

True Freedom: A Right

My eyes flash open, my heart is racing, and I am perspiring. I lay as still as possible until I get my bearings. I gently touch my covers. I then look around as my eyes adjust to the darkness. I hope I haven't awakened anyone. I realise I have had that silly dream again of showing up to take a final examination for a math course in college and I am unprepared for the test. I realise I am safe at home with my family. While I am trying to settle myself back down to fall asleep again, I try to recall what I was reading or watching on TV before I went to bed to cause such a bad dream. As my breathing settles down and I close my eyes, I am reminded that it was just a bad dream. I even found a copy of my college transcript that proves to me that I did indeed take the course and pass with an A. Just a silly bad dream.

On 15 April 2014, as many as 300 teenage girls were abducted from their school in Nigeria. An Islamic militant terrorist group called the Boko Haram carried out this attack. The leader of this group, Abubaker Shekau, says he originally planned to sell the girls into marriages and into sex slavery. Now he wants to use the girls as pawns to gain the release of imprisoned militants. While 53 of the 300 girls managed to escape, more than 260 girls are still missing. Each young lady waking up nightly in a sweat of fear with their hearts pounding. Each young lady is waking up to realise it isn't a bad dream but a nightmarish reality. Each young lady is wondering when anyone in the world will rescue them and set them free. Each young lady is waiting, hoping...

In John 8:36 we read: 'So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed' (*NIV*). As the body of Christ looks to find solutions to the travesties of human trafficking, let us consider that Christ came to bring true freedom for all mankind and it is the right of all mankind to have the chance to gain it. True freedom will come when we reduce the demand for human trafficking. True freedom will come when we revive the downtrodden of human trafficking. And finally, true freedom will come when we reclaim the lost in human trafficking.

1. True Freedom: A right to reduce the demand

To begin to bring true freedom to the world we must first reduce the demand for human trafficking. Human trafficking is a form of modern-day slavery. Victims of human trafficking are subjected to force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of commercial sex, debt bondage, or forced labour. They are young children, teenagers, women and men. Trafficking in persons occurs throughout the world, including in the United States of America. To reduce the demand for human trafficking we must participate by reducing a demand for cheap entertainment and a demand for cheap products and services.

To reduce the demand for cheap entertainment we first have to admit that there are many of our own members who regularly use 'cheap entertainment'. The world teaches that the commercial sex industry and its use is just another hobby that is as common place as collecting postage stamps. What I do with my time carries the same status as what you do with your time. And who is it going to harm anyway?

To begin to reduce the demand for the commercial sex industry we must educate ourselves who are people being used in the industry. We teach that each person trafficked in the commercial sex trade is someone's daughter or son. They have a face and a name. Christ died for each one of them. When we begin to see victims as named persons, it becomes more difficult to set aside the guilt of participating in this industry. We must regularly preach about the dangers of falling into sexual sin and preach that there is true freedom from sexual addiction through Jesus Christ.

As Christians, we must also reduce the demand for cheap products and services. While I may be able to truthfully say that I haven't participated in any form of the commercial sex industry, I am just as guilty as the next for wanting and purchasing cheap products and services. Most of us exist on a fixed budget for groceries and household items. Each time I think I have 'scored a deal' with finding my item at a low price, I need to ask myself, at what cost am I truly purchasing that item. I enjoy a good cup of coffee each morning. To reduce the demand for cheap products, I purchase my coffee beans from a company that is Fairtrade. The Fairtrade movement aims to alleviate poverty, ensure safe working conditions and foster sustainable development. One may not find inexpensive coffee but you will find fairly traded and marketed items. We can do our part of reducing the demand for human trafficking by committing to purchasing at least one of our staples from a Fairtrade source. Philippians 2:3,4 says: 'Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of others' (NIV). Let's begin to reduce the demand one cup of coffee at the time.

2. True Freedom: A right to revive the downtrodden

The Message paraphrases Proverbs 24:11,12 like this: 'Rescue the perishing; don't hesitate to step in and help. If you say 'hey, that's none of my business', will that get you off the hook? Someone is watching you closely, you know-someone will not be impressed with weak excuses.' Fanny Crosby referred to this verse in the hymn 'Rescue the Perishing'. She had a compelling passion for the hopelessly lost in the late nineteenth century. She pinned the words familiar to us: 'Rescue the perishing, care for the dying; Jesus is merciful, Jesus will save.'

Our own Founder, General Booth had a vision of the lost. In his vision he saw a raging ocean. Out of the waters rose a massive rock. On the rock were people carefree walking about. Upon further observation, Booth saw the faces of men, women, and children hopelessly screaming to those on the rock to save them from drowning. One face would slip beneath the waters never to rise again only to be replaced by a new face screaming in despair. He then saw that the platform on the Rock was the church and on shore were the members of the church walking carefree about in their own selfish pursuits. Booth used this vision to aggressively pursue the lost and bring them to the Saviour's feet.

Here we stand 149 years after the start of The Salvation Army. Are we still aggressively pursuing, to rescue those the perishing, in human trafficking? Here in the USA, some of our corps have successively begun programmes to reach out to women in the commercial sex industry. The model that the corps are using is that of a drop-in centre for the women. The centres open their doors to the women without any condemnation. The women are given a warm meal, clean clothes, wholesome recreation and

counselling if desired. These ministries impart hope that the future can be different; they can survive in this world without participating in the commercial sex industry. Staff members at the centres are reporting that these programs are beginning to be successful as women find the courage to leave the industry and seek a better way of life.

3. True Freedom: A right to reclaim the lost

The final thing for us to consider today in proclaiming true freedom is the right to reclaim the lost. We must promote the reduction of human trafficking by reducing the demand. We must provide services around the world for those victims of human trafficking. For if we ignore the lost or the king pins and organisers of this slave trade, we will not see an end to human slavery.

Jesus teaches us in Matthew 5:43,44: 'You have heard that it was said, "Love your neighbour and hate your enemy." But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.' While it is fitting and right to pray for the young girls held as hostages in Nigeria, we are only doing one small part of our religious duty. Jesus teaches us that in his Kingdom we are to pray for those who persecute you. This means we are to not only pray for the safe return of the young women but for the salvation of the men and the leader of the group. Our natural reaction is to ignore these men and to not imagine their conversion to Christianity.

John Newton wrote the famous hymn Amazing Grace in 1779. John Newton was involved in the slave trade. It was only after studying Christian theology that he fully left the slave trade around 1754 and began to promote its abolishment. In Acts 9, we read the conversion of Paul, who was the chief of those persecuting the early Christians. In verse 4 we read that Christ confronts Paul by asking: 'why do you persecute me?' After his conversion, Christ uses Paul to spread his gospel around the world. Paul who was once feared amongst the early Church becomes one who the early church reveres. If the power of Christ is strong enough to convert Paul, it is strong enough to convert me.

Chris Tomlin has written a newer rendition of Amazing Grace. In his rendition, he helps us to see that we are completely saved in Christ. The chains of sin are forever broken and I am free. We need to regular pray with this vision for today's slave owners. We need to pray that the sin that binds them will be broken and that they too will be free. We need to reclaim these lost souls for His kingdom.

'Amazing Grace (My Chains Are Gone)' by Chris Tomlin.

*Amazing grace how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me
I once was lost, but now I'm found
Was blind, but now I see*

*'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear
And grace my fears relieved
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed*

*My chains are gone, I've been set free
My God, my Saviour has ransomed me
And like a flood His mercy reigns
Unending love, amazing grace*

*The Lord has promised good to me
His word my hope secures
He will my shield and portion be
As long as life endures*

*My chains are gone, I've been set free
My God, my Saviour has ransomed me
And like a flood His mercy reigns
Unending love, amazing grace*

*The earth shall soon dissolve like snow
The sun forbear to shine
But God, Who called me here below
Will be forever mine, will be forever mine
You are forever mine.*

May we be faithful to go for the worst sinner and pray for their full salvation.

I probably will have other bad dreams when I wake up in a panic. As I collect myself and am reminded I am safe at home, I want to say a prayer for those around our world who will not wake up safe from their nightmares. I want the Lord to remind me that each of the 27 million people being trafficked around the world has a face and a name. I want the Lord to remind me that I can do something to reduce the demand for human trafficking. I want the Lord to show us ways to serve the victims of human trafficking. And I want the Lord to give us a vision of full salvation of the worst of sinners, even the organisers of human slave trade.

What will you do to bring true freedom to the world today?

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