

Worldwide Crisis: Prayers Needed

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Slavery

In April 2004, Vivian, a 21-year-old woman from Bangkok, was offered work in Australia as a masseuse. Her new employers flew her to Melbourne, but once there, she was forced into sexual slavery in two brothels. Vivian spoke little English, didn't know anyone, and was locked up after hours. By May, frantic to get free, she used her mobile phone to text message a client. He anonymously called immigration officers. However, when the brothel was raided, the authorities freed a South Korean and a Thai woman – but not Vivian. She'd been moved that morning to another location.

Vivian didn't give up. Using a business card she found on the premises, she text messaged her address to the client's mobile phone. A few hours later, Vivian was freed. As a result of her courage and determination, Australian Federal Police arrested and charged two ringleaders of an international crime syndicate with keeping a person in sexual servitude and possessing or exercising ownership of a slave.

While the slavery of Vivian is shocking, so is the fact that an estimated 27 million people are enslaved on every continent except Antarctica, and in many countries including the United States and Australia. Here are just a few examples of this tragic situation:

- In Brazil, 25,000 slave laborers are used mainly to clear Amazonian forests.
- Up to one million people are allegedly held as chattel slaves in Mauritania.
- Across the whole of Europe, tens of thousands of females are enslaved in brothels.
- Around the world, there are an estimated 300,000 child soldiers.
- In South Asia, millions of people are bonded laborers, and hundreds of small boys are transported to the United Arab Emirates and other Gulf states and forced to race on the backs of camels. Additionally, thousands of females are used as sex slaves for tourists.

The price of slaves is the lowest it's been in human history. A young adult male laborer in Mali in northwestern Africa costs just US \$40, while in Thailand young females used in brothels are sold for US \$1,000. Tragically, in many countries, children who work in mines and young teenage sex slaves who contract HIV are considered "disposable" people – to be "used" intensely for a short time and then discarded. These people work without pay under the threat of violence. They are totally controlled and cannot leave without their slave master's explicit permission.

How do people become enslaved?

Slavery in the modern world occurs when economically vulnerable people, who are desperate for a better life, an education, or escape from deep, even generational, poverty, are targeted by well-organized criminal networks.

These vulnerable individuals are exploited for profit through some of the following means:

- Global people-trafficking. Today an estimated 800,000 victims are annually recruited, transported, and received by others for improper purposes through force, abduction, fraud, or coercion.
- Debt bondage. This occurs when a person becomes collateral against a loan that he or she or their families can seldom ever repay.
- Forced labor, when a worker is tricked through the promise of a good job.
- Forced prostitution, where females are cheated, abducted, and detained in brothels.
- Early or forced marriage that places girls in servitude that's often accompanied by physical violence.

What has been done to stop enslavement so far?

Adult and child slavery is now generally accepted throughout the world as being morally wrong. It's illegal everywhere in the world. The UN General Assembly banned it in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the 1956 Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, as well as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The latter came into force in March 1976, and as of November 2003, has been ratified by 104 nations.

In addition, some governments like those of the US and Australia have now introduced new laws and harsh penalties for people smuggling or trafficking in women, or for citizens traveling abroad to have sex with sex slaves. Then there are groups such as India's South Asian Coalition on Child Servitude, who care for and educate freed child carpet-makers, and private organizations in Thailand that provide education to former sex slaves. Nevertheless, while these and other positive steps have been taken, slavery continues.

What can an individual do to help?

One thing that any spiritually minded person can do is pray – sincerely, specifically, and systematically. In my own life, I've had difficult financial problems resolved and almost impossible housing and employment needs met through prayer. I've also been kept safe while working in extremely dangerous situations in Asia.

While my prayer experiences may seem modest when compared to the problem of slavery, they do give me hope – and a reason to keep praying for an end to modern-day enslavement. The aim of healing prayer is to effect change in thinking. Evil, for all its varied outward appearances, is, in essence, really only thought. A person has to think wickedly before he or she acts in a wicked way. The recruitment, control, and exploitation of vulnerable people, are all the result of a perpetrator first entertaining depraved thinking and then acting on it.

What's needed to change evil thinking and stop unprincipled activities is deep spirituality – wholly God-empowered, good thinking and the resulting good deeds. True spirituality is a powerful weapon against evil. When people's thought is filled with divine wisdom, compassion, unselfishness, and mercy, this mind-set leads them to take honest actions, to have respect for humanity, and to uphold individual freedom. Why?

God is the Creator, the only power, the source of all goodness. And because He is wholly good, it would not be possible for Him to create an evil mind or an evil person. While the opposite of this may appear to be true, the concept of evil people is actually an erroneous conclusion about God and His offspring.

God made each person in His likeness. This means that His image – entirely good and entirely loving – everyone in his or her true nature is also compassionate and good. Everyone's pure, spiritual identity includes innate honesty and wisdom. Therefore, anyone can repudiate evil and see it as being no part of them, because it's no part of God.

Any time a person intends to carry out a criminal act, or someone is being enticed, controlled, or exploited by evil, he or she can know that God's powerful help is present. No matter what's occurring, God is not helpless in the face of evil, so neither are His children. There's always an answer. God's law of harmony operates 24/7. When people want to do only what is right, or they need divine Love's help to be safe, then they can and do receive their Father-Mother's spiritual strength. With His powerful help, they can think and act rightly.

God doesn't abandon His sons and daughters. The all-caring parent of everyone is standing by, ready to communicate and supply each person with His profoundly effective, loving message – His right ideas that show ways out, solutions. No one can be trapped into feeling defenceless, desperate, or helpless. God's child is empowered to heed and follow His spiritual guidance, which will always lead to freedom.

The story of Vivian's release from sexual slavery is an example of this. She had the inborn, persistent yearning to be free.



This urgent desire, I believe, was a form of prayer. The answer to that God-empowered longing was the spiritual message, mental prompting from God, to use the mobile phone to get help. Emboldened with God's courage, she overcame her fear and obeyed. The result? She and two other women were released, and the criminal gang, which had been deceptively recruiting Thai females, transporting them to Australia, and forcing them to work as prostitutes, was smashed.

There are numerous modern-day accounts of slaves being assisted to freedom. Often either sympathetic clients, alert neighbors, or groups of people dedicated to helping those caught in these situations, liberate the victims of slavery. Many other people are working to end global slavery, and many more are praying for its abolition. Compared with the enormity of today's slavery, prayer may seem a humble response. Yet I do not underestimate its healing power.

Mary Baker Eddy, who saw the slave trade in America end in her time, wrote: **"Truth brings the elements of liberty. On its banner is the Soul-inspired motto, 'Slavery is abolished.' The power of God brings deliverance to the captive. No power can withstand divine Love"** *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*, p. 224.

How encouraging to understand these words as a real promise about God's power and immediacy to save and deliver His sons and daughters.

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