

# **Relating Biblical Passages to the Issue of Sexual Exploitation**

## Used with permission from Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation

Below is a short compilation of biblical passages<sup>14</sup> that can be used for study groups. The passages focus on the inherent dignity and worth of all people, the state of oppression and slavery that exists even today, and our role and responsibility as defenders of human rights to work for justice and freedom. Biblical passages that explicitly prohibit prostitution have been intentionally omitted to help shift the focus away from the condemnation of individuals in the sex trade toward a more proactive approach: ending sexual exploitation by targeting the root cause—the demand.

Accompanying each biblical passage is a short paragraph noting its implications for congregations today. Our desire is that these references and questions will help individuals and groups determine how they can best respond to the multi-faceted aspects of prostitution and human trafficking.<sup>15</sup>

# Slavery

## Ecclesiastes 4:1

<sup>1</sup>Again I looked and saw all the oppression that was taking place under the sun: I saw the tears of the oppressed—and they have no comforter; power was on the side of their oppressors—and they have no comforter.

**Reflections:** We live in a world prone to cruelty, a world of oppressors and the oppressed. Solomon, the author of Ecclesiastes, is known for two things: his wisdom and search for meaning apart from God. Solomon discovered that all is “vanity/meaningless” apart from God, “a chasing after the wind.” When we are left to our own devices, we focus solely on our own betterment and desires: “And I saw that all labor and all achievement spring from man's envy of his neighbor” (Ecc 4:4). When a person's focus becomes solely personal gain, violence and oppression are often not far behind. All we have to do is look around us to see the oppression that is occurring in our own city today. As spiritual beings, we realize that our focus cannot solely be our own health, wealth, and protection as this adds only limited meaning to our lives. When we pursue peace and justice for all, we reap the benefits of recognizing the meaning and significance of another's life in addition to our own.

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<sup>15</sup> Stop the Traffik, [http://www.stophetraffik.org/downloads/powerpoint\\_script.pdf](http://www.stophetraffik.org/downloads/powerpoint_script.pdf).

- ❖ How often does our quest for significance consider or include the well-being of others? Whom and in what ways? What effects, positive or negative, can this have?
- ❖ What would be the benefits/drawbacks of focusing on the health, safety, and freedom of those for whom society generally ignores and oppresses?

*Prayer Pointer*—Pray that God opens our eyes to see the oppression that takes place around us.

## Mercy and Justice

### Isaiah 58:5-9

<sup>5</sup> Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for a man to humble himself? Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed and for lying on sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD?

<sup>6</sup> "Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?

<sup>7</sup> Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you

see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?

<sup>8</sup> Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard.

<sup>9</sup> Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I.

"If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk,

**Reflections:** In this passage, God addresses certain rituals and explains that God does not want empty, meaningless actions. Depending on one's faith, fasting has different meanings and purposes. It can be done for atonement, as an expression of collaborative mourning and gratitude, as a declaration of the sincerity of one's faith, as an act of petition, and out of a desire to become closer to God. Repentance and generosity to those less fortunate are common themes that coincide with the practice of fasting. Many faiths require that the true significance of this act of worship should extend beyond the Sabbath and prescribed days and outside the doors of our house of worship. As this passage says, true fasting is "to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke (vs. 6)." To accomplish this, the passage says "share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter— when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood (vs. 7)." In other words, faith requires action. One of the many beautiful meanings of the name of God is "God will provide," or Jehovah Jireh.

What does this mean? How is God providing for those who are trafficked or bound by the chains of prostitution? One way God provides is by giving each of us the ability to ameliorate the situations of those in need. God allows us the opportunity to be God's vessel through which mercy and justice are extended to the most vulnerable in society. It is an opportunity to be a part of something that is bigger than ourselves, close to God's heart and a response to Isaiah's call for mercy and justice.

- ❖ Many women, men, and children in our city are hungry or homeless or lack other basic necessities such as clothing. Because of these circumstances, they may engage in the sex trade to meet their basic survival needs. How can we avoid turning our backs on these individuals?

*Prayer Pointer*—Pray for the opportunity to reach out to someone in need.

## Call to Action

### Isaiah 61:1-3

<sup>1</sup>The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, <sup>2</sup>to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, <sup>3</sup>and provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendor.

**Reflections:** Perhaps you already know that human trafficking is often called “modern day Slavery” and that victims of trafficking are all too often forced into prostitution. The same methods that are used in trafficking are used to enslave women and children in prostitution, the majority of whom have not —chosen to be there. The oppressor uses coercion, deception, fraud, the abuse of power, abduction, threats, violence, and economic leverage such as debt bondage to manipulate individuals into a life from which they often cannot escape. Victims of trafficking are denied their God-given dignity.

Similar to the passage in Isaiah, Deuteronomy 15:15 says, “Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you. That is why I give you this command today.” God asks each of us to remember where we came from, whether it was literal slavery in Egypt or the enslavement that we feel in our personal lives. God has been gracious and generous with each of us and asks the same from us toward others. God gives us the opportunity to share in bestowing beauty, gladness, and a spirit of praise, release, freedom, and healing.

- ❖ Deuteronomy implies that we have all been in slavery, though not always literally. How has God used others to proclaim freedom and healing, to provide beauty and gladness in your life?
- ❖ How can we be these vessels of healing and freedom for those in our community who are feeling trapped and broken?

*Prayer Pointer*—Ask God to reveal to you anything in your heart that might be preventing you from reaching out to others. Listen carefully and take action.

## Gifting and Competence

### 2 Corinthians 3: 5-6

<sup>5</sup>Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. <sup>6</sup>He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

**Reflections:** Rather than become prideful about our achievements and competence, we can give credit where credit is due. We are heirs to a new covenant not because of our own competence but because God gives us everything we need for a Spirit-filled life. When we achieve success in life, whether at work, school, or elsewhere, we can be thankful for what God has given us.

- ❖ Does competence come from our own knowledge or from God? Why is it important to acknowledge the interrelationship?
- ❖ Why are we competent? Are we using our intellect, skills, and compassion for others or for ourselves?
- ❖ How are the successes in our lives achieved?

*Prayer Pointer*—Thank God for what you have been given and find ways to share this gifting with others.

## Loving Like God

### Matthew 22:36-40

<sup>36</sup>"Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" <sup>37</sup>Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' <sup>38</sup>This is the first and greatest commandment. <sup>39</sup>And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' <sup>40</sup>All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

**Reflections:** When Jesus was asked what is the most important thing we can do, He answered that it is to love God—not distantly, but with all of our heart, with all of our soul, and with all of our mind. When we love God like this, we grow in love for that which God loves. Thinking about ourselves, for some of us, is an easy thing to do. It’s natural and healthy, but it should not be our only focus. As followers of God, we are called to love God and to show that love through loving others—all others—as we love ourselves. The natural outgrowth of loving God is loving others.

❖ Jesus does not leave room for quibbling over His response to the Pharisee’s question. The greatest command we can follow is to love God, first and foremost. The second is to love our neighbors as ourselves—not instead of ourselves or more than ourselves, but as ourselves. How do you define who your neighbors are? How do you love them as you love yourself?

*Prayer Pointer*—Pray for God to increase love in your life and deepen your understanding of love.

## Religion and Action

### James 1:27, 2:14-18

<sup>27</sup>Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

<sup>14</sup>What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? <sup>15</sup>Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. <sup>16</sup>If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? <sup>17</sup>In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. <sup>18</sup>But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do.

**Reflections:** Words without action are empty and useless. God does not want us to go through the motions, but to be fulfilled by what James calls “pure and faultless” religion. God confronts hypocrisy and requires that we not only “talk the talk” but “walk the walk.” If we say that we love God’s creation and we say that we love others as we have been loved, then we should literally and practically love our neighbor—or else our faith is, as James said, “dead.”

- ❖ According to James, what constitutes religion? Why?
- ❖ What is the difference between faith and good deeds? Is one better than the other? Can one exist without the other? What is the benefit of having both? The detriment of not having both?
- ❖ What good does it do if we learn about and say that we care about exploited individuals within the sex industry, but then do nothing about it?

*Prayer Pointer*—Pray for people who have been exploited; pray to “walk the walk” of faith in your life.

## Serving Others

### Matthew 25:35-40

<sup>35</sup>For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, <sup>36</sup>I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' <sup>37</sup>"Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink?' <sup>38</sup>When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you?' <sup>39</sup>When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' <sup>40</sup>"The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these, you did for me.'

**Reflections:** When we feed the hungry and invite in strangers, take care of the sick and visit prisoners, fight for the rights of those that are exploited, and serve the least in our communities, we are serving God. It is often easy to look to the most influential or powerful in society and desire to align ourselves with them, but Jesus chooses to identify Himself with the poor, the oppressed, the exploited, and the most vulnerable of society. Jesus challenges us to do the same.

- ❖ What does Jesus mean by saying that what we did for the least of these, we did for Him? Who are the “least of these” in this passage? Who are the “least of these” in today’s society?
- ❖ Jesus mentions six practical things that people did to help the poor, homeless, and oppressed. Are the practical needs among the poor and oppressed today significantly different than they were during Jesus’s life? In what ways?
- ❖ Does Jesus qualify which hungry, poor, sick, or imprisoned individuals to help? Do we? Should we?

*Prayer Pointer*— Create a list of the hungry, poor, sick, and imprisoned, and the individuals and organizations that reach out to them, and include them in your daily prayers. Consider placing your name on the list of helpers.

# Commitment to Social Justice

## Luke 10: 29-37

<sup>29</sup>He asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" <sup>30</sup>In reply Jesus said, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. <sup>31</sup>A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. <sup>32</sup>So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. <sup>33</sup>But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. <sup>34</sup>He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. <sup>35</sup>The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.' <sup>36</sup>"Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" <sup>37</sup>The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

**Reflections:** In this passage, two of our previous questions are addressed: what does it mean to love our neighbors as we love ourselves and just exactly who is our neighbor? In loving our neighbors, we rightly love God. In defining who our neighbor is, Jesus tells us it is anyone—family, friends, strangers, all in need. The street child, homeless man, and prostituted woman are our neighbors. We love them by showing mercy, empathizing with and caring for them, and providing a place and means for recovery. In this passage, we see that no one is exempt from the responsibility to help his or her neighbor. Like the Samaritan, we must realize that we cannot ignore our responsibility to help and hope that the clergy, government, or"—experts" will do it all. In God's worldview our mercy, love, and generosity must extend beyond ourselves and our circle of favored people.

- ❖ How many people passed by the abused individual before someone stopped to help? Why?
- ❖ How many people in need of help have we passed by? Would we even recognize them if we saw them?
- ❖ Like the robbed and abused man in Luke, how might an individual in prostitution need help?

*Prayer Pointer*—Pray to become more like the Samaritan in the story.