**Christians & The Human Trafficking Crisis**

 There are many things discussed in the Scriptures that are easy to talk about. Things like grace, love, faith, joy, and hope are wonderful and delight our souls as we meditate on such things. However, there are other subjects that are extremely difficult to discuss. Things like the depravity of sin, the torment of Hell, sexual sins, MDR, etc.

Today we are talking about something especially difficult to address, a subject that rarely gets treatment from the pulpit. In fact, it will without a doubt bring us to a very solemn level of discomfort and grief. Today we are thinking about what the Bible says about the sin-epidemic that is human trafficking and what responsibilities the people of God have in addressing this spiritually-rooted evil that plagues our world. Please keep in mind that this subject is incredibly relevant to the age that we live in and that it is a spiritual issue. May we never ignore or label this as anything otherwise.

**I. Introducing The Problem: What Is Human Trafficking?**

 A. *“The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring 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. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.”* (U.N., The Palermo Protocol, Article 3, paragraph (a)).

 B. *“Human trafficking involves the use of force, fraud, or coercion to obtain some type of labor or commercial sex act. Every year, millions of men, women, and children are trafficked worldwide – including right here in the United States. It can happen in any community and victims can be any age, race, gender, or nationality. Traffickers might use violence, manipulation, or false promises of well-paying jobs or romantic relationships to lure victims into trafficking situations.”* (Department of Homeland Security)

 C. 22% of human trafficking victims go into the sex trade and that 22% make up 66% of the profits of human trafficking (*ILO*)

 D. It is the fastest growing business in organized crime and the second most lucrative commodity traded illegally after drugs/guns.

 E. Attention has primarily been brought to this epidemic through news reports, national criminal cases, popular movies (e.g. *Taken*), and various celebrities (e.g. Ashton Kutcher, Emma Thompson, etc.).

**II. The Extent Of The Problem:**

 A. Global Statistics

 1. According to the International Labor Organization, 4.5 million people around the world are coerced into the sex trafficking trade EVERY YEAR as part of a $32 billion annual industry. Human trafficking in sum accounts for a $150 billion industry. 1 in 4 is a child.

 2. Currently, it is estimated that there are 25 million slaves worldwide at any given time. That is 3x the population of NYC.

 3. Average cost of a slave is $90. Average life expectancy is 7 years.

 B. U.S. Statistics

 1. According to the *U.S. State Department’s Trafficking In Persons Report*, 600,000 to 800,000 people are trafficked across international borders every year, of which 80% are female and half are children.

 2. The average age a teen enters the sex trade in the U.S. is 13 years old.

3. According to *CNN Freedom Project Ending Modern Day Slavery*, an est. 14,500-17,500 people are trafficked into the U.S. each year.

4. In the U.S. alone, sex trafficking amounts to a $9.5 billion/year industry.

5. 800,000 children go missing each year (*National Center for Missing and Exploited Children*). How many of these are being trafficked...?

 C. Kentucky Statistics

 1. Since 2007, there have been 373 cases with 869 victims, mostly female.

 2. This means that of the tiny fraction of those who have actually been caught in KY, this sinful trade in human souls has impacted hundreds of victims and thousands of family members in our state.

 D. Louisville Statistics & Stories

 1. Numerous human trafficking arrests were made this year during the KY Derby festivities. They are typically made EVERY SINGLE year.

2. We are seeing and hearing more accounts of people being trafficked in our neighborhoods and near our homes. In preparation for this lesson, I came across human trafficking attempts at a Macy’s, several malls in our area, Middletown Target, Springhurst Target, and Beckley Creek Park just to name a few. This is happening in our community. A lot...

3. The reason it is a huge threat here is b/c of our key location & population statistics. We have five interstates, are situated on the Ohio River, have a huge turnover in our population, have multiple large events with confluences of crowds, and an international mid-point airport.

**III. Contributing Factors To The Problem:**

 A. The Connection to Pornography Via Sex-Trafficking

 1. *“The porn industry is tied inescapably to sex trafficking. No, not every video and image on every porn site is trafficking-related, but exploitative images and videos are often indistinguishable from regularly consensual content. Porn is a risk factor that has been connected to heavy involvement in sex trafficking, it normalizes the actions trafficking victims are forced into, it desensitizes victims of sex trafficking to those actions, and it’s used as ‘advertising’ by both pimps and traffickers. Clicking, downloading, or consuming videos and images sends the message that we accept sexual entertainment at the cost of sexual exploitation, and earns advertising dollars that fund increased trafficking and exploitation.”* *(Fight the New Drug)*

 2. Objectifying people is increasing rapidly & sexual perversions reign.

 B. Turning a blind eye to social issues, even when the Bible does address them. Sins of omission hold the same cost as sins of commission (James 4:17). Perhaps desensitization is also a big part of this. Are we desensitized to this?

 C. Orphans & Broken Homes (James 1:27): Stats from *www.erasechildtrafficking.org*

 1. 57% had been sexually abused as children.

 2. 49% had been physically assaulted.

 3. 85% were victims of incest as girls, and 90% had been physically abused.

 4. 61.5% were frequently hit, slapped, pushed, or had objects thrown at them by a member of their household.

 5. 40% of the above were kicked, hit, beaten, raped, or threatened and/or attacked with a weapon by a member of their household.

 6. Other common risk factors include: youth, poverty, unemployment, desperation, homelessness, a need to be loved, immigration status, and homes in countries torn by armed conflict, civil unrest, political upheaval, corruption, or natural disasters.

 D. *“Sex trafficking is part of a larger continuum in America that runs the gamut from homelessness, poverty, and self-esteem issues to sexualized television, the glorification of a pimp/ho culture—what is often referred to as the pornification of America—and a billion dollar sex industry built on the back of pornography, music, entertainment, etc.”* (John Rutherford, “The Essence of Evil: Sex with Children Has Become Big Business in America”)

**IV. Does The Bible Address This Problem?**

 A. The Patriarch Joseph was a clear victim of human trafficking.

 1. “*Then they sat down to eat a meal. And as they raised their eyes and looked, behold, a caravan of Ishmaelites was coming from Gilead, with their camels bearing aromatic gum and balm and myrrh, on their way to bring them down to Egypt. Judah said to his brothers, ‘What profit is it for us to kill our brother and cover up his blood? Come and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him, for he is our brother, our own flesh.’ And his brothers listened to him. Then some Midianite traders passed by, so they pulled him up and lifted Joseph out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. Thus they brought Joseph into Egypt”* (Gen. 37:25-28)

2. *“Meanwhile, the Midianites sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, Pharaoh’s officer, the captain of the bodyguard...”* (Gen. 37:36)

3. *“Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt; and Potiphar, an Egyptian officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the bodyguard, bought him* *from the Ishmaelites, who had taken him down there.”* (Gen. 39:1)

 B. Many nations are specifically condemned for human trafficking in the Bible, especially in the prophets.

 1. The Philistines: *“This is what the LORD says: ‘The people of Gaza have sinned again and again, and I will not let them go unpunished! They sent whole villages into exile, selling them as slaves to Edom.’”* (Amos 1:6, NLT)

 2. Tyre: “*This is what the LORD says: ‘The people of Tyre have sinned again and again, and I will not let them go unpunished! They broke their treaty of brotherhood selling whole villages as slaves to Edom.’”* (Amos 1:9, NLT amended for the translation’s addition “with Israel”)

 C. Kidnapping is specifically condemned in both the OT & NT.

 1. *“He who kidnaps a man, whether he sells him or he is found in his possession, shall surely be put to death.”* (Ex. 21:16)

2. *“If a man is caught kidnapping any of his countrymen of the sons of Israel, and he deals with him violently or sells him, then that thief shall die; so you shall purge the evil from among you.”* (Deut. 24:7)

3. *“But we know that the Law is good, if one uses it lawfully, realizing the fact that law is not made for a righteous person, but for those who are lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for...kidnappers and liars and perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound teaching, according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, with which I have been entrusted.”* (1Tim. 1:8-10)

**V. Solutions: What Can/Should Christians Do About Human Trafficking?**

 A. Develop a greater moral sensitivity (Ps. 82:3; Prov. 31:8f; Heb. 10:34). Perpetrators tend to act in ways that should be preventable if we are observant. Victims tend to exhibit signs of their being trafficked. Let’s research and be aware of the red flags.

 B. Seeing people through God’s compassionate eyes (Matt. 25:31-46; Jer. 22:16).

 C. Cultivate and encourage, train and teach, sexual fulfillment through God’s intended mediums (1Thess. 4:3-8; 1Cor. 6:9-11; Heb. 13:4).

 D. Advocating, counseling, encouraging victims (Ps. 35:10; 82:4; Is. 58:6f; 61:1-3).

 1. Taking advantage of our citizenship rights (cf. Acts 16:37f; 22:25-28; 25:11). Encourage the development of and enforcement of laws through God’s ministerial governmental medium (Rom. 13:1-7).

 2. Use our particular skills/experiences to bring attention to & fight it.

 3. Prayer. Pray for the victims. Pray for the perpetrators. Pray for the officers trying to enforce laws. Pray for the legislators crafting laws.

 E. Counseling and reforming former perpetrators and supporters.

 F. Understanding the concerns of parents for their children and being a community of protection for our loved ones. Story after story comes out about people’s children and family members being taken. This constant anxiety weighs on the hearts of many and can cripple social interaction that has huge impacts even on things like evangelism or coming to church.

 G. Most importantly, share the gospel broadly. You never know if you might pull a victim out or change a perpetrator of human trafficking into a disciple.

 God has charged His people to be zealous for good deeds (Eph. 2:10; Titus 2:11-14). One of the worst situations that exist in the world today is human trafficking. People are being taken, stolen from their homes and families, and objectified as physical or sexual slaves. This is a real problem that we can and should be taking the proper steps to address. As Christians, it is imperative that we address this in whatever capacity our sphere of influence, skillset, and resources allow.

 Let us boldly shed light on the horrors of evil in this world (Eph. 5:11-16). Let us advocate for the distressed and afflicted as Jesus would because if we don’t, we will be held liable by the judgment of God’s wrath. And let us provide love, forgiveness, reconciliation, grace, and compassion on both the victims of human trafficking as well as the perpetrators who will turn from their evils.

**For More Information & Resources:**

(Listing Here Does Not Indicate Agreement With All These Groups Stand For)

**Kentucky Based Groups:**

* **Bluegrass Rape Crisis Center** (Lexington-based)
* **Free2Hope** (non-profit; Louisville-based)
* **Kentucky Association of Sexual Assault Programs** (Frankfort-based)
* **Kristy Love Foundation** (Louisville-based)
* **PATH Coalition of KY** (Louisville-based)
* **Rescue and Restore** (Catholic; Louisville-based)
* **Women’s Crisis Center** (Covington-based)

**Nationally/Internationally Based Groups:**

* **Erase Child Trafficking**
* **Fight the New Drug**
* **Hope for Justice**
* **International Labor Organization**
* **IOM Counter Trafficking Data Collaborative (CTDC)**—1st global data hub on trafficking. As of Jan. 25, 2019, they had 91,416 survivor cases from 172 countries.
* **Polaris Project**—Operates the National Human Trafficking Hotline (888) 373-7888 as well as a textline called BeFree (233733).
* **Stop The Traffik**
* **The Dressember Foundation**
* **The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children**
* **TraffickCam**—This app allows you to take pictures of your hotel room and upload them onto a database that can help agencies identify and match locations to those shown in abuse videos and capture perpetrators.

**U.S. Government Groups:**

* **U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (HHS), Administration for Children & Families (ACF), Office On Trafficking In Persons (OTIP)**
* **U.S. Justice Department, Civil Rights Division, Human Trafficking Prosecution Unit (HTPU)**
* **U.S. State Department**—*“The Department of State leads the U.S. global engagement to combat human trafficking and supports the coordination of anti-trafficking efforts across the U.S. government.”* See the latest full report on human trafficking statistics and preventative measures at: https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-trafficking-in-persons-report/
* To report suspected human trafficking to Federal law enforcement, call 1-866-347-2423.

**For Research On Laws On Human Trafficking:**

* KRS 336.075, 605.030, 620.040, 421.500, Kentucky House Bill 524
* SESTA and FOSTA bills signed into effect by President Trump.
* Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 (TVPA)
* The Palermo Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime

**14 Recommendations For U.S. On The State Department’s 2019 Trafficking In Persons Report (i.e. Policy Things To Pray For):**

* Increase investigation and prosecution of labor trafficking cases.
* Increase the number of requests by federal law enforcement officials for Continued Presence and conduct targeted training to ensure such officials apply for Continued Presence in a timely manner and in all appropriate circumstances.
* Shorten processing times and improve training for adjudicators to reduce obstacles for victims to appropriately obtain trafficking-related immigration benefits.
* Proactively identify potential trafficking victims among populations vulnerable to human trafficking.
* Increase the number of trafficking investigations and prosecutions.
* Seek to ensure immigration enforcement does not hinder human trafficking criminal law enforcement or victim protections.
* Increase equitable access to comprehensive victim services across the country and improve access to short-term and/or transitional housing for all victims.
* Encourage state, local, and tribal authorities to implement policies not to prosecute victims for the unlawful acts their traffickers compelled them to commit.
* Remove the restriction on victim assistance funding for legal representation of victims in vacatur and expungement cases for the unlawful acts their traffickers compelled them to commit.
* Mitigate vulnerabilities in employment-based or other nonimmigrant visa programs in the United States, including by increasing oversight of labor recruiters to ensure compliance with federal, state, and local regulations.
* Increase training of prosecutors and judges on mandatory forfeiture and restitution for trafficking victims.
* Increase survivor engagement, including by more systematically incorporating survivor input when forming policies, programs, and trainings.
* Increase prevention efforts, including through outreach to and intervention services for marginalized communities.
* Strengthen efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex and labor trafficking. As described in the Methodology section of this report, these recommendations were drawn from input from multiple anti-trafficking stakeholders, including NGOs and advocates, as well as from government agencies and reports, on the degree to which the United States meets the minimum standards set forth in the TVPA.