

TAKE ME HOME: PRACTICAL WAYS YOUNG PEOPLE CAN RESPOND TO HUMAN TRAFFICKING

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ABSTRACT

Injustice, such as human trafficking, leaves an unnerving sense that something is wrong. Due to an inadequate Christian response, we need to re-think, re-imagine, and restore a theology of a good God and a good Gospel in a bad world. We need a response that is personal yet broad; one that explains but also responds. The Bible reveals a good God intervening in a world gone bad. Our response today needs to include awareness of human trafficking and those opposing it, purposeful prayer practices to connect with God, lamentation to express true empathy, advocacy on behalf of those who suffer, and generosity for justice. Human trafficking provides one example of current injustice Gen Z is poised to act upon, as well as a Christian response that brings those trafficked to a place that can be their true home.

INTRODUCTION

For many, the word “home” engenders thoughts of warmth, security, belonging, stability, caring, opportunity,

loyalty, and personhood. The Old Testament word *shalom* (peace) encapsulates this. You may want to add the word “family,” which can trigger a sense of identity, love, sharing, forgiveness, hope, support, acceptance, value, and permanence. The New Testament word *charis* (grace) could be paired with this. No wonder Paul often started his letters with “Grace and peace to you.”¹

How wonderful that some people experience this! How tragic that some do not! It might be just a faint hope or merely a figment of one’s imagination. Perhaps we’re born with it instinctively from our Creator, but the harsh realities of life crush it out for too many, too often. We sense that “home” and “family” are right, which means they are each person’s right. When these don’t exist or have been snatched away, something tells us, “This is wrong” or “This has to change.” As young people become aware of a larger world and the injustices in it, they want to make a difference and desire direction and tools to do so. Gen Z has arrived at this point.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Human trafficking garners top level concern among young people today, making it a trendy cause. “Slavery,” the common term used for thousands of years, has a new face. In places like Africa, Asia, and Latin America, slavery often refers to bonded labor—working for another person for free, entrapped and given meager food and sometimes shelter. In places like North America, Europe, Southeast Asia, and Australia, slavery often refers to sex trafficking—what used to simply be called “prostitution” but now revised to perceive a pimp behind the body sold for sex (Joy 2019, 17).

According to the Global Slavery Index (2018), the conservative estimate of more than 40 million slaves today far surpasses the 11 million during the 400-year total extracted from Africa during the transatlantic slave trade.² While countries like North Korea, India, Central African Republic, South Sudan, China, and Iran rile finger-pointing Westerners, they are not alone. Human trafficking continues in the United States, with estimates ranging from 58,000 (Plante 2017) all the way to 400,000 (Helmore 2018), and in every state (Sadler 2019). Not surprising-

¹ Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:3; 2 Corinthians 1:2; Galatians 1:3; Ephesians 1:2; Philippians 1:2; Colossians 1:2; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:2; 1 Timothy 1:2; 2 Timothy 1:2; Titus 1:4; Philemon 1:3. See also 1 Peter 1:2; 2 Peter 1:2 2 John 1:3; and Revelation 1:4.

² The Global Slavery Index identifies the following countries, in order, at the top 10 in prevalence of modern day slavery: 1. North Korea; 2. Eritrea; 3. Burundi; 4. Central African Republic; 5. Afghanistan; 6. Mauritania; 7. South Sudan; 8. Pakistan; 9. Cambodia; 10. Iran. Highly repressive regimes and conflict are common drivers for modern slavery. See also <http://theconversation.com/fact-check-how-many-people-are-enslaved-in-the-world-to-day-107078> (accessed April 29, 2019). See also Gary Haugen, *The Locust Effect*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014) p. 18.

ly, most involved in such activities seek to avoid discovery or detection, which makes accurate data somewhat of a guess.

The problem is real, prevalent, deceptive, coercive, and demonic. For these reasons, Christians need awareness and avenues to respond.

CHRISTIANS RESPOND

Just as Jesus responded to human needs in his day, his followers have continued to follow in his footsteps, at least some of the time. Christians take the Bible as their authority, with Jesus as the clearest representation of God. And Christians also believe in and expect an active Holy Spirit to be present as God throughout the earth today. With Jesus as the victor over sin and death, his followers seek to follow his lead. Just as Jesus encountered evil and demonic powers, as well as the people and systems that practice it, his followers can expect the same. But that's no reason to quiver or quit. Scripture identifies a great "cloud of witnesses" (Heb 11:1-12:3) in Bible times, and similar Godly heroes do the same today.

Christians and Slavery

God rescued his people from Egyptian slavery in Old Testament times.³ While God instructed his people not to enslave fellow Israelites, he permitted them to purchase slaves among foreigners and to treat them as property that could be passed on to their children (Lev 25:44-46). In the New Testament, Paul made a few passing comments regarding slavery.⁴

Why have Christians, for the most part, now taken a strong stand against slavery? Christians in 18th century England certainly made an impact. William Wilberforce in Parliament, John Wesley in the church, and former slave trader John Newton's song *Amazing Grace* are landmarks. So is American clergyman Jonathan Edwards (Coffey, 2006). Instead of a key text that reads, "Thou shalt not permit slavery," they anchored their Christian understanding in

Biblical principles such as creation, redemption, human equality in God's eyes, loving one's neighbor as yourself, and the deliverance of the captives. When a person of another race or gender is your equal in God's sight, either you treat the person equally or you dismiss God's perspective. To do nothing in the face of such an ungodly practice as slavery either demonstrates an inactive or impotent god, or a lack of one's connection with God.

Few today will rely on the Bible to endorse or perpetuate slavery. In a sense, that ship has sailed.

GEN Z AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Gen Z is an emerging generation with much still to be discovered about them, perhaps apart from the perceived necessity of continual digital contact (Twenge 2017, 49-53). Because the leading edge of this cohort is starting to come of age, the general characteristics of youth could generally be attributed to them. These include finding one's voice, gaining awareness of social issues, embracing idealism, challenging the status quo, seeing symptoms more than systems, and frequently flitting from one important cause soon to be replaced by another.

All ages could benefit from the fresh perspective and enthusiasm Gen Z can naturally infuse. Gen Z could benefit from collaborating with those who take them seriously and who steer them toward appropriate impact, increased understanding, and worthwhile action. Hopefully older people of faith will engage those from Gen Z.

One of the gut-wrenching impacts of human trafficking is how frequently those part of Gen Z or younger are trafficked. While 40-year-olds remain trapped in brick kilns, it's the photos of their children or grandchildren in the same brick kiln that fuel the passion to respond. A 12-year-old girl, lured by someone she trusted, then snatched to be transported across the country, and sold to multiple buyers each night, shocks teens who view the child as helpless, choice-less, and in need of intervention.

3 The earliest Bible record of slavery comes in the familial fight of Joseph's brothers who sold him into slavery (Genesis 37:18-36). That's certainly not what they told their father. And later Joseph identified that his brothers did this for evil, but God overruled it for good. (Genesis 45:5 and Genesis 50:19-21. After Pharaoh capitulated to Yahweh and let the Israelite slaves leave, he changed his mind and said, "What have we done, letting all those Israelite slaves get away?" (Exodus 14:5 NLT). Part of the laws given to this mass of former slaves anticipated that some would become poor and find themselves in servitude. Here are the instructions God gave them as recorded in Leviticus 25:44-46: "If any of your Israelite relatives go bankrupt and sell themselves to you, do not treat them as slaves. Treat them instead as hired servants or as resident foreigners who live with you, and they will serve you only until the Year of Jubilee." When God's people went into captivity, the punishment for their disobedience resulted in captivity by enemy nations and rulers. In such settings, their freedoms were at the mercy of their conquerors. Whether you call that slavery or servitude or exile or something else, you served at the mercy of your conquerors. This describes the environment when Jesus came to earth, which adds texture to his early proclamation that he came to set the oppressed free.

4 See Ephesians 6:5-11 and Colossians 3:22-4:1 for parallel passages about submission in families and in master-slave relationships. Neither pro-slavery nor anti-slavery proponents know what to do with Philemon 1:10-12, 15-21 where Paul sent the runaway slave Onesimus back to his master (pro-slavery), but told Philemon to treat the slave like a brother (and more), just like he would treat Paul who saved Philemon's soul (verse19).

When exposed to such harsh realities, a failure to respond results in callous inaction with a concomitant deadened conscience. Instead, we need a worthy response.

What can a person do? What should a person do? Most want a quick fix, and they want it now. We suggest starting with a long view, and then help people choose their short-view response in light of a long-view perspective.

The Long View

Human trafficking illustrates injustice—the opposite of justice. This necessitates defining some terms. Justice has to do with fairness. In practical human terms this involves the correct use of power—power to do what is fair—what is right. When power is used only in the best interests of those in power, it probably won't be fair. And that's not right. That's when justice turns to injustice.

Injustice demonstrates the misuse of power. It typically exhibits itself when the strong take from the weak what belongs to the weak. This could be dignity, freedom, the fruit of their labor, the fruit of their love, and even their very lives. Injustice is the abuse of power. Its two main practices are deception and coercive force (Haugen 2009, 85-86). It preys upon the weak and vulnerable because such people cannot stand up for themselves. Institutions tend to maintain the status quo, and that keeps the powerful in power.

Gary Haugen of International Justice Mission challenges individuals, governments, churches, and other institutions to address one more step beyond poverty. That step is violence; specifically, violence against the poor (Haugen 2014, 96-110). Those who are middle class or rich receive the benefits of police protection, court processes, health services, and economic systems. But the poor are more likely to run *from* the police than run *to* them, have little or no voice in court, lack access to health care, and remain trapped in poverty due to the economic systems in place. In fact, 4 billion people live outside the protection of the rule of law (Shamapande 2008).

In the country of India, you are more likely to be struck by lightning than to go to prison for the crime of having slaves. In Bolivia, you are more likely to die because of accidentally slipping in the bathtub or shower than to go to jail for sexually assaulting someone (Shamapande 2008).⁵ Why? If a middle-class or upper-class person suffers, the law intervenes. But when the poor suffer, it doesn't hit

the same radar. As a result, criminals prey on the poor because the poor are vulnerable, and because the criminals won't suffer retribution.

Human trafficking in most countries remains illegal. But when nothing happens, perpetrators continue in freedom. The law reads "justice," but the practice demonstrates "injustice." Human trafficking, as one branch of injustice, can be defined as exploiting the vulnerable for commercial gain (Sadler 2019, 3). In 2018, human trafficking amounted to a \$150 billion industry worldwide (Sadler 2019, 33). The supply continues in response to the lack of law enforcement.. This large practice could seem insurmountable from a long view, but it need not be that way. With the increased awareness and outcry from so many, change is happening and you can be part of it. That's the long view, with a personal invitation.

A Deeper Theology

Injustice proliferates and perpetuates, shocks and hurts, and it remains relentless in our world. Whether or not people believe in God, injustice is inescapable. A Godless response struggles to differentiate why some seek justice while others practice injustice. For those who claim the existence of God, the presence of injustice begs questions such as, "Where is your God?" and "Can your God do anything about this?"

As people who claim the presence, power, and primacy of a good God, we need a deeper theology—something more than true but trite phrases or abbreviated quotations such as "God is love" or "Jesus died on the cross" or "All things work together for good" (Interview with Dan Mackett, March 7, 2019).

Based on Scripture and the accounts recorded there, God-followers can claim these characteristics of God as it relates to justice/injustice: 1) God loves justice, which conversely means God hates injustice; 2) God has compassion for those who suffer injustice, no matter who they are or where they are; 3) God judges and condemns those who act unjustly and those who perpetrate injustice; 4) God seeks to rescue the victims of injustice, and he has chosen us to be play a part in these rescues. Because we serve a God of justice, we care the way God cares and we act on behalf of justice anywhere and everywhere (Haugen 2009, 83).

⁵ Less than 3 convictions in tens of thousands of sexual assaults each year in Bolivia.

The deepest theology regarding injustice is the Incarnation. Jesus, the Word of God, became flesh and moved into our neighborhood, and we have seen his glory (John 1:14). This involves God's presence, which means God is here and he is God. Because of Christ's resurrection, victory is assured. The gift of the Holy Spirit and Christ's promised return both fuel our hope and actions. We respond with actions that include truth, justice, courage, stewardship, and generosity.

Acknowledging evil, we also proclaim God's presence. Just as Jesus set the captives free, he empowered his followers to do the same. Christ's disciples healed the sick, raised the dead, cleansed the lepers, and cast out demons (Matt 10:8; Luke 10:17). Today it could easily include the same as well as rescuing those trafficked, providing foster care or adoption for orphans, giving more to one's heavenly treasure than one's 401(k), and using your platform to speak out on behalf of those dehumanized, and engaging in health care for those marginalized..

Following Christ's practice of getting close to those who hurt, we will feel their hurt the way Jesus did. To get close to suffering requires a deepening of faith. This ushers us into a unique fellowship with Jesus and with others (Phil 3:7-11). The Gospel continues to express God's presence here and now, and the glory that comes only from God. That reality fuels the faith needed to live in a world in which evil and injustice seem to proliferate (Phil 4:4-7, 11-13, 19-20).

Lament—Crying Out

The long view responds to the shocking reality of human trafficking by identifying it as horrible and evil. Such reactions are justified and should be acknowledged. This includes naming evil in our world and calling out to God in our distress. In a feel-good society with quick fixes for everything, we usually want to switch channels or take a pill or run if necessary to abort the pain.

But this is the time to re-discover a book in the Bible we rarely reference—Lamentations. Instead of a happy face emoji or “God is good. . . all the time. . .” we cry out and lament. While there are 150 Psalms in the Bible, we tend to use only the praise types; not the angry or hurt or crying-out types of Psalms. But you can find those in your Bible, too. Some are more individual, and others are geared for the community.⁶ After crying out to God with as much

detail as might be necessary, these Psalms then transition to statements of faith that God hears and will do what only God knows is best. Frequently this results in praise to God, but only after the lament has been expressed. The reaction of lament remains important, but should not be the last word or experience.

You're Not Alone

Because someone trafficked often trusts their trafficker more than others, they need rehabilitation in addition to needing rescue. Due to the intensity, the duration, and the powers at play, this involves much more than a Sabbath afternoon youth outreach activity. With growing awareness in the past couple of decades, with governments, law enforcement, churches, NGOs, corporations, and individuals rising-up in response to this alarming injustice, Gen Z can add their response and involvement to a growing response regarding the current crisis. A Sabbath afternoon outreach activity might be the spark to engage greater involvement in specific and local ways. Becoming aware of those most at risk takes the church to the places injustice abounds. By reaching out consistently to “the least of these,” followers of Christ will find themselves in the very kinds of places Jesus frequented, in conflict with established powers, and being the hands, feet, voice, and arms of Jesus.

This takes us to the short view. It includes responding quickly and for a sustained amount of time, local or global action, and different levels of participation.

THE SHORT VIEW

Those who want to get practical often seek a quick response. They may need guidance and information to choose wisely so they can be helpful rather than harmful. Should something happen today, or in the coming days? Some might anticipate a greater impact acting locally, while others could see more significance acting globally. Decisions will need to be made about one's level of investment.

Response Time

Outrage, pity, involvement, and empowerment can contribute to one's response. You certainly don't want to be callous to injustices such as human trafficking. Your awareness may come from the news, a personal testimony, or exposure to a person or a program.

⁶ Individual laments can be found in Psalm 3, 4, 5, 9, 10, 13, 14, 22, 25, 39, 41, 42, 43, 54, 55, 56, 57, 69, 70, 71, 77, 86, 88, 140, 141, and 142. Communal laments can be found in Psalm 12, 44, 58, 60, 74, 79, 80, 83, and 85.

We suggest your first response be one of prayer. That can take place at any time; at any place. Make it as specific or as general as your awareness and response. Tap into the supernatural from the start. Be sensitive to impressions from God regarding what to do as well as what not to do.

You can Google “human trafficking in (*name of your city*)” and discover what others already know or have started. This can increase your awareness and link you to individuals or agencies already involved and ahead of you. Check them out to see if this is where you can direct your interest and response. One well established international anti-human trafficking organization is International Justice Mission (IJM.org). Check out their website or view some of their videos on YouTube.

As you become aware of human trafficking, you might witness something suspicious, even in your neighborhood or during broad daylight. Don’t try to be a hero, which may hurt you and the person being trafficked. If you see something that may look like human trafficking you can call the National Human Trafficking Hotline at 1-888-373-7888.⁷ This hotline speaks many languages and also has a directory of local organizations across the country.

Host a 24-hour “Freedom Fast” and invite others to join you for “a day without food for a future without slavery.” Take the money you would have spent on food and donate it to an organization that’s stopping human trafficking. Google “Freedom Fast IJM images” to see what many local groups have done and are doing. Use the 24 hours together to find out more about what you can do for anti-human trafficking efforts in addition to fund raising.

You can advocate to elected representatives by tweeting your representative(s) at state or national levels. For example, go to twitter.com/GovSM to send a tweet to your representative through the Government’s Social Media connection via Twitter. Making the connection is one thing. Having something to say should be determined first. There might be a petition you support and that can happen in person or online. As Gen Z reaches the voting threshold, voting and voice go together.

Local or Global?

Some want to make a difference in their neighborhood, while others desire a global impact. You might be one who wants both.

Locally you can start or join a prayer group that regular meets for specific prayer concerns regarding human trafficking. Let your agenda be your prayer guide. Seek for your prayer time to shape your agenda. For a global perspective with specific targets for prayer, become a prayer partner with IJM where you can get prayer prompts and updates periodically.⁸

As you find out more regarding local agencies and individuals already involved, volunteer to join their efforts. Ask about needs, share your gifts and passions, listen and observe, take action and support. Get input from local experts. Invite them to your youth group or church to increase awareness and suggest opportunities for involvement. Because human traffickers usually go after those who are vulnerable, to the extent your church serves the vulnerable, you are already actively preventing human trafficking. You would then also be around the very people traffickers would seek to lure or coerce. Increase communication and awareness of human trafficking tactics in your church community.

Tap into readily available resources to enlarge your personal understanding and your church. Go online to a digital box of videos, “Justice and Jesus” discussion guides, and more.⁹ Use these to address the large issue of justice/injustice and the more specific branch of human trafficking. If you’re doing ministry with Gen Z young people, get helpful input from a youth leader newsletter every other month with tips and insights for aiding the spiritual formation of young people toward justice from God’s perspective.¹⁰

To move beyond information to advocacy, start with the IJM advocacy newsletter that will provide you with national initiatives and events.¹¹ For local advocacy, check with the groups active in your town to discover the issues and timing of legislation, forums, events, and actions. It could be showing up at city hall or attending a court hearing or signing a local petition or joining a group to inquire about supply chains for local merchants.

7 Accessible online at humantraffickinghotline.org/. The phone number is spoken verbally (so it’s easy to remember) 888 3737 888.

8 Sign up to become a prayer partner with IJM at <https://www.ijm.org/get-involved/pray>.

9 IJM has these resources as a free download at ijm.app.box.com/v/justiceandjesus.

10 Click on “Youth Leader Newsletter” at ijm.org/get-updates to receive an electronic newsletter bi-monthly.

11 Click on “Advocacy Newsletter” at ijm.org/get-updates for a quarterly update on advocacy initiatives from IJM’s Advocacy and Mobilization Team.

Become a monthly donor as a “Freedom Partner” that will bring human traffickers to justice, and rehabilitate those who have been afflicted. At \$24/month, many individuals can do this starting immediately.¹² Gen Z young people can band together as a church or youth group and jointly fund for a local group to make a global impact.¹³

Without question, both local and global responses are appropriate and available for those ready to respond to the human trafficking actions that fly in the face of justice.

Level of Investment

Pray right now, “Lord, rescue and restore those enslaved today.” Add another step for justice, “Lord, stop perpetrators by empowering justice.” That takes about 10 seconds. For those willing to invest deeper, pray it again tomorrow. Add even a third day. Those who continue develop actual prayer rhythms—times, places, and topics that become one’s two-way conversation with God. Consider this discipline if you choose to invest more deeply.

The same applies to awareness, advocacy, actions, donations—in addition to your prayers. What will be your level of investment—low or high or somewhere between those extremes?

Reaching out or assisting a local agency that provides shelter or a halfway house for runaway teens might be a one-time event or a regular practice. The same could be true of assisting with foster care—a group that certainly is vulnerable; saved by some who provide foster care and yet taken advantage of by others who claim to provide care. Will you help a foster care family or take the plunge into becoming a foster care family?

You might choose to read a book, but you could take it a step farther by starting a book club. The next level would be to build on what you’ve discovered to create an action plan for your book club. For a wake-up call regarding human trafficking in America, choose Kevin Bales and Ron Soodalter’s *The Slave Next Door: Human Trafficking and Slavery in America Today*. For another person’s journey in combatting human trafficking from a church perspective, pick Raleigh Sadler’s *Vulnerable: Rethinking Human Trafficking*. For a quick overview of justice from an anti-human trafficking perspective, select Gary Haugen’s *Good News*

About Injustice. For a deeper read, try Siddharth Kara’s *Modern Slavery: A Global Perspective* or Gary Haugen’s *The Locust Effect*.

For advocacy, signing a petition can be quick. Tweeting a government representative can happen in less than a minute. Setting up an appointment to meet with your government representative or someone from their staff takes time to go and to be prepared in anticipation of your appointment. It may also include an investment of money for travel. This can be done individually or as a group.

Your investment might have to do with rescuing those enslaved. It might have more to do with the prosecution of traffickers or assisting in the legal process. Perhaps it takes the long process of changing legislation so pimps are prosecuted rather than criminalizing their girls as prostitutes while their pimps walk free. You might be more into the aftercare with the long road of recovery for those who are rescued. Maybe you’ll champion the involvement of others and host a “Rescue Party” or a “Freedom Sunday/Sabbath”¹⁴ to invite others to join the cause. This increases awareness, action, advocacy, and financial support to extend the flow of justice. For Gen Z people who want to make a difference now, the opportunities are right in front of them.

For a well-thought-through approach to what your church or youth group might do, consider the uniqueness of your community and your specific church, and then utilize the community justice assessment tool for churches. This digital document¹⁵ takes you through a process to respond with justice as the cause in your neighborhood, with your people.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are grouped into two categories: 1) Each person personally; and 2) Key leaders in specific positions.

Personal Recommendations

Become more aware of human trafficking by reading one book on the topic this year and by Googling “human trafficking in (*my city*)” to find out what’s happening and who’s responding, as well as how you might respond.

12 Sign up to be an IJM “Freedom Partner” for \$24/month at ijm.org/give/freedom-partner.

13 For example, the Youth Sabbath School at the Carmichael SDA Church in California is an IJM Freedom Partner by regularly giving donations that continue to surpass the monthly goal.

14 Both available through IJM at ijm.org/rescue-parties and ijm.org/freedom-sunday.

15 Available to download at IJM’s website at ijm.org/sites/default/files/download/resources/Community-Justice-Assessment-Tool.pdf.

Choose your level of involvement in terms of prayer, advocacy, action, and generosity.

Capitalize on Gen Z idealism for justice by engaging with them on this topic, and direct their idealism to your church.

Recommendations for Key Leaders

1. NAD leaders to infuse the network of union, conference, and local church with the information and resources already identified as a start to addressing human trafficking locally and globally.
2. NAD leaders to add “Freedom Sabbath” (addressing human trafficking) to the “End It Now” (addressing domestic violence) annual campaign.
3. Union leaders to highlight at union events and through their respective union papers Gen Z church members who are responding to human trafficking as well as the agencies they endorse.
4. Conference leaders to identify Gen Z young people with an interest and action in responding to human trafficking, and notify other churches within the conference to join forces or share information, strategies, and actions.

5. Pastors and local church leaders to give renewed focus to serve the vulnerable—those least likely to experience justice (most likely to suffer injustice).
6. Gen Z and youth leaders to sign up for IJM’s bi-monthly Youth Leader Newsletter.
7. Clarify and communicate ADRA’s opportunities for engagement to respond to human trafficking.

CONCLUSION

Human Trafficking illustrates injustice and calls for a response of justice. Gen Z young people are prime agents for action, advocacy, and generosity. A deeper understanding of God simply spurs the necessity and calling to respond. Gen Z young people can spark others to join the movement so humans who are trafficked truly can go home.

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