

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PRAYER FOR VICTIMS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING 2023

INTERNATIONAL
SOCIAL JUSTICE
COMMISSION



I HAVE HEARD THEIR CRIES

ADULT BIBLE STUDY RESOURCE

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'The Israelites groaned under the slavery, and cried out. Out of the slavery their cry for help rose up to God. God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob' (Exodus 2:23-25 NRSV).

INTRODUCTION

No matter where we live in the world, modern slavery and human trafficking is happening around us. It is happening in homes, neighbourhoods, villages and cities across our countries.



GROUP ACTIVITY *15 minutes*

What do you know about modern slavery and human trafficking? In small groups, write down and discuss everything you know about it. Take time to share with the larger group what each small group discussed.



WHAT IS SLAVERY?

Slavery is when one person controls another person as if that person is a thing or a possession. That control is based upon the threat of and/or actual use of violence whether physical, emotional, psychological, spiritual or

financial. When people are experiencing slavery, they are being exploited. This means that they are being treated unfairly for another person's selfish advantage and gain.

People who are enslaved are dehumanised and treated as if they are an object. Their identity and ability to make choices are stripped away from them. Restrictions are placed on every area of their lives. They are forced to sacrifice their hopes, dreams, loved ones, their past and their future. If they are paid for their work, it is barely enough to survive. It takes away their freedom and is a violation of their human rights.

The 2022 Global Estimates indicate that the number of people experiencing modern slavery and human trafficking has increased to an estimated 49.6 million people on any given day.

This means worldwide approximately:

- 27.6 million people are experiencing forced labour and sexual exploitation
- 22 million individuals are experiencing forced marriages



WHAT DOES SLAVERY LOOK LIKE AROUND THE WORLD?

Slavery can look many different ways around the world. Here are some examples:

Klenam's* father lost his job in their village. Their family was large with too many children to feed. When a neighbour introduced Klenam to a man promising him a high paying job and a chance to finish his schooling, he thought this opportunity would help his family. Only once he got there, he never went to school. Instead, he worked 12-14 hours every day on the shrimp boats diving deep underneath the water to untangle the nets while receiving no pay and little food for this dangerous work.

Fatemeh's* family fled their city when the militia invaded and began to attack those living there. Displaced and living in a refugee camp, Fatemeh's father married her off despite telling her family that she did not want to do this. Now, her much older husband and her mother-in-law control every area of her life and profit off the work she provides in the home.

Sally's* new boyfriend is handsome and charming. He gives her gifts all the time. He makes her feel so loved and accepted. She has always been looking for a place to belong and someone to take care of her. After weeks of this, her boyfriend then tells her that she needs to repay him back and help him out by providing sex to his friends. When she tries to resist and leave, he becomes violent with her and threatens to hurt her family.



WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Exodus 2:23-25

Introduction: The book of Exodus emphasises that Yahweh does not stand apart from history but is actively involved in judging oppressors and liberating the downtrodden. It stresses that he is more powerful than any of the rulers of the earth. Exodus clearly shows that Yahweh is God who delivers people from all kinds of bondages and brings about salvation, hope, healing, joy and redemption.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How did the Hebrews become slaves in Egypt?
- What do you know about the story of Joseph in Genesis?

The beginning of Exodus helps us to understand the situation the people of Israel were experiencing at that time - their struggles, oppression and slavery in Egypt. When we look back into the history of Israel in this foreign land, it was due to the human trafficking of Joseph, who was sold into slavery by his brothers. In being a slave to Pharaoh, Joseph experienced many hardships, pain and oppression. Yet, God had a purpose for the life of Joseph. God delivered Joseph from his struggles and lifted him up into the highest levels of leadership in Egypt. Joseph forgave his brothers during the time of famine and helped them to resettle in Egypt.

After Joseph died and a new Pharaoh came into power, the Egyptians were afraid of the rapid growth of the Hebrews in their country and intentionally sought to kill any male Hebrew newborns. But God intervened and saved Moses for his purpose. Seeing that the Israelites were still rapidly increasing in numbers, the Egyptians forced them into labour - slavery. Even though

the Israelites had become citizens of Egypt and were working to build and improve this country, they were no longer considered to be human beings and their rights were stripped of them. They were oppressed – their lives were full of injustice hardships, inequality, pain and bitterness. There was no one to challenge the power of Pharaoh or fight for justice. Out of their pain and bitterness, they ‘groaned under the slavery, and cried out to God’ (Exodus 2:23).



DISCUSSION QUESTION

How did God respond to the cries of the Israelites?

Chapter 2:24-25 describes God’s response to the cries of his people.

- He heard their groan and cries – In the *New International Version*, the word ‘groan’ is intimately connected to the idea of ‘crying out’. The Hebrews at that time had no leader – nobody to turn to. They were utterly helpless and hopeless. The only thing they could do was cry out to God. Their cries for help did not go to some pagan god but to the Creator of this world and all humanity. Their cries rose up to the God of their forefathers. Psalms 50:15 says, ‘and call on me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honour me.’ God heard their cries. God hears the cries of all people.
- He remembered his covenant – The word

‘remembered’ in Hebrew is ‘Zakar’ which is an important theological theme in the book of Exodus. In Hebrew, remembering is not just an intellectual exercise but it includes acting on that memory. God had made unconditional promises to Abraham and his descendants. Unlike humans, God is faithful. He does not forget the promises he has made. He will fulfil them even if it seems to us that he is taking a long time to do so.

- He was concerned – God not only heard and remembered but he was concerned. The God of Israel was not ignorant of the plight of his people nor unwilling to save them from bondage. He was planning to do something to save them from the slavery they were experiencing in Egypt. These actions of hearing, remembering and being concerned were indications of his faithfulness and compassion towards his creation.

These verses that we read in the book of Exodus let us know that people around the world experiencing slavery are not alone. God hears their cries from the darkness, he remembers and he is concerned as he works to bring all into his light.

ACTIVITY

PRAYER STATIONS



‘Their cries for help did not go to some pagan god but to the **Creator of this world** and all humanity’