

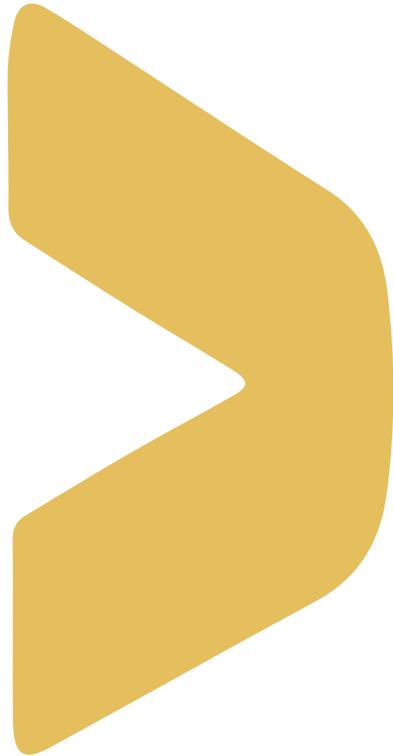


FREEDOM SUNDAY

GOD'S PEOPLE
WORKING TOGETHER
TO END HUMAN TRAFFICKING

RESOURCES FOR
WORSHIP + ACTION

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
 because he has anointed me
 to proclaim good news to the poor.
 He has sent me to proclaim
 freedom for the prisoners
 and recovery of sight for the blind,
 to set the oppressed free,
 to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”
 – Luke 4:18-19 (NIV)



When Jesus publicly announced his mission, he read from the prophesy in Isaiah 61:1-2. This mission is the same one that Jesus entrusted to the church. Those words are a call that is being fulfilled today: freedom for those living in oppressive circumstances, freedom for those who are enslaved by traffickers. There is good news: the Lord cares for individuals who are hurting and vulnerable and offers healing and restoration. This is good news that we as the church can share. By observing **Freedom Sunday** and working together to end human trafficking, we can become part of fulfilling Jesus’ mission today.

Together, with our brothers and sisters across the world, our desire is for Freedom Sunday to be a resource and an event that will include a growing number of churches around the world. Through our worship, we call out to God to end the evil of human trafficking, and we seek to become part of that work.



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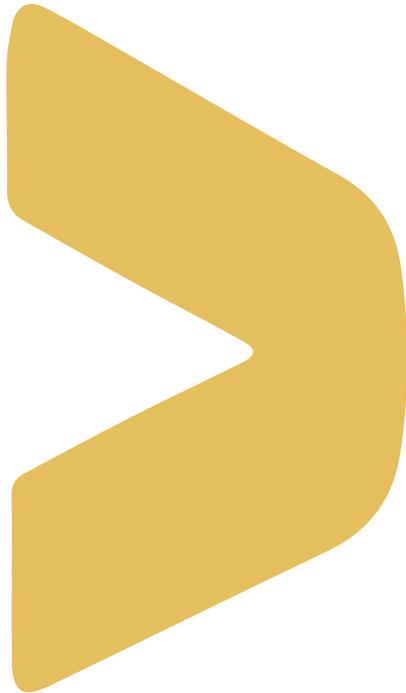


Freedom's Promise



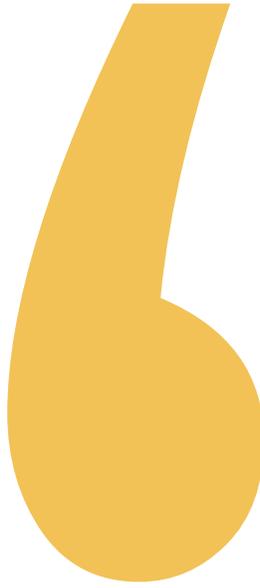
CENTER FOR JUSTICE &
 RECONCILIATION





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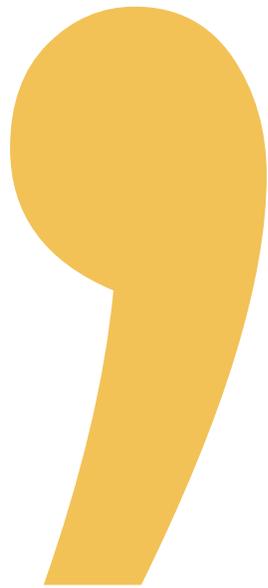
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“IS THIS NOT THE FAST THAT I CHOOSE:
TO LOOSE THE BONDS OF INJUSTICE,
TO UNDO THE THONGS OF THE YOKE,
TO LET THE OPPRESSED GO FREE,
AND TO BREAK EVERY YOKE?

...
THEN YOUR LIGHT SHALL BREAK
FORTH LIKE THE DAWN,
AND YOUR HEALING SHALL
SPRING UP QUICKLY ...”

— ISAIAH 58:6,8



WHAT IS FREEDOM SUNDAY?

Freedom Sunday is a global day of worship, prayer, and action surrounding the problem of human trafficking. On September 24, 2017, the last Sunday of the month, churches around the world will join together to raise awareness about human trafficking and modern slavery and to show our compassion for men, women, and children who are exploited around the world. As the Body of Christ in our world, we unite to commit to a tangible response against the evil of human trafficking.

Through Freedom Sunday, churches will make commitments to take action to prevent human trafficking and exploitation in our local and global communities and to care for victims of this crime. Together, we can stop trafficking and bring God's good news of freedom for the oppressed.

HOW TO GET INVOLVED

1. PLAN A SERVICE

Within this packet you will find a variety of materials to serve as a resource as you plan your Freedom Sunday service. They are designed to be flexible. You may choose to use selections as they are printed, or you may choose to adapt what's here to fit the needs of your context and congregation. Worship resources include prayers, song suggestions, related Scripture, biblical reflection, and sermon starters. These worship resources have been designed to support your congregation as you gather to learn more about human trafficking and explore the role you can play in tackling this injustice.

2. TAKE ACTION

Human trafficking affects every country in the world in some way, as countries of destination, transit, and/or origin. Your congregation has the power to address human trafficking both locally and globally. Together, we can work to make communities safer places for children and adults, where it is harder for traffickers to operate and hide themselves and their victims. A selection of resources is available to equip your church to start taking action to prevent human trafficking. Resources include ideas for how your church can engage your community and additional resources for ongoing learning and participation.

WHAT IS HUMAN TRAFFICKING?

HUMAN TRAFFICKING IS ...

It's the recruitment or movement of a person, by force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of profiting from the exploitation of that person. Individuals are bought and sold and forced into commercial sexual exploitation or forced labor.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING IS ...

It's not just something that happens "over there." It affects every country in the world in some way, and it can trap anyone—male or female, child or adult, rich or poor. Its victims cross racial, ethnic, geographic, economic, and educational backgrounds.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING IS ...

It's a criminal system based on greed, control, and power. In whatever shape or form, all people dream of a hopeful future, whether it's to be loved, to be seen, to belong, or to find a better future for their families. Traffickers exploit those desires among those who are most vulnerable and makes promises that are deceptive.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING IS ...

It's often difficult to see or acknowledge. It's sometimes hard to talk about. Yet it's something that as a church we have to address.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING IS ...

It's something that dehumanizes people, turning them into objects and commodities. As God's people, we care about the issue of human trafficking because we believe that every person is made in God's image and is, therefore, valuable and worthy of dignity. Our hope is to see people restored into the fullness of who God created them to be.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING IS ...

It's something too big to stop on our own. We need to come together with other churches, organizations, businesses, and community leaders to fight human trafficking, and above all, we turn to God asking Him to work through the church to stop human trafficking.

PRAYERS

These are sample prayers for public worship. Please choose the one you believe is most appropriate for your congregation, or create your own. Together, let's pray for God's will to be done to end the abuse and exploitation of people.

A GUIDED PRAYER FOR AN END TO SLAVERY AND TRAFFICKING

Pray for those whose voices are not heard: the defenseless, the imprisoned, and the broken. Pray for the rescue and restoration of those who are enslaved both at home and around the globe. (Isaiah 42:22, Leviticus 19:29, Exodus 20:14)

Pray for those who are enslaved in our world. Pray for God's redemption in each circumstance of victimization. Though bound by the sin of exploitation in this present world, pray for freedom in Christ. (Isaiah 61:7, Revelation 21:1-5, Jeremiah 29:11, Isaiah 58:6)

Pray for those who daily battle human trafficking and for those who give of their time, money, and hearts to serve victims: first responders, activists, advocates, counselors, social workers, and church leaders. Pray for wisdom, compassion, discernment, and empathy. Pray that a bright light can be shown in this darkness. (Romans 8:20-21, Galatians 5:13-14)

Pray against the propaganda of lies impressed on society—the normalization of sexual harm. Pray that the evil found in pornography, strip clubs, and the solicitation of sex would be exposed. Pray that God would convict the hearts of those who exert power over other human beings, that God would heal the heart of exploitation and end the demand. (Psalm 10, Leviticus 19:29)

Pray for those who are vulnerable: children, single-parent households, those who are abused, immigrants, and children in foster homes. Pray for wisdom for caretakers of children, including parents, teachers, church leaders, school bus drivers, coaches, and other authority figures. Pray protection over those at risk, that they might be protected from harm. (2 Thessalonians 3:2-3, Isaiah 41:10, Psalm 121:7-8)

Pray for God's provision: that laws would be put in place to abolish exploitation of human beings in any capacity; and in so doing, that laws would be put into effect outlawing the sale or purchase of slave-made products. Pray for global leaders to respond to the call and

PRAYERS

stand to end labor trafficking. Pray that consumers would make compassionate decisions about the products they purchase and support companies that have rid their supply chains of slave labor. (Isaiah 10:1-2, Psalm 2:10-12)

Pray for corporate collaboration among God's children in the fight to end slavery and human trafficking. Pray for the empowerment of the local church to stand against evil. Pray for the church's practitioners to gain wisdom and knowledge in becoming the top defender and protector against exploitation of people. Pray that the church would rise up, take heart, and pursue justice. Pray for the church to provide tangible comfort, support, and protection as we are called to be God's hands that heal. (Isaiah 61:1-3, 1 Peter 2:9-10, 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5, Ephesians 4:19-20)

A PRAYER FOR VICTIMS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Dear God, we pray for victims of human trafficking ... for those who have been dehumanized and held captive by the greed and violence of a broken world. For girls and boys, women and men, who are bought and sold and abused by those who have forgotten the eternal value of a human soul. May they rediscover their worth in You. And may we affirm their worth as individuals who are made in Your image.

Lord, reveal the way our choices may play a part in keeping others captives by creating demand for more slaves, and give us courage to make different choices. Give us eyes to see injustice and exploitation, and give us the courage to speak out against evil.

Use us to bring light into the darkened corners of this world, that they may not remain dark forever.

May Your light expose the evil deeds of the captors, and may Your love create a change of heart within those who are perpetrators of human trafficking.

Use us to loosen the chains of injustice and let the oppressed go free. We pray for an end to the evil that is human trafficking, and we pray that the victims of trafficking may find restoration and healing in You.

Amen.

PRAYERS

PRAY THE SCRIPTURES

Psalms of lament on behalf of victims of human trafficking

Be merciful to me, Lord, for I am in distress;
my eyes grow weak with sorrow,
my soul and body with grief.
My life is consumed by anguish
and my years by groaning;
my strength fails because of my affliction,
and my bones grow weak.
Because of all my enemies,
I am the utter contempt of my neighbors
and an object of dread to my closest friends—
those who see me on the street flee from me.
I am forgotten as though I were dead;
I have become like broken pottery.
For I hear many whispering,
“Terror on every side!”
They conspire against me
and plot to take my life.

— *Psalms 31:9-13 (NIV)*

I cry aloud to the Lord;
I lift up my voice to the Lord for mercy.
I pour out before him my complaint;
before him I tell my trouble.
When my spirit grows faint within me,
it is you who watch over my way.
In the path where I walk
people have hidden a snare for me.
Look and see, there is no one at my right hand;
no one is concerned for me.
I have no refuge;
no one cares for my life.
I cry to you, Lord;
I say, “You are my refuge,

PRAYERS

my portion in the land of the living.”
Listen to my cry,
for I am in desperate need;
rescue me from those who pursue me,
for they are too strong for me.
Set me free from my prison,
that I may praise your name.
Then the righteous will gather about me
because of your goodness to me.
—Psalm 142 (NIV)

Pray for healing and restoration for victims

“But I will restore you to health
and heal your wounds,”
declares the Lord,
“because you are called an outcast,
Zion for whom no one cares.”
— Jeremiah 30:17 (NIV)

Pray to end the demand

Repent! Turn away from all your offenses; then sin will not be your downfall. Rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed, and get a new heart and a new spirit. Why will you die, people of Israel? — Ezekiel 18:30-31 (NIV)

Pray for traffickers

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. — Ephesians 6:12 (NIV)

PRAYERS

Pray for unity among churches to stop trafficking

The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!” And the head cannot say to the feet, “I don’t need you!” On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. — *1 Corinthians 12:21-26 (NIV)*

Pray to remember we cannot fight this injustice on our own

God is our refuge and strength,
an ever-present help in trouble.
Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way
and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea,
though its waters roar and foam
and the mountains quake with their surging.
There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
the holy place where the Most High dwells.
God is within her, she will not fall;
God will help her at break of day.
Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall;
he lifts his voice, the earth melts.
The Lord Almighty is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress.
Come and see what the Lord has done,
the desolations he has brought on the earth.
He makes wars cease
to the ends of the earth.
He breaks the bow and shatters the spear;
he burns the shields with fire.
He says, “Be still, and know that I am God;
I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth.”
The Lord Almighty is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress.

— *Psalms 46 (NIV)*

SONG SUGGESTIONS

These are suggested hymns and choruses that complement the themes of Freedom Sunday. Please choose those you believe are most appropriate for your congregation. Together, let's seek God and call out to Him.

CHORUSES

- "All Who Are Thirsty" (Brenton Brown)
- "Amazing Grace! My Chains Are Gone" (Chris Tomlin)
- "God of Justice" (Tim Hughes)
- "Here Is Love" (Matt Redman)
- "I Belong to You" (Sean Curran)
- "Jesus, You Are Worthy" (Brenton Brown, Don Williams)
- "Let My People Go" (Beth Redman, Gary Baker, Jonas Myrin, Matt Redman)
- "Love Came Down" (Brian and Jenn Johnson)
- "Our God Is Mercy" (Brenton Brown)
- "The King Has Come" (Eoghan Heaslip, Neil Bennetts)
- "The Power of Your Name" (Lincoln Brewster)
- "Your Grace Is Enough" (Matt Maher)
- "Your Great Name" (Natalie Grant)

HYMNS

- "Abide With Me"
- "All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name"
- "Amazing Grace"
- "Arise, My Soul, Arise"
- "Come, Holy Spirit"
- "Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus"
- "He Lifted Me"
- "His Eye Is on the Sparrow"
- "Let Your Heart Be Broken"
- "Make Me a Servant"

RELATED SCRIPTURE

These are Scripture passages that address themes that surround human trafficking and modern slavery:

*“So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.”*

— Genesis 1:27 (NIV)

COMMENT: We care about the issue of human trafficking and modern slavery because we believe that every single person, whether child or adult, female or male, is made in God’s image and is, therefore, valuable and worthy of dignity. Human trafficking dehumanizes people, turning them into objects and commodities. Our hope is to see people restored into the fullness of who God created them to be.

He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

*“The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”*

Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. He began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

— Luke 4:16-21 (NIV)

COMMENT: When Jesus announced his mission as Messiah, he quoted Isaiah 61:1-2, saying that he had come to bring good news, proclaim release and healing, and offer freedom. Jesus came to offer salvation that starts in the here and now. As the Body of Christ, we are charged with the same mission: to offer new life through Christ to those who are oppressed.

RELATED SCRIPTURE

*“Shout it aloud, do not hold back.
Raise your voice like a trumpet.
Declare to my people their rebellion
and to the descendants of Jacob their sins.
For day after day they seek me out;
they seem eager to know my ways,
as if they were a nation that does what is right
and has not forsaken the commands of its God.
They ask me for just decisions
and seem eager for God to come near them.
‘Why have we fasted,’ they say,
‘and you have not seen it?
Why have we humbled ourselves,
and you have not noticed?’
“Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please
and exploit all your workers.
Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife,
and in striking each other with wicked fists.
You cannot fast as you do today
and expect your voice to be heard on high.
Is this the kind of fast I have chosen,
only a day for people to humble themselves?
Is it only for bowing one’s head like a reed
and for lying in sackcloth and ashes?
Is that what you call a fast,
a day acceptable to the Lord?
“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 yoke?
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?
Then your light will break forth like the dawn,
and your healing will quickly appear;
then your righteousness[a] will go before you,
and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard.
Then you will call, and the Lord will answer;
you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I.*

RELATED SCRIPTURE

*“If you do away with the yoke of oppression,
with the pointing finger and malicious talk,
and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry
and satisfy the needs of the oppressed,
then your light will rise in the darkness,
and your night will become like the noonday.*

— Isaiah 58:1-10 (NIV)

COMMENT: We are not truly honoring God through our worship and rituals if we are simultaneously ignoring the plight of the oppressed.

The Lord said, “I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey—the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.”

But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?”

And God said, “I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain.”

— Exodus 3:7-12 (NIV)

COMMENT: God heard the cries of the Israelites, who were enslaved and oppressed in Egypt. He promised to bring His people out of slavery. God does not desire for anyone He loves to be enslaved, and He loves everyone.

RELATED SCRIPTURE

*“Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves,
for the rights of all who are destitute.
Speak up and judge fairly;
defend the rights of the poor and needy.”*

— Proverbs 31:8-9 (NIV)

COMMENT: Through Scripture, God issues a call to advocate on behalf of those whose voices are quieted through oppression.

*Arise, Lord! Lift up your hand, O God.
Do not forget the helpless.
Why does the wicked man revile God?
Why does he say to himself,
“He won’t call me to account”?
But you, God, see the trouble of the afflicted;
you consider their grief and take it in hand.
The victims commit themselves to you;
you are the helper of the fatherless.
Break the arm of the wicked man;
call the evildoer to account for his wickedness
that would not otherwise be found out.
The Lord is King for ever and ever;
the nations will perish from his land.
You, Lord, hear the desire of the afflicted;
you encourage them, and you listen to their cry,
defending the fatherless and the oppressed,
so that mere earthly mortals
will never again strike terror.*

— Psalm 10:12-18 (NIV)

COMMENT: The prayers and cries of individuals who are oppressed and exploited are heartfelt, and God hears them. God cares about those who are oppressed and exploited, and we should, too.

RELATED SCRIPTURE

*Endow the king with your justice, O God,
the royal son with your righteousness.
May he judge your people in righteousness,
your afflicted ones with justice.
May the mountains bring prosperity to the people,
the hills the fruit of righteousness.
May he defend the afflicted among the people
and save the children of the needy;
may he crush the oppressor.*

— Psalm 72:1-4, 12-14 (NIV)

COMMENT: The lives of every single person who is living under oppression are precious to God.

*I waited patiently for the Lord;
he turned to me and heard my cry.
He lifted me out of the slimy pit,
out of the mud and mire;
he set my feet on a rock
and gave me a firm place to stand.
He put a new song in my mouth,
a hymn of praise to our God.
Many will see and fear the Lord
and put their trust in him.*

— Psalm 40:1-3

COMMENT: Take time to pray for protection and deliverance for victims of human trafficking. Pray that they would feel and know God's presence and experience the freedom He desires for them.

RELATED SCRIPTURE

*This is what the Lord says:
“For three sins of Israel,
even for four, I will not relent.
They sell the innocent for silver,
and the needy for a pair of sandals.
They trample on the heads of the poor
as on the dust of the ground
and deny justice to the oppressed.
Father and son use the same girl
and so profane my holy name.*

*...
“I hate, I despise your religious festivals;
your assemblies are a stench to me.
Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings,
I will not accept them.
Though you bring choice fellowship offerings,
I will have no regard for them.
Away with the noise of your songs!
I will not listen to the music of your harps.
But let justice roll on like a river,
righteousness like a never-failing stream!*

— Amos 2:6-7, 5:21-24 (NIV)

COMMENT: Our attempts to honor God are unacceptable if we attempt to worship in church services and religious events but ignore the plight of the oppressed and God’s call for justice in our daily lives.

*Continue to remember those in prison as if you were together with them
in prison, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.*

— Hebrews 13:3 (NIV)

COMMENT: Turning our backs and ignoring the injustice in our world is not an option. God calls us to identify with and suffer alongside those who are in bondage. He calls us to show true, active compassion.

BIBLICAL REFLECTION

As you prepare to lead in worship on Freedom Sunday, take time to reflect on the issue of human trafficking from a biblical perspective.

THE GOOD NEWS OF THE GOSPEL

God went far beyond the call for justice and mercy. In Jesus, the Word became flesh (John 1:14). In self-emptying love and humility, God entered our world, making possible life “to the full” for all people (John 10:10). The stated mission of Jesus, fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah 61:1-2, makes clear God’s redemptive purposes—particularly for those living in poverty, those deprived of freedom, those who are suffering, and those who are oppressed (Luke 4:18-19).

Restoration, renewal, and reconciliation are offered to everyone through Christ’s sacrificial death and resurrection (Ephesians 2:14-18). This powerfully demonstrates God’s love for us and the value placed on humanity. In Jesus, God was prepared to make this self-offering in order to re-create, renew, and restore all of creation (2 Corinthians 5:17).

GOD’S KINGDOM ON EARTH

When we respond to God’s love, we begin to live with different values—God’s values. We live the prayer “Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10). We learn that the overflow of truly loving God is to love our neighbor as well (Mark 12:30-31). As people who have been reconciled to God through Christ, we join in God’s reconciling work in creation (2 Corinthians 5:19). Like Jesus, we learn to care for people who are called the least and the lowest (Matthew 25:40). In such ways, we strive to make God’s kingdom here on earth a visible reality. This is a struggle, a spiritual battle (Ephesians 6:12).

PRACTICAL CHRISTIAN RESPONSES TO HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Our response to the evil of human trafficking is based on what we believe about God and God’s purposes for humanity. We also have an obligation to listen and to learn from survivors of human trafficking. Their voices are central to shaping and transforming both our theological and our practical responses to trafficking. Their plight cannot be ignored. Their needs are urgent.

BIBLICAL REFLECTION

Underlying causes of trafficking should be acknowledged, including the ways that demand for cheap labor, cheap services, and cheap products leads to labor trafficking. As the church we also need to address the way pornography fuels the trafficking of children and adults for commercial sexual exploitation. If we have been complicit or unheeding in these areas, we need to be challenged to change and to work for a world free of the exploitation of other people for our benefit.

Both individually and as the Body of Christ, we are called to respond in prayerful and practical ways. Our first priority is to pray for individuals who have been trafficked. Also, where possible, Christians should be actively involved in initiatives that seek to care for and offer healing and wholeness for victims of exploitation. Freedom and dignity must be restored to those who have been exploited.

The Church seeks to stand alongside people who have been trafficked by protecting them and preventing this crime through speaking out to the powerful systems that enable this crime to thrive, systems that we are all a part of in some way. In conjunction with other concerned groups, the church has a duty to press for societal and structural changes to protect those who are vulnerable to exploitation.

CREATED IN GOD'S IMAGE: WHAT IT MEANS TO BE HUMAN

Christians believe that human beings have a unique place in God's creation. Created in God's image (Genesis 1:26-27), humanity reflects the glory of God and has God-given dignity and worth. We are also gifted with individuality, autonomy, reason, and creativity, and we have the capacity for knowledge and moral awareness (Romans 2:14-15). Reflecting the nature of God, who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we seek relationship and fellowship both with God and with one another. We are created with an innate longing for deep spiritual communion with our Creator (Psalm 42:1).

HOW OUR WORLD AND RELATIONSHIPS BECAME DISTORTED

Often our attitudes, choices, and behaviors fall far short of God's creation plan for humanity (Romans 3:23). In conflict, hostility, and division and in the mistreatment of people, it is evident that relationships with God and with one another have become fractured and distorted. The use of power to abuse and exploit other people is further evidence of a broken world.

BIBLICAL REFLECTION

WHY HUMAN TRAFFICKING IS EVIL

Human trafficking strikes at the heart of what it means for humanity to be created in God's image. It dehumanizes individuals who are trafficked, denying them their God-given value and worth and robbing them of their dignity and autonomy. Motivated by profit and greed, trafficking turns human beings into commodities.

Traffickers prey on people in vulnerable situations, such as poverty and desperation. Trafficked people are oppressed and enslaved, losing their freedom through coercion, fear, false promises, or deception. Body, mind and spirit are affected.

GOD'S CONCERN FOR JUSTICE FOR THE VULNERABLE AND OPPRESSED

Trafficking of fellow human beings is not new. The Bible tells the story of Joseph, who was sold by his own brothers (Genesis 37:28). Joel records how the defeated nation of Israel was scattered and its people traded (Joel 3:3). Amos describes poor people being sold, trampled on, denied justice, and oppressed by their own people (Amos 2:6-7).

Yet God's concern for justice is also made abundantly clear in the Bible. Set free from slavery in Egypt, the Israelites were called to live differently from surrounding nations—as God's covenant people. They were told never to forget what it was like to be exploited and oppressed (Leviticus 19:33-34). The Levitical code set out God's instructions to ensure protection and provision for disadvantaged, poor, and vulnerable people such as strangers, widows, and people living with a disability (Leviticus 19:9-18).

The psalmist testifies that God upholds the cause of those who are oppressed, people who are hungry, prisoners, individuals who are bent down, strangers, orphaned children, and widows (Psalm 146:7-9). The prophets declare that God loves justice (Isaiah 61:8), and they call for it to "roll on like a river" (Amos 5:24). The obligation is clear to "act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8).

SERMON STARTERS

The style of sermon or message you'll want to deliver will vary depending on your style of worship and congregation. Here you will find a selection of resources we hope will be helpful in your preparation.

SERMON STARTER 1

Passage: Genesis 37:1-36; 39-45 (Joseph's Story)

Main Point: God offers restoration to the vulnerable and exploited

Overview: In Genesis, we read an early account of human trafficking in the life of Joseph, who was sold into slavery by his brothers. In Egypt, Joseph was a slave to Pharaoh, and he was thrown into prison when Pharaoh's wife lied after being rejected. But even in the darkest times of his life, God was still with Joseph. God gave Joseph favor with Pharaoh, and eventually he was put in a position to help his family. God also gave Joseph the opportunity to forgive his brothers and reconcile his family. In the story of Joseph, we see an example of how God brought good out of a situation that was clearly meant for evil.

God does not approve of slavery and exploitation. In the story of Joseph we see that God used something that his brothers meant for evil and instead used it for good. This is not an endorsement of evil, but a testimony to God's redeeming work. Human trafficking touches things all around us, including the food we buy, the entertainment we enjoy, and the clothing we wear. There is no such thing as a victimless crime. When we act selfishly in these matters, it affects the vulnerable (Romans 2:8 and Galatians 5:19-21).

God is with us in our pain. The Scripture reminds us multiple times that "the Lord was with him." God never abandoned Joseph. Joseph was betrayed by his family, enslaved, falsely accused, and wrongfully imprisoned, but God's presence was always with him. Though people disappointed Joseph, God never failed him. Even in his darkest, most painful circumstances, God was with Joseph. Wherever you are, God is there with you, too (Hebrews 10:23).

God brings good from evil. God is a God of restoration. What others meant for evil, God was able to use for good. Sometimes others will try to harm us or use us for their own benefit. Sometimes they succeed. But God is never blind to our pain. God sees. God knows. God cares. God is able to bring both healing and restoration. And God can use us to bring His healing and restoration to victims of trafficking and exploitation.

SERMON STARTERS

SERMON STARTER 2

Passage: Luke 4:14-21 (Jesus Announces His Mission)

Main point: Jesus wants freedom for people who are oppressed.

Overview: After Jesus returns from being tested in the desert, he goes to his hometown. In the synagogue where he grew up, he is given the scroll of Isaiah to read. He opens it and chooses the passage he wants to read: Isaiah 61:1-2. Then he sits down and announces that he is the Messiah and this is his mission. He has come to bring good news, proclaim release and healing, and offer freedom. Jesus came to offer salvation that starts in the here and now. As the Body of Christ, we are charged with the same mission: to offer new life and freedom to those who are oppressed—including victims of human trafficking.

Jesus announces his mission as Messiah. Jesus has just returned from 40 days of being tested in the wilderness, and he begins his public ministry. He had been performing miracles and people were paying attention, but in this moment, he announces that he is the Messiah. He is handed the scroll from Isaiah. Of all the passages he could choose, he picks Isaiah 61:1-2 and tells those gathered that the words are fulfilled in him.

Jesus came to bring good news to the poor. Jesus came in the power of the Holy Spirit to communicate, or announce, good news to the poor. There has been much debate about whether “the poor” means those who are poor in spirit or those who are materially poor, but it’s not an either/or. Luke consistently references those who are living in the margins of society. The word in the passage is *ptóchos*, which creates the image of someone who is cowering or bent down—like a beggar. Being “poor” was more than just being without money; it was also being without a voice, influence, and position. To be poor was to be downtrodden. As a result, they were powerless to change their condition and were often victims of exploitation and oppression. But Jesus also came to bring good news to those who are spiritual beggars—those spiritually broken and in need of a restored relationship with God.

Victims of human trafficking fall into both categories. They are exploited and oppressed because they are vulnerable and powerless, so someone else controls their lives. They also need the healing and wholeness that comes through a restored relationships with God.

Jesus was sent to bring release and freedom. God sent Jesus to proclaim—to declare—that captives would be released, the blind would see, the oppressed would go free. He came to do more than talk about how things should be; he came to fulfill the words. He

SERMON STARTERS

came to embody the year of the Lord's favor—an allusion to jubilee, a year of freedom and release from bondage and debt. Jesus came to release us from the things that keep us in bondage. This can be properly translated as forgiveness of sin, and it also includes release from forces that oppress people in physical ways. Jesus came to restore God's image in us—to free us to live with God-given dignity.

Victims of trafficking need forgiveness for sin—just as we all do. But in order to live as God created them to be, they must also be freed from physical bondage and oppression. We need to ask ourselves: Are there things we are doing that are keeping others enslaved? Are there things we could be doing to release others from bondage and offer freedom?

SERMON STARTER 3

Passage: John 4:1-14 (The Woman at the Well)

Main Point: Through Christ, new life is possible for those who are broken.

Overview: While journeying through Samaria, Jesus encountered a woman at a well. Jesus broke the socio-cultural norms of this day by talking with her. Not only was it unheard of for a man to speak to a woman in public, but Jews also hated Samaritans. This woman, who had five husbands and was now living with a man who was not her husband, was also rejected by her own community, which explains why she's drawing water at the hottest time of the day. Yet Jesus not only spoke to her, but discussed a deep theological truth with her. In her encounter with Jesus, the woman found acceptance, forgiveness, grace, and a new beginning. Jesus did not define her by her past but as someone made in God's image and worthy of love. Our past mistakes don't have to determine our futures. God always offers the chance for a new life. And God wants to use His church to offer new life to individuals who have been exploited through human trafficking.

Jesus valued the woman enough to go find her. This was a woman so looked down on by her community that she preferred to face the noonday sun over the judgment of other women at the well. Yet Jesus cared enough to seek her out at that particular well during that particular time. Jesus knew the woman would be coming, and he went there to meet her. Today, individuals who are victims of human trafficking and exploitation also face prejudice and social stigmas. They need to know that God values them and searches for them.

SERMON STARTERS

If Jesus had stayed within the bounds of what society considered acceptable, he would not have spoken to her. Likewise, we also have to be willing to get outside our comfort zones to reach those in need of God's love.

Jesus helped the woman come to a better understanding of who God is. The woman's conversation reveals a few clues about her beliefs about God. She thought of God as confined to a place—this mountain or in Jerusalem. She thought of the Messiah as someone who might perhaps show up one day—not someone that could change her present reality. Perhaps, given her background, she thought of God as being for other people—not for someone like her. Jesus reveals truth to her: that God cares more about the hearts of his worshippers than the place they worship; that salvation is immediately available; that God cares enough about her to sit down on a dusty well in the heat of the day and have a conversation. It changed her life.

Today, trafficking victims may also need to understand truths about God: That God is trustworthy. That God is a rescuer. That God seeks after the lost. That no one is beyond the reach of God's love. That no sin is so big God won't forgive. Like the woman at the well, trafficking victims today need to find spiritual healing made possible only in Jesus Christ.

Jesus offered the woman new life. Jesus' disciples went into the town to buy food and returned to Jesus apparently without mentioning him to the townspeople. Yet the woman abandoned her original purpose of drawing water, left the jar at the well, and ran into town to tell all the people about this man who just might be the Messiah. Before meeting Jesus, her past condemned her. She had few options but to go from one man to another as a way to survive. Jesus did not judge the woman, but neither did he excuse her sin. Jesus lovingly confronted the woman's past and offered her a chance for a new beginning.

In Jesus, this woman found a way to begin again. Today, trafficking victims need that same opportunity for a new life. Survivors of trafficking need healing and help. We have a chance to offer them the grace and hope of Jesus.

There is much we don't know about the woman's story. Where did she sleep that night? What new skills did she need to learn to survive? What physical or emotional scars needed healing? Did she stay in that village or find a new place where her past was not so well known? Likewise, for trafficking victims today escaping their circumstances is only the beginning. They need treatment for physical or mental wounds. They need to learn new job or social skills. They need to learn how—and whom—to trust. But the woman's story gives us hope that it is possible.

Now, as then, God is in the restoration business.

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Optional object lesson: We have value because we were created by God in God's image.

Take a \$20 bill and show it to the congregation. Ask: "Does this bill have value?" Offer the \$20 bill to a few people. "If I gave it to you would you take it?" Ask a few others, "If you found it on the ground would you pick it up?" "Why does it have value?" The answer is because our government has given it value. As a result, this piece of paper has value, and it is worth something.

Then, drop the bill on the floor, step on it, pick it up, and twist it around and crumple it up. Again, offer it to a few people. Hold up the now tattered \$20 bill. Ask the same questions. "Does this bill have value?" "If I gave it to you would you take it?" "If you found it on the ground would you pick it up?" Say to participants: "It looks like it has been through a lot. It has been through some hard times, messy situations. It doesn't look pretty. It has been tattered and torn, bruised, and abused. It shows all this on the outside. Does it still have the same value as it did before?"

Summarize: Aren't people like this bill? No matter what we have been through, and whether or not we show it on the outside, we all have been created in the image of God. As such, every person we meet has dignity and value. As God's people, it's our job to remind others of their God-given dignity and their value in God's eyes.

CALL TO ACTION

We have intentionally planned this Freedom Sunday packet to help engage your church and community. Please prepare what you are going to present and what parts of our suggested Call to Action you would like to include. We also suggest inviting local organizations to participate and set up booths around your venue.

Start locally.

Research your local context and share how the problem of human trafficking affects your community. Reach out to local, like-minded organizations to learn more or to ask them to share with your congregation.

Hold a prayer event.

Only the power of God can end a tragedy this pervasive. Create a time to come together in prayer. Invite friends, family, and coworkers to pray. Prayer guides are available for downloading at the Faith Alliance Against Slavery and Trafficking (FAAST) website: faastinternational.org/resourcestoolkits.

Hold a Bible study.

Take a deeper look at what the Bible says about the problem, God's heart for justice, and the church's role in addressing human trafficking. Bible studies for both adults and older children are available through FAAST's church toolkit section (faastinternational.org).

Host an awareness event.

Consider showing a documentary that addresses the problem of human trafficking. Suggestions include *Not My Life*, *Trade of Innocents*, *Chosen*, *In Plain Sight*, *Very Young Girls*, and *Not for Sale*.

Create a strategy.

Take your church through Engage Together's church toolkit, which guides your congregation in developing a strategic action plan that's unique to your church's strengths and your community's needs. Learn more at engagetgether.com/church.

Teach children online safety.

You can find resources at netsmartz.org.

Educate leaders and volunteers.

Educate people serving in ministries for at-risk children and youth to identify and report suspicious activities. Educate anyone who works with children or youth at your church to identify signs of trauma and what to do when they suspect abuse.

CALL TO ACTION

Fight the demand.

You can learn more about the connection between pornography and sex trafficking at pornharmsresearch.com. Defenders USA (sharedhope.org) and The X3Network (x3pure.com) help fight the demand for commercial sex trafficking by addressing the struggle with pornography or sexual addiction. Learn about the connection between consumerism and labor trafficking from the Global Slavery Index (globalslaveryindex.org) and Slavery Footprint (productsofslavery.org). These sites are tools to understand the problem, responses, and contributing factors related to labor trafficking.

Minister to children and youth in the foster care system.

Children and youth in the foster care system in the U.S. are targeted by traffickers because of their need for love and protection, particularly after they “age out” of the system.

Partner with others.

Partner with reputable direct-care services, such as emergency shelters or residential homes for trafficking, in your area. They often have needs that your congregation or individuals in your church can meet.

MORE RESOURCES

Additional toolkits and other resources geared toward churches who want to engage in anti-human trafficking efforts are available through these websites:

- Stop the Traffik: stophetraffik.org/usa, stophetraffik.org/uk
- Faith Alliance Against Slavery and Trafficking (FAAST): faastinternational.org
- Alliance for Freedom, Restoration, and Justice (AFRJ): engagetogether.com/church
- The Salvation Army: salvationarmy.org/ihq/antitrafficking
- Nazarene Compassionate Ministries: ncm.org/trafficking
- Ending Human Trafficking podcast: endinghumantrafficking.org

**The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim
freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.**

— Luke 4:18-19 (NIV)



**THANK YOU
FOR BEING A
PART OF
FREEDOM SUNDAY**

**GOD'S PEOPLE
WORKING TOGETHER
TO END HUMAN TRAFFICKING**