



Traffic Guard

What does the term human trafficking mean to you? Do you envision a filthy truck transporting women across country borders? Do you picture dirty, dark rooms where young girls and boys are forced to sell their bodies? We hear stories of human trafficking on the news. We see films such as *Taken* that give us a glimpse into what human trafficking entails (although this film portrays an unrealistic view of how trafficking situations end). The United Nations defines human trafficking as:

the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation.

United States Department of State, Trafficking in Persons Report 2009, <http://www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/2009/index.htm> (August 2009).

In more concise terms, trafficking could be defined as forcing someone to work without pay or using power to coerce a person to do something unwillingly. Two major forms of human trafficking include sex trafficking and labor trafficking. Both forms exist all around the world—even in the United States.

Although you might disagree with her political views, Secretary of State Clinton offered a very powerful statement on the reality of human trafficking at the 2009 release of the Trafficking in Persons Report:

Around the world, millions of people are living in bondage. They labor in fields and factories under brutal employers who threaten them with violence if they try to escape. They work in homes for families that keep them virtually imprisoned. They are forced to work as prostitutes or to beg in the streets, fearful of the consequences if they fail to earn their daily quota. They are women, men, and children of all ages, and they are often held far from home with no money, no connections, and no way to ask for help. This is a form of slavery, a crime that spans the globe, providing ruthless employers with an endless supply of people to abuse for financial gain. Human trafficking is a crime with many victims: not only those who are trafficked, but also the families they leave behind, some of whom never see their loved ones again.

What fuels this travesty? One factor is the monetary gain for traffickers. The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe estimates that trafficking industry revenue ranges between \$5-\$9 billion (USD) annually.* Deceptive uses of power and control over a person also contribute. Many times victims of human trafficking fall into a trafficking situation, thinking they are taking a job as a nanny, a model or believing they will be paid a fair wage for their labor.

Human trafficking is not something that only occurs across the world in small remote villages or something that happens to naïve travelers. Human trafficking also takes place in the cities, towns and suburbs of the United States. It may be happening near you.

I was the case manager on call when police discovered a trafficking situation just down the street from my apartment in Nashville, TN. I went to this apartment and met two beautiful people. It has been three years since these victims were found, and the healing process hasn't been easy. One of the girls has come to know Christ in a beautiful way. She is recognizing that she is as Ephesians 2:10 says, "a workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works."

Not all stories end that hopeful. Often, the trafficking will last years, and the victims are afraid to speak up—for fear of their traffickers. There is also deep trauma involved. Many times family members do not believe the victims or simply do not know that their family member is being trafficked. Sometimes victims die in the trade.

Victims of human trafficking need to find hope in something greater than themselves. As Christians we have a hope to share through the reality of the redemption that Christ wants to offer them and the new life they can gain.

Isaiah 1:17 says, "Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow." As I have gained interest in human trafficking, God has impressed this verse upon my heart. I spent a whole year reflecting on this passage and what each part of the verse means in relation to my work with trafficking victims. What speaks most are the verbs: learn, seek, relieve (*encourage*), judge (*defend*) and plead.

* United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, Economic Roots of Trafficking in the UNECE Region, http://www.unece.org/press/pr2004/04gen_n03e.htm (August 2009).

We are called to action. Not everyone can encourage or defend victims of human trafficking, but everyone can plead the case, whether through prayer or by becoming informed.

This past year, I worked as a mental health therapist at Sexual Assault Center in Nashville, TN. This position gave me opportunity to walk through the emotional healing process with a couple of trafficking victims. These individuals needed someone to treat them with dignity, love, defend and protect them.

The statistics and reality of human trafficking can be overwhelming. It's easy to excuse ourselves and ignore these atrocities—"I'm not a social worker"... "I wouldn't know where to start." Yet, human trafficking is a reality we need to confront, whether in our neighborhood, our city or our country. Should we not step up and care for those who are hurt, since we have been rescued from our own despair through Christ's mercy?

Someone has said, "With knowledge comes responsibility." The more I know about human trafficking and the severity of the situation, the more responsible I am to inform those around me. That's why I am currently with a team in El Alto, Bolivia, working to start a holistic aftercare program for victims of prostitution and human trafficking. I know I am doing what God has created me to do. I also know that God has been preparing me in advance for this task.

So what can *you* do to end this modern form of slavery? You will probably never travel around the world or across your city to rescue a victim of human trafficking. Most likely, you will never hear the stories first-hand. You might never meet a victim of human trafficking, but you can pray for victims and their families; their devastation will last for years. Intercede on behalf of those around the world who are currently in bondage and advocate for them.

I encourage you to become well informed about human trafficking. Talk to your senators, congressmen, neighbors and pastors so that together you can plead the case for victims. If you are considering a career working with victims of human trafficking, thoroughly prepare. Strive to become the best lawyer, doctor, social worker, teacher or journalist you can be.

Within us all lies a desire to battle injustice. That desire stems from our creation in the image of God and His desire to see mercy and love poured upon these victims. Recognizing our gifts and abilities and what we can offer to end this form of slavery is important. As much as we may want to hear that we are heroes or that we had a part in rescuing somebody from bondage, only Christ can truly take the honor and glory for victims being released. Ultimately, it is Christ who provides freedom to those held in bondage.

Secret Place

Hide me in Your secret place;
let your strength become my fare,
Entering deep within my soul,
absorbing all my care.

Let me dwell in times of trouble,
in the shadow of Your wing,
Safe in Your protective arms,
that to You my heart can sing.

For You've known each joy and
sorrow,
my desires and every thought,
Each victory my life has known
and all the battles I have fought.

When no man can know my trouble
or the burdens that I bear,
Hide me in Your secret place,
For I know I'll meet You there.

Carla Pollard

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Consider these ways you can be involved in bringing hope.

pray that trafficked persons all around the world and even in your city would know freedom and healing. Pray that individuals working with victims of human trafficking would speak God's words of comfort and care.

read books and information concerning human trafficking and our calling as the body of Christ.

Good News About Injustice by Gary Hauggen

Terrify No More by Gary Hauggen

Just Courage by Gary Hauggen

Escaping the Devil's Bedroom by Dawn Herzog Jewell

give to organizations fighting to end human trafficking

INTERNATIONAL JUSTICE MISSION is a professional organization made up of lawyers, social workers and investigators who work with local law enforcement around the world to end human trafficking. www.ijm.org

FREE FOR LIFE MINISTRIES is a fundraising organization that provides shelter for victims of human trafficking worldwide. www.freeforlifeministries.com

SUTI SANA is an organization in El Alto, Bolivia providing holistic aftercare for women wanting to leave prostitution or human trafficking. www.sutisana.com

Alicia Bunch is a Licensed Master of Social Work. She is currently working in El Alto, Bolivia, with Suti Sana. If you would like to receive her updates, email her at alicia.bunch@wordmadeflesh.org or visit www.wordmadeflesh.org/author/aliciabunch.

