking of the benefits of chattel slavery. Historically, when the church has failed to act, or has delayed in acting, the consequences have been catastrophic.

As Edmund Burke so famously said, “All that is necessary for evil to prevail is for good men to do nothing.” Paul simply said to overcome evil by doing good (Romans 12:21). Inaction has never been an option. In fact, it could be said that one of the greatest risk factors for human trafficking is a church that chooses to do nothing in the face of such egregious evil.

The call to action is for the many—and for the one. If my particular congregation is not engaged in the fight against modern-day slavery, I'm not off the hook. We are—each one of us—held accountable for our own response to injustice.

Jesus went out of His way to bring good news to the broken and marginalized. He hung out with people who were considered irredeemable. He went to places off limits to the religious class. Places where visitors get beat up and left for dead by the side of the road. He left everything and everyone to seek out and restore a single soul. Yes, Jesus spoke to crowds. But He ministered to individuals. One by one.

So look around. What does modern day slavery look like in your community? Is it immigrant farm workers exploited for cheap labor? Is it underage girls sold for sex? Is it the illicit activity taking place behind the doors of unregulated “massage parlors”? Now determine what you can do for just one person. For today, don't think about the other 26,999,999. Focus on the one.

I once heard about a woman who wanted to help young girls trapped in the sex slave trade—but she felt she had no particular skill to offer. She did, however, like to bake cookies. So once a week she made a few dozen cookies and brought them to a brothel that was not too far from her neighborhood. It doesn't sound like much, but over time she developed relationships with the girls and was able to share Jesus with them. One by one.

There are as many different strategies to combat human trafficking as there are victims. Ultimately, though, modern day slavery only demands one response.

Yours.

Prayer:

Lord, I am amazed that in a world of 8 billion people, You picked me. Please show me how I can make a tangible difference in the life of one person touched by human trafficking today.

Shared by Alexandra Snyder



Unnamed, Not Unknown

Do you know the discomfort of feeling unknown – the sense that who you are does not matter, that you are insignificant in the world?

The unnamed women in the gospels had roles so peripheral that the writers did not deem it necessary to share their names. But these women were not unknown. *Not to Jesus.*

Six months before Jesus was to be crucified, He went quietly, alone, to Jerusalem during the Feast of Tabernacles. He went straight to the temple, where He could daily be found, teaching.

The scribes and Pharisees were already angry with Jesus, and could not abide His presence in the temple. They set about to trick Him, so as to turn the people against Him and have a reason to accuse Him. Can you picture it?

An early morning, the sun rising slowly over the city, dust in the air. Jesus' calm voice teaching truth, people coming in streams to hear Him. Then, in the middle of it all, comes a disruption and a clamor... a woman thrown to the ground and loudly accused.

A woman just caught in the very act of adultery.

There was no question. She was guilty.

Jesus knew.

The Pharisees demanded Jesus speak judgment over her. Would He abide by Mosaic law and turn His back on His teachings of mercy and forgiveness? Or would He break Mosaic law? They were sure that either way they would win.

His response? Silence.

He waited, writing on the ground. Perhaps He was waiting for the men to realize the sinfulness of their own goals in confronting Him. But instead of self-awareness, they persisted in asking for a judgement on the woman.

Finally, He stood, and said, "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her." (John 8:7)

And bending back down, He continued to write on the ground. He waited. And they all left. Every one.

Oh the mercy! Jesus showed mercy to those guilty men. He did not stare them down. He did not watch their humiliation as they turned away in admission of their own sin. When He looked up and saw they were gone, He turned to the woman. How broken she must have been, how terrified. She knew she had sinned. She knew what she deserved.

For when a law has been broken, whether biblical or otherwise, there are two phases to dealing with the transgressor.

First, guilt must be determined. This is the conviction phase. And in this story, everyone is convicted. In my story, in your story... everyone is convicted. We are guilty of sin.

Then, if guilty, the sentence is handed down. Condemnation. Punishment.

The woman waited for the worst.



Jesus did not minimize the woman's sin. He knew. But He did not lay a sentence on her. Instead He offered her a fresh start, a clean slate. He offered her forgiveness. No condemnation.

Jesus stood up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, Lord."
And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you..."
(John 8:10-11a)

Embodied in the man who would soon die on a cross for her, for you, for me... was both justice and mercy. In Jesus alone have righteousness and peace kissed. (Psalm 85:10)

There is nothing, nothing, that you have done that can't be forgiven by God in Christ Jesus. He knows everything about you, everything you have done, everything you need.

Are you cowering today, knowing your guilt, waiting for punishment? You have been rightly convicted. But hear this and believe truth: you are not condemned. "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus," (Romans 8:1). All that punishment you are waiting for has already been dealt, already been taken. Jesus, hanging bloodied and broken on the cross, knowing you and your guilt... He accepted it. He sees you. He loves you. He forgives you. Accept the freedom and forgiveness Jesus so lavishly holds out to you.

Prayer:

Father,

Thank You for offering us freedom and forgiveness. Would You help those who have been used and broken by the evil of sex trafficking to seek restoration and healing in You? Would You draw them to the promise of the joy that can be theirs as they begin life anew?

Shared by Patti Brown



Same Tactics, New Times

“As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl ... “These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation?... But when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers ... The crowd joined in attacking them ...”

(From Acts 16:16-26)

Slavery is not a stranger among mankind. On the contrary, generations have honed the skills of oppression and profit from the captivity of others. As first century church fathers Paul and Silas went to pray, they met a girl enslaved by wealthy owners who took advantage of her weakened condition. Under the control of an evil spirit, she was used by them as a commodity to tell fortunes. Even the dark spirit within her recognized the servants of God.

After many days, the Apostle Paul commanded the spirit to free the girl from her bondage, but in doing so, he enraged the perpetrators of the crime. Seeing their profit supply cut off, the exploiters “saw their hope of gain was gone” and moved to attack those who spoke for the victim. The owners accosted Paul and Silas physically and verbally, commanding the crowd to join in their disdain and, ultimately, having them thrown into prison. Lovers of darkness lash out at lovers of light.

There has always been a cost for loving what God loves. We live in new times, but the Father of Lies uses the same old tactics in his campaign for darkness. The Enemy longs to silence the ones who speak for the heart of God. Until the day comes when evil is finally defeated, the battle will rage on.

Before the next day arrived, God intervened for the two men willing to stand against evil and stand for freedom. In the darkness of a jail cell, the followers of God prayed and sang of their faith. As others listened around them, a divinely appointed earthquake shook the prison and set them all free. Even “the foundations of the prison were shaken.”

Those who know God understand what it is to be set free from bondage, to be moved from darkness to light. Once used as pawns of the evil one, they receive grace that can only inspire them to stand for the freedom of others still held captive.

Should there come a day when a slave crosses our path or calls to us as servants of God, may we stand for freedom. Out of the abundance of our hearts may our mouths speak prayers and songs of release. When answered with attacks or persecuted for our stand, may we look to the God who freed us first and holds the foundations of our very lives in His hands. While the battle rages on, may those who know the sweetness of release continue to bow at the gates of heaven and stand for the freedom of those who still long to know the joy of being *Released*.

Prayer:

God of grace,

You see every person in bondage and everyone who holds them in bondage. You have watched this through the ages with a heart that breaks for the peace lost. Would You empower the people of God, would You empower me, to stand and speak for freedom for those who have no voice? Would You strengthen my heart with immovable trust in You so I am bold and courageous and unafraid? Would You make me ever grateful for the freedom I've found in You? Would You intervene for those yet to know the peace You long to give and to provide through Your Son? I look to the day when You will be victorious over all evil and Your peace will reign.

In the name of Your Son, Amen

Shared by Julie Sanders





About the Contributors

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Andi Worley is a Training Coordinator for Street Grace Speakers Bureau. Street Grace is a faith-based organization working to end domestic minor sex trafficking (DMST) in Metro Atlanta and throughout the United States. Andi is a former workshop trainer for Precept Ministries. She has been married 53 years and has 2 children and 6 grandchildren. andi.worley@streetgrace.org

Anita Craig and her husband Robert have been married 22 wonderful, adventure-filled years. They share a common passion to engage the power of prayer to help victims of trafficking find freedom. Their three wonderful children are emptying the nest all too fast.

Carol and Janie Weaver, mother and daughter, have both travelled to Greece on mission trips. Carol is editor of The Chain, a women's newsletter published through her church. Janie shares her passion about human trafficking through her Facebook page, FREEDOM MAKER:19:20. They live in Knoxville, Tennessee. www.facebook.com/FreedomMake1920

Danielle Jones has spent the last 4 years working with minor victims and adult survivors of sex trafficking. She is a wife, mom of four daughters, and advocate. Danielle currently serves as the Chair for the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Council's Human Trafficking Initiative. www.nhclc.org

Eileen Sommi is a freelance writer living in Knoxville, TN with her husband and four children. She has a heart for those caught in human trafficking and is on the board of Firewall Ministries, an organization whose mission is to mobilize global prayer for the end of human slavery. www.firewallministries.com

Genny Heikka is a mom, author, speaker and passionate voice for children who have been victims of trafficking. She lives in Northern California with her husband and two kids, where she balances writing with motherhood, and loves both. You can find her at gennyheikka.com or on twitter as [@GennyHeikka](https://twitter.com/GennyHeikka).

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Julie Sanders is a minister to women in her own country and abroad. As a writer and Bible teacher, she is passionate about helping others know the peace that passes understanding. She helped to establish Fresh Grace, a cooperative of churches moving against domestic human trafficking in her region of the United States. www.juliesanders.org

Kristi Stephens is a wife, mom, women's ministry leader, occasional speaker, and intermittent blogger. She and her husband have responded to God's leading to step into the great unknown of fostercare; they hope to foster to adopt. You can find her at www.KristiStephens.com or on facebook or twitter.

Leah Weldon works with Mukti Network Nepal/Mukti Kathmandu, a Kathmandu based group of organizations and individuals fighting together against trafficking, sexual exploitation and abuse. They stand for freedom, prayer, shared learning, and collaboration. Find Mukti on Facebook under Mukti Kathmandu. Contact: muktikathmandu@yahoo.com.



Mai Andrews and her husband, Ashok, have 2 daughters and serve the Lord in Kolkata, India. Ashok is the senior pastor at the Kolkata Christian Fellowship and also gives leadership to a mission body JKPS (Jatyo Kristyo Prochar Samity). Their ministry includes church planting, sponsoring children, community transformation initiatives, and an after care home (Mahima) for minor girls rescued from trafficking. www.mahimaindia.org, www.jkpsindia.org, www.kcfellowship.net

Mary Boswell is a wife, mom & daughter of her Heavenly Father. As a former Critical Care Nurse and a mom to two active children, God has carried her through life changing trials, but through each one she has leaned on the arms of God. Join Mary at The Calm of His Presence where she seeks to live in and lead others to God's calming presence.

Mary Haegeland works with the Mukti Network, Nepal/Mukti Kathmandu, and with Five 14 Private Limited Nepal. "Mukti" means freedom, liberation, and salvation. Five 14 works in communities in Nepal that not only suffer from poverty and exploitation, but also have potential to achieve a better future; they aim to impact villages and their surrounding areas. Contact: www.five14.biz and muktikathmandu@yahoo.com

Mary Frances Bowley is the Founder of Wellspring Living, an organization fighting childhood sexual abuse and exploitation since 2001. She has been a leader in bringing the fight against child sex-trafficking to Atlanta and is a founding member of the Governor's Task Force for CSEC Victims. She was appointed to the Governor's Commission on Domestic Violence in 2010. www.wellspringliving.org

Niels Vandereyken works with Oasis Global in Belgium. Oasis has a vision for community – a place where everyone is included, making a contribution and reaching their God-given potential. In Belgium, Oasis has two projects: working alongside marginalized Thai women, helping them to learn Dutch and find work, and working with young children living in a squat in Brussels. www.oasisbelgie.be, www.oasisglobal.org

Patti Brown knows what it is to move from depression and into joy by God's power. Passionate about encouraging women to seek Jesus and find freedom, her message of forgiveness will help those in the aftermath of sexual slavery find healing. Find Patti writing at Do Not Depart and Joyful Mama. www.donotdepart.com, www.becomingjoyful.blogspot.com

Rachel Louise is an average American girl and the author of the book *Almost Sold, The Miracles God Performed to Free Me From Sex Slavery*. It is Rachel's desire for all people to be forewarned to the horror of sex trafficking and the miracles of healing that Jesus Christ can bring. To learn more, visit www.sexslaveryredemption.com

Robert Craig is Founder and Executive Director of Firewall Ministries, an organization whose goal is to mobilize prayer against human trafficking. He is the prayer mobilization specialist for Samaritan's Purse and Operation Christmas Child. www.firewallministries.com

Stephanie Kozick lives and works in Dublin, Ireland, with her eyes open to the people of many nations around her. There's a good chance you'll find her working at a café, networking with people around Western Europe, or having a coffee with a friend. However, she now knows that the "least of these" may be right across the table.

Susan McCrary is an ESL teacher and has served in international missions. Her cross-cultural experience gives her understanding and passion regarding human slavery, domestically and internationally. Susan currently resides in Knoxville, Tennessee, where she helped to launch Fresh Grace, a human trafficking initiative of unified churches around the region.

Wendy Willard and her family are trying to follow Christ wherever He leads, which currently means they are independent cross-cultural ministers in Nicaragua. There, they support others ministering in the country, including those working directly with girls rescued from trafficking, as well as U.S. families traveling to Nicaragua to adopt orphans.

Thank you to all those who shared your love for the God of hope and the freedom
He brings through the writing of these devotions in *Released*.



Additional Notes

It is our hope and prayer that *Released* has been a source of information and inspiration. If, as you've been reading, you recognize your own need for restoration, healing, and forgiveness, we invite you to contact us through www.juliesanders.org to find out more about the God who wants to be known by you and help you experience true freedom.

If you have concerns about someone you know and need further information or assistance, we recommend these resources as places to begin:

In the United States: The National Human Trafficking Resource Center
1-888-373-7888 or Text HELP to BeFree (322733)

The Polaris Project: polarisproject.org
International Justice Mission: ijm.org
Walk Free Foundation: globalslaveryindex.org
Courage Worldwide: courageworldwide.org
Abolition International: abolitioninternational.org
Street Grace: streetgrace.org

