



gospel
&
culture

GOSPEL & CULTURE: HUMAN TRAFFICKING
WEEK 10 | SIMONE HALPIN

Gospel & Culture: Human Trafficking

On Sunday August 28, Simone Halpin, Director of Women's Care at Moody Church & Executive Director of Naomi's House, gave a talk on how the Gospel and God's heart for the vulnerable help us understand and combat human trafficking. She worked through a number of questions and issues in consideration with this topic.

Definition

The legal definition for human trafficking: Human trafficking is the act of recruiting, harboring, moving or obtaining a person, by force, fraud or coercion, for the purposes of involuntary servitude, debt bondage or sexual exploitation.

It is considered modern-day slavery. Force, fraud, or coercion does not need to be proven for victims under eighteen. The traffickers keep the money so the victims have no control outside of the trafficker.

Worldwide

Human trafficking affects every country in the world. There are an estimated 21 million victims of human trafficking globally. The buying and selling of humans generates annual profits of \$150 billion in US dollars.¹

Labor Trafficking in the US

There are a variety of ways that labor trafficking occurs within the United States itself. People are forced to work in homes as domestic servants; farmworkers are coerced through violence as they harvest crops; factory workers are often held in inhumane conditions. Labor trafficking has also been reported in door-to-door sales crews, restaurants, construction work, carnivals, and health and beauty services. In general, this is 600,000-800,000 people trafficked into the U.S. each year.²

Sex Trafficking in the US

Sex trafficking in the U.S. is also known as forced prostitution. Victims are lured by traffickers under the guise of false promises. Most victims are vulnerable and not receiving care from home, and traffickers prey upon these vulnerabilities.

¹ International labor association, http://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_243201/lang--en/index.htm

² U.S. State Department

Here are a few startling statistics:

- The average age of a girl forced into prostitution in the U.S. is 13 years old.³
- The average amount traffickers make annually is \$150,000-\$250,000.⁴
- The best guess for the number of children currently trafficked in the U.S. is 325,000 children.⁵

Chicago

25,000 women and girls are trafficked in Chicago each year.⁶

There are 175,000 "Johns" (buyers), mostly men.⁷

1 out of 5 runaway children will be approached by a trafficker. Within 72 hours, a runaway teenager will be approached by a trafficker.

68% of runaways are in social services or foster care.⁸

Resources

Resources for women coming out of this lifestyle are very sparse. Research has shown that those who suffer from the trauma of a trafficker have a unique way of healing, and to put them in a homogenous home or program is essential to healing and growth.

A total of 33 residential programs nationwide will be currently operational and exclusive to trafficking victims, with a total of 682 beds. 12-15 beds are right here in Illinois.⁹ When Naomi's House opens in October, we'll add 5 to that number, and then hopefully eventually 9.

Cook County Women's Justice Program is a segment of Cook County Jail that has treatment for women who have been forced into prostitution. They had so many women being arrested for prostitution-related activity that they started to develop resources. Many victims fall into the Stockholm Syndrome where, upon release or rescue, they return to their trafficker

³ US Department of Justice

⁴ UIC Report, https://socialwork.uic.edu/wp-content/uploads/bsk-pdf-manager/FINAL_-_Human_TraffickinginIllinoisFactSheet-November2015_2_121.pdf

⁵ U.S. State Department

⁶ Human Trafficking in IL Fact Sheet, Jane Adams Center for Social Policy and Research, 2015 IC Report, https://socialwork.uic.edu/wp-content/uploads/bsk-pdf-manager/FINAL_-_Human_TraffickinginIllinoisFactSheet-November2015_2_121.pdf

⁷ UIC Report, https://socialwork.uic.edu/wp-content/uploads/bsk-pdf-manager/FINAL_-_Human_TraffickinginIllinoisFactSheet-November2015_2_121.pdf

⁸ <https://polarisproject.org/facts>

⁹ National Survey of Residential Programs for Victims of Sex Trafficking Report, http://www.icjia.state.il.us/assets/pdf/researchreports/nsrhvst_101813.pdf

because they truly believe that he's the only one who can care for her.

What keeps her there?

A major difference between international trafficking and trafficking within the U.S. is that the victim is not chained to her trafficker. Chains in the U.S. are more subtle, things like violence & threats, substance abuse addictions, and trauma impact--the literal rewiring of her brain processes.

What does she need to heal?

Women who have suffered from sexual exploitation need a comprehensive approach to care, which Naomi House will provide.

In *The Body Keeps the Score*, author Bessel van der Kolk, MD, has a chapter called "The Love Code." In this chapter, he discusses the idea that healing happens the most in a traumatized victim when the victim is in a genuine, caring relationship. If this seems familiar, it's because it's the Gospel.

What Luke 7:36-50 Shows us about Social Justice

At first glance, it may seem like this passage is about the woman. We may start asking ourselves questions like, "How did she get here? Did she choose this life? Was she forced into it?" These are the same kinds of questions we ask today. But those details are left out because they are not the point of the passage.

Compare Simon with the woman. Simon is a Pharisee, part of the intellectual elite. He's interested in Jesus, or else he wouldn't have invited him to the banquet. However, he's detached and uncomfortable by the scene the weeping woman has made; he clearly questions Jesus.

On the other hand, this woman is drawn to Jesus, so much so that she's come to a place where is not welcome and shown an incredibly vulnerable side of herself. She's seeking a relationship with Jesus--an intimate relationship, shown in the way she touches him, kisses him, lets her hair down, displays deep emotion. She is unashamed.

Jesus uses this woman's actions to make a point to Simon, and Simon answers the question correctly. But while Jesus is explaining to Simon that this woman is demonstrating what it means to have a relationship with him, not just an intellectual relationship, Jesus is looking at the woman. *Simon knew everything there was to know about the law and religion, but he still missed it.*

When we come to the end of ourselves and recognize our own depravity, our own sin, and we come to a place where we know that a relationship with Jesus is our only hope, that is where we find freedom. The woman in this story had arrived at this place--the spirit had begun a work in her heart and she literally fled to find Jesus to worship him. She was desperate for forgiveness, for freedom, so much so that she made a scene and didn't care what anyone would say about her--she wanted a relationship with him.

So often, we read a story like this and identify with Simon. If we're honest, we see ourselves as better than others. We question how the vulnerable got to where they are, and we have all kinds of suggestions for how they should do things differently.

Social Justice: Studying Issues or Loving People

If we're not careful, we'll approach social justice issues like human trafficking in the same way. We want to take an intellectual approach, keep the actual person at arm's length. We can either study people's situations and call them out on what they've done wrong, or we can approach these issues as Jesus did--by seeing humans as humans.

If we want to make a difference in social issues, we have to make it personal, not intellectual. We have to come to the end of ourselves and note that we are no different when it comes to the depth of our sin than anyone else. This is where we find freedom. As Tim Keller notes, the realization of the size of our debt that Jesus has forgiven will determine how much we love and impact the lives of other people.

This is how the gospel intersects with human trafficking--by starting with our own surrendered heart.

The Model of Nehemiah 1:4

"As soon as I heard these words I sat down and wept and mourned for days, and I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven."

- First, Nehemiah wept. He was overcome with the news that his city was broken and ruined.
- Second, he fasted and prayed. At some point in the midst of the fasting and praying, he heard from God and God gave him instructions; his heart knew what to do. His prayer in chapter one is beautiful--he's

asking for God to hear his prayer and to show favor.

- Third, he acted. He found the courage to ask the king for permission to leave his prestigious job in the palace and go back to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls of his city. He took the information that had been brought to him and he refused to do nothing. Through prayer and fasting and boldness, he knew what God had called him to do.

This provides a great model for anyone asking the question, “What do I do?” There is enough brokenness, enough dark circumstances, in our own cities and around the world, that something must tug at you. If we all fasted and prayed and asked God, “What do I do?”, I believe he would show us. We all have different areas of brokenness and injustice that pulls at our hearts and causes us to say, “That’s not right.” For me, it was the exploitation of women and girls within the very city that I live in. It took years of fasting and praying before God made a way for us to open Naomi’s House. He has shown incredible favor that it’s almost unbelievable. And along the way, through this journey, his faithfulness has been on display. We have the privilege to be a part of his great work and redeeming lives, and in the process, we begin to be changed as well.

More on Naomi’s House

For more specific information on Naomi’s House, possible volunteer opportunities, and contact information, please visit the Naomi’s House website at <http://www.moodychurch.org/naomis-house/>.



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