

## An anti-human trafficking bible study



# Let my people go

## Exodus 9:1

People are too precious to be bought and sold, and yet they are. Across the world human trafficking is affecting the lives of hundreds of men, women and children on an unimaginable scale. The figures are shocking, but sometimes it is easy to forget that behind these numbers are real men, women and children made in the image of God who are being denied the right to live life in fullness. They also mask the root causes of human trafficking, poverty, gender inequality and poor education that make people vulnerable to traffickers. Many of our partner churches are addressing human trafficking in their countries focusing on rescue, support and rehabilitation, and prevention.

Each of the stories you will read is true. Each is the real life experience of a man, woman or child who has been a victim of human trafficking and who has been helped by one of our partner churches. These stories will help you understand the complex nature of human trafficking and encourage you to think about how we can work together with our partners to put an end to this modern day slavery. They have been taken from our 2015 Anti-Human Trafficking Report, which is an exploration of human trafficking from the perspective of our partners. The report is a culmination of experiences from practitioners in our partner churches in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and Europe who are taking practical steps towards putting an end to human trafficking through prevention, education and rescue. It is available on our website or from the Church Offices.



## What does the bible say about human trafficking?

By listening to the experiences of our partners around the world, sharing them, and learning from one another, we will be able to respond positively together as Christians to challenge these harsh realities. Each week we share a story from a partner church and ask you to read the bible passage with this in mind. There is a reflection and discussion points prepared by people from all across the church. You might be surprised how these texts open up to you in light of the experiences of others.

## Definition of human trafficking

‘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.’

## More information:

### Read

- The joint Church and Society, Guild and World Mission 2007 report, ‘To be silent is to be unfaithful.’
- The World Mission 2015 report, ‘Anti-human Trafficking: Our Partners’ Experiences’
- Visit the Scottish Churches Anti-Human Trafficking Group’s webpage:  
[www.acts-scotland.org/activities/anti-human-trafficking](http://www.acts-scotland.org/activities/anti-human-trafficking)

### Learn

- Invite someone from the World Mission Council to speak to your church or group about human trafficking

## Contact us for more information or resources:

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## 1. Made in the image of God

Genesis 1:27

Gemma grew up in rural Jamaica where there was little opportunity for education or work. She did not attend school regularly, money was tight and life in general was hard. The vicious cycle of abuse did not pass her. Abused regularly by her stepfather, and having previously been abused by another male relative, Gemma had no choice, but to move out at the age of 16. She travelled to Negril to live with friends, hoping to get a job; however, everything went downhill and she ended up working as a prostitute and eventually in a go-go club. She came to Theodora, a project of the United Church of Jamaica and the Cayman Islands, through a friend who noticed she was bruised, cut and generally looked bad. Investigations showed that she had a boyfriend who was not only abusing her, but also pimping her. Gemma proved to be a bright girl and she began to turn herself around with a helping hand. It is still a work in progress; she spent approximately 18 months at Theodora and is now back living in the community. She has a child, but with a new job she can just about manage. Importantly, she now feels much better about herself and has hope for the future.



## Reflection

To be made in the image of something that is so perfect and pure is a wonderful thing. For humans to be made in the 'image of God' is what should set us on a course that demands an attitude of mutual respect. It should demand us to see one another as wonderful, equal and each life a miracle.

Of course, we know all too well that this is not the reality that is lived out and experienced by so many in our world.

Gemma's life is one that is viewed as less valuable and less precious by many around her. She is sold as a product, time and time again, decreasing her self-worth. This attitude has tragically resulted in even Gemma valuing her life as 'less'.

Gemma is stuck in a vicious cycle of abuse and minimal self-worth. This continuous narrative was created for Gemma when she was very young. Many factors including poverty and lack of education contributed to her desperate situation but at the heart lies the fact that she was valued less by the people closest to her.

The cycle is eventually broken. At the end of the story we hear that through the life changing and lifesaving work of the Theodora Shelter, Gemma is able to create a new life for herself and her child.

In the Christian tradition we are constantly reminded that Hope, Faith and Love are the most important aspects of human life. With a simple rearrangement of the three factors a new relationship emerges:

### **Love + Faith = Hope**

This is the transformation that we witness in Gemma's life.

Gemma's **faith** grew thanks to the Christian teachings at the United Church of Jamaica and the Cayman Isles and Gemma realises the empowering knowledge that all men and women are created equally in the eyes of God.

**Love** is given out by those at the Theodora Shelter and for the first time Gemma experiences deep and true acts of love.

With love and faith, hope emerges in Gemma's life. It's a transformation that each of us can make in our lives, but also in the lives of others.

## Discussion points

- Discuss how the following made Gemma vulnerable to abuse: poverty, education, her gender.
- The bible says we are all made in God's image, but where do you see examples of different standards and unequal expectations for men and women in the world?
- Challenge yourself: do you see everyone as equal to you? Can you see past the annoyance, the upset, the 'difficult characters' in life. What can you do to challenge your attitude?
- The old saying 'where there is tea there is hope'. What can you do to offer someone in your life that hope? What love can you give them, what faith can you provide so that hope is the outcome? Will you offer them a chat, a cup of tea, a long awaited phone call?

## Prayer

For women, Inequalities remain so commonplace in our world,

As long as women are valued less, fed less, fed last, unschooled and subjected to violence, the potential for our human family to create a peaceful, prosperous world will not be fulfilled,

This is not the dream you had for your people Lord,

This is not the way you would see us live,

This is not the way of justice for all in 'your image',

Lead us, through your wisdom, through your guidance, to correct where we have gone so wrong.

Amen

*Hannah Mary Goodlad is the Moderator of the National Youth Assembly 2015-2016.*

*Case study from the United Church of Jamaica and the Cayman Islands.*





## 2. Domestic Servitude

Genesis 16: 1-16

In Nepal early marriage is very common. Sometimes the young husbands will continue to go to school, but that is not the case for girl brides like Indra. She was jealous as some of the women and girls she knew left Nepal for a better life in a foreign country. While Indra did her housework she would imagine earning good money, wearing nice clothes and owning jewellery, but most of all earning money to send home to her family. An agent took her to Mumbai to work, where she suffered six months of physical and mental torture before being sent to Saudi. She was kept there for 3 years working long hours in the house and also tending to sheep, unable to speak to her family or to leave because her passport had been taken from her.

When she was finally able to go home her family welcomed her until the money began to run out. She felt as if she had no choice, but to return to Saudi. Her mind was changed after attending a human trafficking awareness session run by the United Mission to Nepal and she now warns others about traffickers and runs a small piggery.



## Reflection

'Human trafficking' - the words offer an easily understood explanation of what we are talking about. Or do they? Scratch the surface and complex, sad and tragic elements emerge; threads that weave together fray and burn and tear at our imagination.

Reading the story of Indra, we can immediately identify with her as a victim of something terrible. Indra has no rights. Gender roles, familial relationships, societal expectations of marriage and domesticity - all of these leave her incapable of asserting her individuality or to have ambitions and aspirations of her own.

There are other victims. For her parents, poverty and tradition are fearsome forces that drive their perspective and the money she sends to them becomes central to their response to their daughter's plight. Clearly, the real villains are the criminals who seduce her with talk of riches and freedom. Their greed and inhumanity are unacceptable. Reducing people to commodities to be traded is despicable.

However, no trade succeeds without a marketplace. For trafficking to thrive, there must be people who employ cheap, even slave labour. There must be flawed (mostly) men who are happy to fulfil their needs by exploiting the (mostly female) helpless. There must be an economic environment that provides the pool of poor and disenfranchised people who are victims of human trafficking.

To reflect constructively on the issue, we should ask ourselves, individually and collectively, these questions:

- Is there anything we do that helps form a situation in which trafficking finds both demand and supply?
- Is there anything that we can affect in our politics and in our understanding of the reality and the trauma of trafficking that would reduce the risk and the effect?

In the passage from Genesis, we see a tradition and a set of values in which Hagar is central to the solution of a problem for Abraham and Sarah, but where her experience and her need for respect are considered to be secondary. The elements of power, tradition, perception, assumption, class, entitlement that are at play take no account of the values that we as Christians would espouse: love, respect, fairness, humanity.

It is right to condemn human trafficking. It is crucial that we recognise the horror it represents - try re-reading this reflection replacing 'human trafficking' with 'slavery'! It is right also to recognise the need to respond to it in prayer and action; in compassion and love.

## Discussion points

- Retell Indra or Hagar's story from the perspective of the different characters: Indra, her parents, the traffickers; Abraham, Sarah, Hagar.
- These two stories describe the experiences of people we cannot know personally. What if we knew the people? What if they were our daughters, friends, workmates, school friends, neighbours? How would we react?
- As a society or as individuals, what position should we take? Can we take action? Can we encourage others to do so? How do we, as a nation, respond to countries such as Saudi Arabia where we read that Indra has been subjected to a terrible ordeal?
- What should our churches' response be? Locally, nationally, internationally.
- What can we do in our own places to help prevent human trafficking or to support its victims?

## Prayer

Loving God,

We bring before you the helpless poor who fall victim to the evils of human trafficking. Be with them; cradle them in your care in their times of need; share your strength with them in their powerlessness.

Teaching God,

Help us to understand better the causes and the effects of this dreadful trade in humanity. Guide us to be your eyes, ears, hands and lips as we seek to address the issues and the realities of this matter.

Forgiving God,

We pray that those who engage in the trafficking of human beings may come to understand the anguish they cause and seek forgiveness for their actions.

Enabling God,

Give us strength, wisdom and understanding to work for a world where respect for your creation means that this trade in people is at an end.

Amen

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## 3. Deception and Deceit

### Genesis 34: 1-31

Charu's friend promised her a job in Mumbai which would pay a salary 10 times higher than what she was earning at the time. Struggling to provide for her two children and with an alcoholic husband, Charu was desperate to earn more money. Her friend took her to Mumbai, but she remembers nothing of the journey having fallen into a deep sleep after being given a cold drink.

When they arrived in the city, she was left at a bus stop and waited for hours for her friend to return. Finally a different woman appeared to offer to take Charu to her home to help her. This home turned out to be a brothel where she was forced to work as a commercial sex worker.

Eventually she was rescued and brought back to her village, but she faced a lot of abuse and persecution. Her parents want her to remarry as her husband has left her, but Charu wants to continue to work to provide for her children and become self-sufficient.



## Reflection

Both Dinah and Charu are victims of rape. The terms used in the Hebrew Scriptures to describe Shechem's rape of Dinah translate as 'saw her', 'took her', 'laid her' and 'shamed her'. These stages of rape could also be applied to Charu's story. Her 'friend' is clearly part of a trafficking ring who 'saw her' circumstances and knew that she needed more money to provide for her children. Although initially Charu accompanies the 'friend' willingly, she has been deceived about the job and the trafficker 'took her' by drugging her. A woman working for the traffickers befriends her and in the brothel Charu is 'laid' and 'shamed'. She is raped of her trust, her consciousness, her freedom, her dignity, her self-esteem, her contact with her children and family as well as the ownership of her own body. We feel relief at Charu's rescue but she returns to find she has been raped also of her respectability within her own community.

In Charu's story the multiple traffickers and abusers are not brought to justice. In Dinah's story not only is Shechem brought to justice but so is his whole town. This is not 'eye for eye, tooth for tooth' retributive justice as laid down in the Torah (Exodus 21:24). Shechem rapes Dinah and her brothers rape his town.

Shechem's lust grows into love for Dinah. He asks his father to ask Dinah's father, Jacob for a marriage contract. Jacob knows of the rape and does nothing but when his sons return they seek to avenge her honour. Employing deceit, they lure not only Shechem but all the men of his town into being circumcised on the understanding that this will enable the Shechemites and the Israelites to intermarry freely- which was forbidden in the Torah (Deuteronomy 7:3-4). Like Charu, the Shechemite men are 'taken': they are still sore and may have used drugs for relief. They are slaughtered, the town is plundered of all wealth and animals while the women and young children are taken as slaves presumably for purposes of sexual exploitation and domestic servitude. Dinah is taken home.

The reader is left to decide if she was being held against her will or if she had developed fondness for Shechem and chosen to remain. Her feelings are irrelevant to the writer as being an unmarried woman Dinah is still the property of her father. Today, trafficked victims become the property of the traffickers and those who employ them, while in some parts of the world women are still the property of men.

## Discussion points

- Who are the victims, the deceivers and the abusers in the story of Dinah's rape?
- To what extent are the brothers avenging Dinah's honour and to what extent their father's?
- How do you react to the response of Charu's family and community when she returns from her ordeal?
- What kind of justice would you consider appropriate for each of those involved in the deceiving and raping of Charu?
- How can good mothers like Charu, striving to survive against abusive alcoholic husbands and to provide a better future for their children, be made aware of the dangers of trafficking?
- How can the church provide practical and spiritual support to women such as Charu?

## Prayer

Transforming God,  
You have called us to follow in the footsteps of  
Christ in whom there was no deceit.

Help us to bring to light and to justice those who  
deceive and dehumanise their sisters and brothers  
in the name of greed and worldly power.

Be with the powerless ones who are at this moment  
suffering cruelty and degradation.

Bless the agencies which find and support  
victims of trafficking and rape.

Restore with Your healing love those who have to  
learn to trust again in the good of human nature.

Amen

*Rev Carol Ford is the minister of St Margaret's Lochend  
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*Case study from the Church of North India.*





## 4. People are too precious to be bought and sold

Genesis 37:12-36

From the age of 3, Rupa was brought up by her uncle. When she was 13, he forced her to marry a much older man for 5000 Rupees. Unhappy in her marriage, Rupa ran home, but her uncle physically abused her. After a short while he made contact with a woman in Delhi to sell her again and get rid of her. Telling Rupa they were going on a trip to North India, he took her to Delhi and abandoned her at a railway station. She waited there until a local brothel owner came to collect her. She spent 6 months in the brothel until she was sold to a man from Uttar Pradesh, who promised to marry her and give her a good life. This was not the case and she was regularly raped by him and his friends. After 8 years she managed to escape and return to her village, but people shunned her, refusing her food, water and shelter. Finally an old couple took pity on her and with the help of the Church of North India she has filed a complaint with the local police against her uncle.



## Reflection

It can be difficult to read the story of Joseph without reflecting back to a 'happy ending' (and hearing words from the musical!). But here we find a young man sold to traders on an international trade and migration route, taken from home in Canaan to the foreign land of Egypt, by Ishmaelite traders who saw him as one more cargo item to profit from. Here we find one of the youngest in a family sold by those who were meant to have a duty of care to him.

Joseph was quite an annoying younger brother – his father's favourite, who reported his brothers' behaviour, and bred jealousy with his dreams. The anger he brought out in his brothers is their initial motivation to get rid of him, and they have the power to see that through – the power of age, strength and numbers. Reuben is able to take some heat out of things with reason, and an appeal to family ties. However, when the opportunity arises to profit from selling Joseph - offering the moral highground of no bloodshed, but with financial gain and getting rid of him – it proves irresistible.

Family obligations keep Joseph alive – but they don't keep him free to live life in all its fullness. Similarly, family obligations saw Rupa brought up by her uncle – but they don't stretch to life with dignity and freedom. The family ties instead become treated as bonds of ownership, an ownership the uncle thinks he can pass to other people, profiting while also ending any responsibility for Rupa. Marriage was offered to Rupa as a way of building a new life with someone else caring for her, but that promise was falsely made, and again possession and power were assumed.

For Joseph, and much more for Rupa, there is a terrible inequality of power. Joseph is vulnerable because he is away from the protection of his father, and is faced with greater numbers and strength. Eventually even Reuben joins in the deception of Jacob, rather than standing up to the others. Rupa is vulnerable because the culture in which she lives has granted greater power to men. In her story we find the community in which she lives colluding in that gender inequality, and judging Rupa for what has been done to her. This is all in the context of a society that permits the assumption that a woman can be owned, by family, in marriage or for sex work.

## Discussion points

- Joseph was an annoying troublemaker in his family. Rupa disobeyed her uncle, and eventually became a sex-worker and victim of multiple rape. Most victims of human trafficking will have very messy and complicated lives. Are there any aspects of people's lives, behaviour or personalities that make it harder to value them as precious and made in God's image?
- What cultural or legal judgements about certain behaviours (e.g. sex work) contribute to devaluing people, and how might those be changed to improve society's responses to trafficked people?
- In faith traditions and cultures where there has been a lot of emphasis on obeying or honouring parents and elders, how do we avoid family ties becoming bonds of power, obligation or inequality?

## Prayer

God,  
may all people know that they are loved;  
and may your love for all people open our hearts,  
to overcome our distaste and distrust,  
to break our bonds of power and politeness,  
and so transform our cultures and communities.

Amen

*Rev Jenny Adams is the minister of Duffus, Spynie and Hopeman Parish Church.*

*Case study from the Church of North India.*





## 5. Let the little children come to me

Luke 18: 15-17/Matthew 18: 5-6

Children in Ghana are frequently trafficked into the fishing industry where they are exploited by fishermen who are desperate to feed their families and eke out a living on the banks of Lake Volta. There are approximately 49,000 children in child labour on the lake and of this number 21,000 are considered to be in hazardous child labour. Working long hours and living in meagre conditions the children not only provide cheap labour, but have small nimble fingers, which enable them to release fish from smaller nets. They are also made to dive into the lake to disentangle nets from the numerous tree stumps under the water. This is a dangerous job that has terrible consequences for the children, ranging from water borne diseases to death by drowning.



## Reflection

In many parts of Africa people say children are special as they cure our loneliness; they are a gift from God to be celebrated and protected. More still needs to be done to protect them. Interestingly in Britain the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals was founded in 1824, fully 60 years before the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, though Jesus, 2000 years ago, stressed the innocence of children, as their knowledge of the world is limited. As the old Sunday School hymn says:

'Jesus loves the little children,  
All the children of the world'

It may seem twee but it is nonetheless true. Christ encourages us to love all children regardless of their sex, race, faith or ability. Every child is everyone's child, so to abuse children in this way is evil, as evil as in the days of powder monkeys, chimney boys or child miners or millworkers.

Loving and caring for children is a form of protection, keeping them safe from the sins and vices of this world and teaching them how children should be raised for when they in turn become parents.

All children everywhere need a life of happiness, joy and their knowing God's special love for them. A life where they have a future and are treated as children, as Jesus showed us.

Any society which looks to the future and is not narrowly and selfishly obsessed with the present will give the highest priority to the welfare of its children. We cannot and should not be silent in the face of such horrible and avoidable suffering and distress endured by children in Ghana.

What is the real value of fish when you see the real cost of catching them; the greatest of our treasures being desecrated in this way, probably sleeping rough, hungry, thirsty, perhaps cut or injured from the work, uneducated, and physically abused as well? Fish, at the expense of the happiness and welfare of children. What a reflection on humanity and our Christian faith that we permit this evil to continue.

Any child should be received with gratitude and treasured with love – a joy to the parents and a welcome gift to the community. Children thrive best inside a loving family who will promote their rights and welfare. So while the good of the family should be promoted to enable this, individual children need our protection from exploitation and abuse.

## Discussion points

- What are some of the reasons for people being trafficked? What are the source, transit or destination countries for them?
- How does wider poverty impact on the success of human traffickers?
- What measures can be taken to protect vulnerable children in Ghana from this form of exploitation?
- How can Church groups unite, collaborate and work together to eradicate and prevent the vice of human trafficking?
- What can the Scottish and Westminster Governments, the European Union and United Nations do to protect vulnerable groups? How can they tackle the problem of human trafficking from a regional, continental and global perspective?

## Prayer

Loving Lord, you know the hopes and fears these children have; you feel their physical and psychological pain, surround them with your love and help them to bear these unjust hardships in their lives until they can be released and to understand that they are not forsaken or deserted.

Breathe into their souls a prayer for those who cannot pray for themselves, help them to know they are never alone, let them know you are beside them, holding them in your arms, calming their fears and filling them with your love and peace.

Richly bless the individuals and groups who are struggling to bring the evil of human trafficking to light and longing to rid the world of this obscenity that is fuelled by greed and callous inhumanity.

Merciful God hear our prayer, this we ask through your life-changing love in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

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*Case study from the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Ghana.*





## 6. Developing networks, building hope

Matthew 20: 1-16

Peter grew up in an orphanage, but once he turned 18 he ended up living on the streets of Prague having no place to call home and no prospects. An unknown man approached Peter and his friend, offering them a good job in the UK, but once they arrived he took their papers and forced them to work in his house and in the fields with no pay. After some time Peter escaped and sought help. He was taken to a British charity, identified as a victim of trafficking and supported by social services. The Evangelical Church of the Czech Brethren's Diaconal Centre was contacted and Peter was admitted to their asylum house. An individual plan was created for him to help him reintegrate into society.



## Reflection

A parable which is, it seems, shot through with injustice. The workers: waiting to be employed for the day, to have something with which to buy food, feed their families; the need to work to support family, but also for their own dignity.

And through the day, the landowner comes and employs another group.

Those looking for work would, as many still do today, go to the market place, from where they might be hired for the day. After a few hours if there was no work it was assumed those still unemployed would go home and return the next morning. But those who were desperate, who were looking for a chance remained, even through the heat of the day, and even to the eleventh hour. One hour's pay would be better than none.

Each group, except the last were given an assurance of payment. The first group given a contract: they would receive a full day's wage. The others were promised 'just reward'. The last group were given no promise at all and yet seemed prepared to work. Perhaps it was though trust for this landowner – known to them as a good man. Perhaps they were so desperate they would take anything, considering they had nothing to lose.

At the end of the day, the owner instructs his foreman to pay each 'the wage' (colloquialism for one day's pay). Instead of a pro rata payment, each and all were given the same. Had protocol been observed, with the earliest starters paid first and going home, there would have been no dispute. The first would not have known what the last were paid. But as if picking up on the last verse of the previous chapter, the last are first! But the first are not happy! A deliberate twist in the parable to enable those who had earned their pay to witness the generosity of the landowner.

And at the end of the day no promises were broken. The contract was honoured. All promises fulfilled.

Jesus explains God's way of justice, and strives to educate those around in that same grace and compassion inviting us to emulate his ways, not the world's.

There is no ending as such. How did the complainers accept the owners' explanation? There is no ending because we are to give this parable its ending. The ending depends on what we consider true justice.

## Discussion points

- It was the owner who went to the market place, and not his steward; yet it was the steward who was told to pay the wages. One 'calls'; the other ensures proper 'payment'. Does your life work on the same principle? Or do you consider you/we are in charge rather than stewards?
- Have you ever complained about a seeming injustice when others are given 'more than they deserve'? Or stepped in when some are given less?
- Consider the trust of those who were 'desperate', the eleventh hour workers; the importance of being able to trust; and of being so desperate you would trust anyone. Think how Peter might have felt when offered work. Worth the chance? What were his options?
- Peter was helped, by a charity, by the church and state. He found someone in whom he could trust and hope. Is there anything we can do locally to restore dignity and hope to those who have been abused? In the wider scene, what opportunities are there to lobby governments, churches to step in and bring justice and dignity?

## Prayer

Lord Jesus, we praise you that you are one in whom we can place our complete trust. You always give us more than we deserve. May we be as trustworthy and as gracious to those around us.

Give us understanding of those for whom any chance is worth risking. Help us recognise their plight, seeing no way forward; grasping any chance to get them out of their hell on earth.

We pray for those whose trust has been abused.

We pray for those who abuse the trust of others.

May your love intrude in their lives and bring them, each one, to lives of trust and peace, and hope for each day that dawns.

We seek to follow your way, Lord; open our eyes and hearts; give us generous spirits to reach out in love as we learn from you, as we emulate your ways on our journey.

Amen

*Rev Christine Sime is the minister of Dalgety Bay Parish Church.*

*Case study from the Evangelical Church of the Czech Brethren.*

