

NAZARENE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

WHAT WE TEACH SPEAKS VOLUMES:  
WHAT CHRISTIANS SHOULD KNOW BEFORE JOINING THE FIGHT AGAINST  
COMMERCIAL SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

A THESIS IN THE PRACTICE OF MINISTRY  
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by

AMANDA C. MONTGOMERY

KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI

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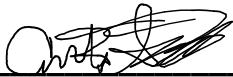
## Doctor of Ministry Dissertation Approval

**Student Name:** Amanda Montgomery

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We, the undersigned, determined that this dissertation has met the academic requirements and standards of Nazarene Theological Seminary for the Doctor of Ministry program.



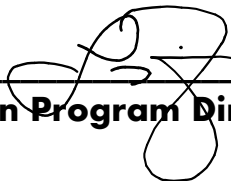
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**Faculty Advisor, Antonio Settles**



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**Second Reader, Mark Hayse**



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**DMin Program Director, Levi Jones**

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## ABSTRACT

Amanda C. Montgomery

### What We Teach Speaks Volumes: What Christians Should Know before Joining the Fight Against Commercial Sexual Exploitation

Christianity is meant to be a beacon of hope and good news to the marginalized. One group that is marginalized throughout local communities in the United States are the victims and survivors of Commercial Sexual Exploitation (CSE). In the past few years, it has become popular for churches to get involved in anti-trafficking efforts, but CSE survivors have reported that while some ministries are beneficial, other ministries are harmful, and most are nonexistent. These problematic responses have the potential of harming CSE victims, protecting perpetrators, and sustaining the crime of CSE within the local community. This paper will focus on laying a scriptural foundation for God-honoring and survivor-informed anti-trafficking engagement. Using biblical accounts of sexual assault and exploitation, a multi-week Bible study curriculum is provided to inform a Christian perspective and approach to anti-trafficking work in the local community.

## **The Problem and Its Setting**

### **The Crime and the Culture**

In the past decade, the crime of Commercial Sexual Exploitation has been at the forefront of news articles and media coverage. The United Nations have emphasized the issue of international human trafficking, State laws have been updated, and churches across denominations have committed to pray for those trapped in modern-day slavery in all its forms in our country and across the world. The topic of human trafficking has caught community attention, but has it changed their hearts? Statistics indicate that commercial sexual exploitation, a form of human trafficking, is increasing in local communities across the United States.<sup>1</sup> When the COVID-19 pandemic swept the globe and impacted the ability for children to attend school and adults to go to work or other public settings, then people who were already in dangerous living situations were left with abusers, off the radar, with no one to notice red flags in schools and the local community. Even crisis resources, anti-trafficking non-profits, and hospitals were unavailable to those needing assistance. Telecommuting and distance learning became standard practices, creating further dependence on a culture already addicted to computer screen time. Alcoholism and pornography use increased as the general population dealt with stress in unhealthy ways.<sup>2</sup> As the nation struggled to steady itself, the crime of commercial sexual exploitation increased. Technology was a blessing and a curse. When K-12 grade schools closed, Google Chromebook was one of the major tablet brands used by schools to continue the school year online. However, Google's refusal to activate safety features on school tablets left students

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<sup>1</sup> "2019 U.S. National Human Trafficking Hotline Statistics," [polarisproject.org](https://polarisproject.org), July 31, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> "How the Pandemic Is Changing Pornography," *Psychology Today*, accessed November 19, 2021; Victoria Forster, "Soaring Pandemic Alcohol Sales Cause Concern for Doctors," *Forbes*, accessed November 19, 2021.

of all ages exposed to explicit material and online recruiting tactics.<sup>3</sup> The National Center on Sexual Exploitation (NCOSE) identified Google's Chromebooks in the 2021 "Dirty Dozen" list, ranking it one of 12 featured companies knowingly permitting Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) to thrive through their company unhindered. Several months after NCOSE publicized the list, Google updated its default settings to include safety features for all Chromebooks designed for K-12 use.<sup>4</sup> The accessibility to purchase sex through the internet has become so easy that credit card companies and other online payment systems are held accountable by anti-trafficking groups. In 2020, VISA made the Dirty Dozen list by profiting off of brothels, prostitution websites, and pornography websites known for trafficking minors.<sup>5</sup> After making the Dirty Dozen list, VISA announced its decision to break ties with PornHub, which initially appeared to be another anti-trafficking victory. However, VISA's decision to restart a partnership with MindGeek, the company that owns and operates PornHub, has led NCOSE to add VISA back to the 2021 Dirty Dozen watchlist.<sup>6</sup> Although the anti-trafficking movement has fought and won battles against many company policies, an immense amount of time, research, and funding is needed to motivate national and global companies to make necessary changes. Each company on the Dirty Dozen list is merely a glimmer of the companies that profit from labor and sex trafficking. The utilization of Bitcoin, AirB&B, online gaming, Snapchat, and many other forms of technology and social media grant myriad ways for traffickers to groom victims and for buyers to purchase digital or in-person sex with low risk of being caught. As technology advances, the crime of CSE evolves, creating new shadows of anonymity and trauma.

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<sup>3</sup> National Center on Sexual Exploitation, "Chromebooks," NCOSE, accessed November 19, 2021, <https://endsexualexploitation.org/chromebooks/>.

<sup>4</sup> National Center on Sexual Exploitation, "Major Victory! Google Defaults K-12 Chromebooks and Products to Safety," NCOSE, June 29, 2021, <https://endsexualexploitation.org/articles/google-defaults-chromebooks-to-safety/>.

<sup>5</sup> "2020 Dirty Dozen List," National Center on Sexual Exploitation, January 6, 2020, <https://endsexualexploitation.org/dirtydozen-2020/>.

<sup>6</sup> "Dirty Dozen List 2021," NCOSE, accessed November 19, 2021, <https://endsexualexploitation.org/dirtydozenlist-2021/>.

## Trapped in the Shadows

Commercial Sexual Exploitation is a severe form of the more prevalent crime of sexual assault. The National Center on Domestic and Sexual Violence (NCDSV) estimates that one in four women and one in six men within the general population in the United States have been sexually assaulted.<sup>7</sup> Of the one in five people in the community who are sexual assault survivors, many exhibit Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, depression, anxiety, or other indicators of trauma.<sup>8</sup> In instances of rape, the study showed that the perpetrator previously knew the person they victimized 80% of the time.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, a majority of CSE survivors report having known the perpetrator prior to being trafficked by them.<sup>10</sup> Although both are sexual assault survivors, sexual assault survivors within the general community do not readily connect their victimization to the trauma happening to people trapped in CSE. When the general community fails to recognize the multitude of sexual abuses that CSE victims suffer, their denial alienates CSE victims and relegates them to endure abuse in the blind spots of the community.<sup>11</sup> Worse than ignoring the plight of CSE victims, the general community often blames them for their victimization or accuses them of choosing abuse.<sup>12</sup> Community judgment runs rampant when sex is exchanged for money.<sup>13</sup> Other biases surface when co-occurring issues, such as chemical dependency or

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<sup>7</sup> “The 1 in 6 Statistic - Sexual Abuse and Assault of Boys and Men,” 1in6, 2017, <https://1in6.org/get-information/the-1-in-6-statistic/>; “Sexual Assault Statistics,” accessed November 19, 2021, <http://www.ncdsv.org/images/sexualassaultstatistics.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> “Sexual Assault Statistics,” accessed November 19, 2021, <http://www.ncdsv.org/images/sexualassaultstatistics.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> “Sexual Assault Statistics,” accessed November 19, 2021, <http://www.ncdsv.org/images/sexualassaultstatistics.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> “Child Sex Trafficking | Polaris,” polarisproject.org, August 21, 2020, <https://polarisproject.org/child-sex-trafficking/>.

<sup>11</sup> Linda Tuhiwai Smith and Cindy Coloma, *Renting Lacy: A Story of America’s Prostituted Children* (Vancouver, Wa: Shared Hope International, 2013).

<sup>12</sup> Melissa Farley et al., “Comparing Sex Buyers with Men Who Do Not Buy Sex: New Data on Prostitution and Trafficking,” *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 32, no. 23 (August 31, 2015): 3601–25, <https://doi.org/>, 18-19.

<sup>13</sup> Melissa Farley, “#MeToo Must Include Prostitution,” *Dignity: A Journal on Sexual Exploitation and Violence* 3, no. 1 (February 2018), <https://doi.org/>; Melissa Farley, “Prostitution and the Invisibility of Harm,” *Women & Therapy* 26, no. 3/4 (2003): 247–80, <https://prostitutionresearch.com/prostitution-and-the-invisibility-of-harm/>, 3.

criminal history are present.<sup>14</sup> Some research has even captured beliefs that sex work offers an outlet for male violence that would otherwise lead to a higher instance of rape.<sup>15</sup> Community denial, blame, and justification lead CSE victims to remain trapped in the shadows and vulnerable to their oppressors.<sup>16</sup>

Commercial Sexual Exploitation thrives on community denial and misinformation. The crime is hard to catch and easy to ignore without a basic understanding of how it occurs in the community. Children and adults victimized by CSE traffickers and buyers are forced to do humiliating and traumatic sexual acts with no knowledge of where to turn to get help exiting abusive situations. Threats of violence, blackmail, or a lack of access to basic needs, such as safe and affordable housing, are all tactics used to keep victims trapped.<sup>17</sup> In recent years, survivors have courageously written autobiographies describing their survival from CSE grooming, recruitment, and victimization in both urban and suburban settings across the United States.<sup>18</sup> Their stories not only bring awareness to the atrocities they suffered; they are a clarion call to serve the needs of victims who remain trapped today.

Perpetrators are also often trapped in the snare of CSE, even as they exacerbate victims' suffering by committing the crime. Sex buyers often exhibit sex addiction manifested through

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<sup>14</sup> "Erasing Criminal Records Lets Trafficking Victims Rebuild - Law360," [www.law360.com](http://www.law360.com), accessed December 4, 2021, <https://www.law360.com/articles/1347157/erasing-criminal-records-lets-trafficking-victims-rebuild>.

<sup>15</sup> Melissa Farley, "Very Inconvenient Truths: Sex Buyers, Sexual Coercion, & Prostitution-Harm-Denial," *Logos Journal of Modern Society & Culture*, October 9, 2016, [http://prostitutionresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Very-inconvenient-truths-sex-buyers\\_sexual-coercion\\_and-prostitution-harm-denial\\_Farley-in-Logos1.pdf](http://prostitutionresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Very-inconvenient-truths-sex-buyers_sexual-coercion_and-prostitution-harm-denial_Farley-in-Logos1.pdf).

<sup>16</sup> Melissa Farley, "#MeToo Must Include Prostitution," *Dignity: A Journal on Sexual Exploitation and Violence* 3, no. 1 (February 2018), <https://doi.org/>; Melissa Farley, "Prostitution and the Invisibility of Harm," *Women & Therapy* 26, no. 3/4 (2003): 247–80, <https://prostitutionresearch.com/prostitution-and-the-invisibility-of-harm/>.

<sup>17</sup> Melissa Farley, "Prostitution and the Invisibility of Harm," *Women & Therapy* 26, no. 3/4 (2003): 247–80, <https://prostitutionresearch.com/prostitution-and-the-invisibility-of-harm/>, 7; Wendy Barnes, *And Life Continues: Sex Trafficking and My Journey to Freedom* (Wendy Barnes, 2015), 195.

<sup>18</sup> Wendy Barnes, *And Life Continues: Sex Trafficking and My Journey to Freedom* (Wendy Barnes, 2015); Savannah J Sanders, *Sex Trafficking Prevention: A Trauma-Informed Approach for Parents and Professionals* (Scottsdale, AZ: Unhooked Books, An Imprint Of High Conflict Institute Press, 2015); Harmony Dust, *Scars & Stilettos: The Transformation of an Exotic Dancer* (Sherman Oaks, Ca: Harmony Dust, 2018); Rachel Moran, *Paid for: My Journey through Prostitution* (New York, N.Y.: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc, 2015).



online pornography, voyeuristic tendencies, or in-person engagement. Brain science indicates that sex addiction is as addictive as heroin.<sup>19</sup> As sex buyers build a tolerance to “moderate” pornography, they report a need to increase the graphic nature of the pornography to get the same fix. The built tolerance leads to becoming sexually aroused by pornographic content that includes gender and race-based violence, humiliation, fetishes, child pornography, and same-sex and transsexual pornography viewed by self-professed heterosexual males.<sup>20</sup> Often the increased need for more extreme content leads virtual sex buyers to buy physical sex acts.<sup>21</sup> In the Chicago study, one sex buyer discussed how he used pornography to teach younger men what to buy from women. He said, “I’d prepare him for it by showing him porn. Look at pornography, see what sex acts they do and go from there.”<sup>22</sup> Even though sex buyers exhibit arousal from fetishes, many report disgust and self-loathing, leading to an increased risk of depression and suicidal ideation.<sup>23</sup> Others who may be exhibiting distress about viewing extreme types of pornography have been known to become physically and sexually violent against CSE victims who are people of color, women, trans-individuals, or anyone else who has become the target of their disgust and arousal.<sup>24</sup> Likewise, victims have reported increases in demands of forced participation in disturbing or violent forms of power or sex abuse.<sup>25</sup> During a recent talk at the *United Nations World Day Against Trafficking*, anti-trafficking expert and CSE survivor Kyra Doubek shared

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<sup>19</sup> Patrick Carnes, *Out of the Shadows: Understanding Sexual Addiction* (Center City, Minn.: Hazelden, 2001), 236.

<sup>20</sup> Gary Wilson, *Your Brain on Porn: Internet Pornography and the Emerging Science of Addiction* (Margate, Kent, United Kingdom: Commonwealth Publishing, 2014).

<sup>21</sup> Patrick Carnes, *Out of the Shadows: Understanding Sexual Addiction* (Center City, Minn.: Hazelden, 2001).

<sup>22</sup> Rachel Durchslag and Samir Goswami, “Deconstructing the Demand for Prostitution: Preliminary Insights from Interviews with Chicago Men Who Purchase Sex,” *National Human Trafficking Hotline*, 2008.

<sup>23</sup> Patrick Carnes, *Out of the Shadows: Understanding Sexual Addiction* (Center City, Minn.: Hazelden, 2001); Gary Wilson, *Your Brain on Porn: Internet Pornography and the Emerging Science of Addiction* (Margate, Kent, United Kingdom: Commonwealth Publishing, 2014).

<sup>24</sup> Patrick Carnes, *Out of the Shadows: Understanding Sexual Addiction* (Center City, Minn.: Hazelden, 2001); Gary Wilson, *Your Brain on Porn: Internet Pornography and the Emerging Science of Addiction* (Margate, Kent, United Kingdom: Commonwealth Publishing, 2014).

<sup>25</sup> Carolyn West, “Let Me Tell Y’all ‘Bout Black Chicks,” Dr. Carolyn West, accessed March 1, 2020; Melissa Farley, “Prostitution and the Invisibility of Harm,” *Women & Therapy* 26, no. 3/4 (2003): 247–80, <https://prostitutionresearch.com/prostitution-and-the-invisibility-of-harm/>, 7-8.

that exploited women die by the average age of 34, often as victims of homicide by sex buyers.<sup>26</sup> Even when murdered, society has treated victims of sexual exploitation with contempt. In the 1990s, law enforcement used the term “no humans involved” or NHI when prostitutes, drug traffickers, or gang members were murdered.<sup>27</sup> During this era that is referred to as “selective enforcement,” many of the NHI murders were documented as misdemeanors rather than homicide.<sup>28</sup>

### **Hear No Evil, See No Evil**

The reality of sex trafficking is horrific, and the content is disturbing. The atrocities common in CSE victim and survivor stories are not openly discussed within Christian circles. Regarding topics around sex, Christians teach about modesty, waiting to have sex until marriage, fleeing lustful situations, and refusing to watch suggestive movies. To lean into the fight against sex trafficking is to become aware of abusive situations that reflect the most extreme levels of graphic content that are unspeakable in Christian circles. Should Christians offer space and resources for CSE survivors to recover from the sexual trauma they have suffered? Are Christians permitted to minister to perpetrators and lead them toward repentance, accountability, and reconciliation to the Lord? No Christian approach should be formed in a manner that opposes scripture. Before Christians consider anti-trafficking engagement, they must study sexual assault and exploitation accounts in scripture and allow these accounts to inform the Christian perspective. If the biblical foundation step is ignored, then Christians may respond to

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<sup>26</sup> Kyra Doubek, Survivor Leaders from around the World Share Their Stories with UN Ambassadors (July 30, 2021).

<sup>27</sup> Diana Cabili, “‘NHI’ Condone Violence against Prostitutes,” accessed November 27, 2021, [https://reflectionsjournal.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/V9.N2.Cabili.Diana\\_.pdf](https://reflectionsjournal.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/V9.N2.Cabili.Diana_.pdf).

<sup>28</sup> Diana Cabili, “‘NHI’ Condone Violence against Prostitutes,” accessed November 27, 2021, [https://reflectionsjournal.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/V9.N2.Cabili.Diana\\_.pdf](https://reflectionsjournal.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/V9.N2.Cabili.Diana_.pdf).

CSE victims with bias, judgment, and power abuse resulting from omitted or distorted interpretations of scripture.

## **Literature Review**

### **What is Human Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation?**

Human trafficking is a crime that encompasses both labor trafficking and sex trafficking. The Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 defines human trafficking as, a) sex trafficking in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such act has not attained 18 years of age; or b) the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery. It is important to note that force, fraud, or coercion need not be present when a minor is trafficked, even when the perpetrator is another minor.<sup>29</sup> Sexual exploitation is the abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power, or trust to profit monetarily, socially, or politically from the labor or commercial sex work of another.<sup>30</sup> Since multiple terms such as human trafficking, sex trafficking, and commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC), are used throughout the research, this writer will most often refer to the crime of sex trafficking as commercial sexual exploitation (CSE) in order to differentiate from labor trafficking and to include the victimization of both minors and adults within the language. The broader term human

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<sup>29</sup> 106th Congress, "Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000," Public Law 106–386 Section 1002 § (2000).

<sup>30</sup> "Sex Trafficking and Exploitation," [www.safevoices.org](https://www.safevoices.org), accessed November 27, 2021, <https://www.safevoices.org/what-domestic-violence/sex-trafficking-and-exploitation>.

trafficking will be used when discussing research or statistics that include both labor and sex trafficking.

Commercial Sexual Exploitation thrives in a community that allows the crime to run rampant without consequence. A community that offers ample opportunity for anonymous illegal sexual activity with little to no risk of punishment is, in part, responsible for the crime that it cultivated. Although sex trafficking is a global and national problem, it is also a local community problem. As a result, this writer will observe a systemic perspective of CSE within the local community context. The CSE local community system will refer to three generalized categories: CSE victims/survivors, CSE perpetrators referring to both traffickers and sex buyers, and the local community referring to both the entire local community and the Christian community as a subcategory within the local community. These three general categories will comprise the CSE local community system.

### **Grooming and Recruitment:**

How are victims lured into being trafficked in the first place? Nationally recognized anti-trafficking organization, The Polaris Project, published statistical trends from reports made to the national Trafficking Hotline. In 2019, they found that the three most common recruitment tactics in the United States were through intimate partners, family members, or through job advertisements.<sup>31</sup> The most common forms of force, fraud, and coercion used to prevent victims from leaving the abuse were found to be the introduction or exploitation of substance use, physical abuse, sexual abuse, displays or threats of violence, and intimacy-related emotional

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<sup>31</sup> “2019 U.S. National Human Trafficking Hotline Statistics | Polaris,” [polarisproject.org](https://polarisproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Polaris-2019-US-National-Human-Trafficking-Hotline-Data-Report.pdf), July 31, 2020, <https://polarisproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Polaris-2019-US-National-Human-Trafficking-Hotline-Data-Report.pdf>.

abuse.<sup>32</sup> Although the presence of force, fraud, or coercion are often reported by both minors and adults, this form of abuse is not required for trafficking to have taken place when a minor is involved. Any sex act with a minor in exchange for anything is indicative that CSEC has taken place. In the 2019 study, 67% of people reporting victimization indicated that they were 17 or younger when they were initially trafficked.<sup>33</sup>

Statistics are beneficial in understanding trends, but Washington Trafficking Prevention director Kyra Doubek cautions the community to be careful not to use these trends to overgeneralize the unique circumstances surrounding each survivor's story. While training the community, Kyra shares, "If you have met one trafficking survivor, then you have met one trafficking survivor."<sup>34</sup> In the past decade, many CSE survivors have courageously written autobiographies explaining how they were groomed, recruited, trafficked, and how they managed to escape. Their life stories depict both similarities and distinct differences that can heighten a community's awareness of the various ways that CSE occurs in the local community.

In her book *Girls Like Us*, anti-trafficking leader Rachel Lloyd describes common grooming and recruiting tactics that minors have disclosed through the *Girls Educational and Mentoring Services* (GEMS) peer-support program.<sup>35</sup> She explains that many teens who have grown up in abusive households tend to be targeted by pimps who may seem safer than their own families.<sup>36</sup> Initial grooming tactics may resemble a dating relationship where actions may seem

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<sup>32</sup> "2019 U.S. National Human Trafficking Hotline Statistics | Polaris," [polarisproject.org](https://polarisproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Polaris-2019-US-National-Human-Trafficking-Hotline-Data-Report.pdf), July 31, 2020, <https://polarisproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Polaris-2019-US-National-Human-Trafficking-Hotline-Data-Report.pdf>.

<sup>33</sup> "2019 U.S. National Human Trafficking Hotline Statistics | Polaris," [polarisproject.org](https://polarisproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Polaris-2019-US-National-Human-Trafficking-Hotline-Data-Report.pdf), July 31, 2020, <https://polarisproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Polaris-2019-US-National-Human-Trafficking-Hotline-Data-Report.pdf>.

<sup>34</sup> Washington Trafficking Prevention, "2021 TCCAT Community Conversation," [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com), February 1, 2021.

<sup>35</sup> Rachel Lloyd, *Girls like Us: Fighting for a World Where Girls Are Not for Sale: A Memoir* (New York: Harperperennial ; Enfield, 2012).

<sup>36</sup> Rachel Lloyd, *Girls like Us: Fighting for a World Where Girls Are Not for Sale: A Memoir* (New York: Harperperennial ; Enfield, 2012), 71-73.

consensual, even to the victim. One common pattern begins with a relationship forming with a trafficker that poses as a boyfriend figure. After a relationship is formed, the trafficker will appear to confide in the victim, will state that he is in a financial crisis, and will ask her to help him through the crisis by performing a sex act for money “just this one time.” She is reassured that it will not change his love, and that he will know he can depend on her when he needs her the most. Out of love, loyalty, and the desire to help her boyfriend in a crisis, the victim will comply. Initial commercial sex acts are often followed by the trafficker feigning gratitude, affirmation, apologies for putting the victim in the situation, comfort, and sex. This grooming process can form a deeper relational bond between the victim and the trafficker and can cause the victim to believe that they voluntarily decided to receive money in exchange for sex. This pattern may repeat a few more times before the trafficker begins treating the victim with contempt and violence. Common next steps include changing the victim’s name, forcing the victim to comply to an objectified identity, incorporating the victim into a group of other trafficking victims, and forcing the victim to meet a certain quota of sex acts or money per day. If the victim objects, then they are physically abused, shamed, threatened, or blackmailed.<sup>37</sup> Sometimes, the trafficker introduces drugs to the victim as a means of disabling a victim’s fight or flight responses, deadening traumatic experiences through drug relief, and creating further dependence on the trafficker to provide drugs once the victim is addicted.<sup>38</sup> All expenses including drugs, rent, food, and clothing are leveraged against victims as debt bondage.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Armand King, *Raised in Pimp City: The Uncut Truth about Domestic Human Sex Trafficking*, Amazon, 1st edition (Ariginal One Publishing, 2019); Wendy Barnes, *And Life Continues: Sex Trafficking and My Journey to Freedom* (Wendy Barnes, 2015).

<sup>38</sup> Debra Boyer, “Who Pays the Price? Assessment of Youth Involvement in Prostitution in Seattle,” *Prostitution Research & Education*, 2008; Linda Tuhiwai Smith and Cindy Coloma, *Renting Lacy: A Story of America’s Prostituted Children* (Vancouver, Wa: Shared Hope International, 2013); Wendy Barnes, *And Life Continues: Sex Trafficking and My Journey to Freedom* (Wendy Barnes, 2015).

<sup>39</sup> Nita Belles, *In Our Backyard: A Christian Perspective on Human Trafficking in the United States* (United States: Free River, 2011).

In 2018, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) reported that “of the more than 23,500 runaways reported to NCMEC in 2018, one in seven were likely victims of child sex trafficking.”<sup>40</sup> Yet, runaways are only one group at risk for commercial sexual exploitation. Girls, boys, and women who are exploited have diverse backgrounds including age, socio-economic status, education, race, citizenship, spoken language, and family background. Although victims come from all walks of life, those most marginalized within the community tend to be at a heightened risk of being trafficked. The use of the internet and phone apps have increased opportunities for traffickers to recruit and groom victims and for buyers to participate in the crime while remaining anonymous.<sup>41</sup> The average age that girls are recruited into commercial sexual exploitation is 12-17 years old.<sup>42</sup> While many 12-17 year-olds in the United States are dealing with the woes of middle school and high school, victims of trafficking are subjected to rape, physical abuse, being threatened or harmed with weapons, forced drug use, forced abortions, being held against their will, gas-lighting, forced pornography, blackmail, burning or other forms of branding, threats to life and lives of loved ones, withheld medical care, forced hunger, and incarceration to name some of the most common accounts reported from survivors, law enforcement, detectives, and other advocates.<sup>43</sup> To add insult to injury, many

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<sup>40</sup> “About NCMEC,” Key Facts, accessed November 2, 2019, <http://www.missingkids.com/footer/media/keyfacts>.

<sup>41</sup> I Am Jane Doe. *50 Eggs Film*, 2017. <https://www.iamjanedoe.com/>. (Film: Documentary); “Sex Trafficking in America,” *Frontline*, May 28, 2019, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/film/sex-trafficking-in-america/>.

<sup>42</sup> Rachel Lloyd, *Girls like Us: Fighting for a World Where Girls Are Not for Sale, an Activist Finds Her Calling and Heals Herself* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2012).

<sup>43</sup> Melissa Farley, “Prostitution and the Invisibility of Harm,” *Women & Therapy* 26, no. 3/4 (2003): 247–80, <https://prostitutionresearch.com/prostitution-and-the-invisibility-of-harm/>, 7; Savannah J Sanders, *Sex Trafficking Prevention: A Trauma-Informed Approach for Parents and Professionals* (Scottsdale, AZ: Unhooked Books, An Imprint Of High Conflict Institute Press, 2015), Kindle Loc 588; “COVID-19 and Crime: The Impact of the Pandemic on Human Trafficking,” *United Nations: Office on Drugs and Crime*, n.d., <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/frontpage/2021/July/covid-19-and-crime-the-impact-of-the-pandemic-on-human-trafficking.html>.

survivors who have exited exploitive situations have reported being judged, blamed, ignored, or belittled by the local community.<sup>44</sup>

Survivor and author Rachel Moran describes how her sexual exploitation happened as a means of survival rather than the result of coercion by a specific trafficker. She explains that the community is less judgmental of someone victimized by an abusive trafficker than it is of a person forced to exploit themselves to acquire basic resources such as food and shelter (“survival sex”). Moran describes how single mothers stood on the street next to her trying to make enough money to pay for school shoes, uniforms, or medical treatment for their children. In her book *Paid For*, Moran writes, “Those mothers who prostituted themselves at Christmas time, or communion time, or the new school year made bigger sacrifices for their children than most parents can understand.”<sup>45</sup> A story similar to Moran’s description has stood the test of time in literature, cinema, and Broadway. *Les Misérables* tells Fantine’s story of destitution upon losing her job. After selling her hair and her teeth to pay for her child’s care, she resorts to CSE. Following her first exploitation, Fantine sings the famous and heartbreaking song, *I Dreamed a Dream*, bringing audiences to tears with her tragic story.<sup>46</sup> This fictional account draws empathy from masses, yet survivors living similar circumstances in real life are avoided or judged.<sup>47</sup> Research indicates that men, boys, and people who identify as transgender are more often exploited via survival sex than by a third party trafficker. Rather than receiving help the survivors have reported being disregarded or criminalized by law enforcement.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Amy Vatne Bintliff et al., “Lifelong Wellbeing for Survivors of Sex Trafficking: Collaborative Perspectives from Survivors, Researchers, and Service Providers,” *Dignity: A Journal on Sexual Exploitation and Violence* 3, no. 3 (October 2018), <https://doi.org/>.

<sup>45</sup> Rachel Moran, *Paid For: My Journey through Prostitution* (New York, N.Y.: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc, 2015), Ch. 19, Audible 7:16:00.

<sup>46</sup> Cameron Mackintosh Ltd, “Les Misérables: Welcome to the Official Website,” *Lesmis.com*, 2019, <https://www.lesmis.com>.

<sup>47</sup> Rachel Moran, *Paid For: My Journey through Prostitution* (New York, N.Y.: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc, 2015).

<sup>48</sup> Andrea J Nichols, Tonya Edmond, and Erin C Heil, *Social Work Practice with Survivors of Sex Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), Kindle Location 183.



Even when traffickers are known to have groomed and recruited their victims, it is often the victims who are blamed for their abuse. In her book *Girls Like Us*, Rachel Lloyd powerfully describes two different recruitment tactics that receive different levels of empathy from the community:

“Some of the girls, however, have been forced into the sex industry through kidnapping and violence, held at gunpoint, pushed into a car, kept in a locked room. Girls are then raped, often gang-raped initially, to break their will. The subsequent shock and traumatic response leave the girl feeling utterly helpless and totally subdued. The fear often keeps her from running away. The shame can keep her from reaching out for help. While it can be shocking for people to initially learn that American girls, ones who never, ever make the news, are kidnapped with increasing frequency, these are still relatively, the cases that tend to engender the most public sympathy and interest from the criminal justice system. Their victimization seems obvious and fits into a tidier, more common understanding of human trafficking. Yet for most of the girls, the force, the violence, the gun in her face don’t come until later. Their pathway into the commercial sex industry is facilitated through seduction, promises, and the belief that the abuser is actually their boyfriend. Statistics show that the majority of commercially sexually exploited children are homeless, runaways, or the distastefully termed “throwaways.” These girls and young women have a tougher time in the court of public systems. It is presumed that somewhere along the line they “chose” this life, and this damns them to be seen as willing participants to their own abuse.”<sup>49</sup>

It is important to recognize that not all victims are missing. Some are trafficked while never skipping a day of school or college. Others are blackmailed by ex-boyfriends or girlfriends who are profiting off sexting images. Still, others are being trafficked out of their homes by their parents or guardians. Although these issues are happening in local communities, the culture is primed to dismiss potential cautionary signs of exploitation. Moreover, CSE survivors have criticized the music and movie industries for glorifying pimps and sex buyers as symbols of successful lifestyles to be pursued. Several survivors have warned that the movie *Pretty Woman* turned prostitution and sex buying into a Cinderella story. Survivors explain that a culture primed to enjoy stories of virgin teens locked in high towers awaiting their rescuers is already a

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<sup>49</sup> Rachel Lloyd, *Girls like Us: Fighting for a World Where Girls Are Not for Sale: A Memoir* (New York: Harper Perennial ; Enfield, 2012), 74.

going concern, however adding the romance between a prostitute and a sex buyer is an additional and distinct concern.<sup>50</sup> Classic and modern-day fables blind the local community from seeing predatory opportunists or recognizing real victims who suffer in local neighborhoods and schools.

### **Sex Buyers:**

Just as traffickers can groom victims, perpetrators can groom other perpetrators to be sex buyers and traffickers. In 2014, researchers Durchslag and Goswami conducted a study where they interviewed 113 male sex buyers in Chicago. When sex buyers were asked about the first time they purchased sex, 46% indicated that peer pressure from friends or a family member was involved, and 29% said that their first sexual encounter of any kind was through paid sex.<sup>51</sup> In their opinions, to decline was to be called derogatory names by peers. Some said that they went to a strip club with friends. Several reported that their brothers, uncles, or fathers bought them sex to lose their virginity and enter manhood.<sup>52</sup> Similarly, one CSE survivor mentioned a traumatic experience she endured of being forced by a father to have sex with his teenage son.<sup>53</sup> Other men described that the initial act of buying sex came from the compulsion to act out their pornographic fantasies.<sup>54</sup> The total number of times and frequency that the interviewees purchased sex varied significantly with 77% of the buyers indicating that they had purchased 1-40 different sexual encounters and 23% of the buyers admitting to purchasing 41-100 or more

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<sup>50</sup> Rachel Moran, *Paid For: My Journey through Prostitution* (New York, N.Y.: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc, 2015), Ch. 16, Audible 12:42:00.

<sup>51</sup> Durchslag and Goswami, "Deconstructing the Demand for Prostitution: Preliminary Insights from Interviews with Chicago Men Who Purchase Sex."

<sup>52</sup> Durchslag and Goswami, "Deconstructing the Demand for Prostitution: Preliminary Insights from Interviews with Chicago Men Who Purchase Sex."

<sup>53</sup> Rachel Moran, *Paid For: My Journey through Prostitution* (New York, N.Y.: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc, 2015).

<sup>54</sup> Durchslag and Goswami, "Deconstructing the Demand for Prostitution: Preliminary Insights from Interviews with Chicago Men Who Purchase Sex."

sexual encounters.<sup>55</sup> The average frequency of purchases ranged between “several times per month” to “a couple times a year.”<sup>56</sup>

The Chicago study also focused on how sex buyers perceived women involved in paid sex acts. Some of the men considered all women to be prostitutes because they could be bought with a dinner date or gifts. Some used this concept to normalize their behavior and to justify that no harm was done when purchasing sex. However, when the interviewees were asked why they purchased sex, more sinister reasons arose. Nearly 50% of the buyers said that they purchased sex in order to obtain sex acts that they either felt uncomfortable asking their partner or which their partner refused to perform.<sup>57</sup> In other words, when the men had experienced boundaries with spouses, partners, or their own conscience, then they paid for the ability to cross that boundary with someone who was unable to refuse. Common sentiments across several studies were reflected in statements like, “I want to pay someone to do something a normal person wouldn’t do,” and “Anything you can’t get from your girlfriend or wife, you can get from a prostitute.”<sup>58</sup> A third of the interviewees said that they purchased sex because of the absence of commitment or responsibility. One man stated, “You don’t care about this person- it’s a feeling of no strings. I don’t have to see that person anymore if I don’t want to.”<sup>59</sup> As the researchers asked questions that led to the interviewees’ perceptions of male dominance and violence, they found that 43% believed that if a man paid for sex, then the woman should do anything he says. One buyer added, “She gave up her rights when she accepted my money.” When assessing perception of rape, 21% believed that the concept of rape does not apply to prostitutes because of the money exchange, and 39% believed that prostitution decreases the rate of other women being

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<sup>55</sup> Durchslag and Goswami, 9.

<sup>56</sup> Durchslag and Goswami, 9.

<sup>57</sup> Durchslag and Goswami, 9.

<sup>58</sup> Melissa Farley, “Very Inconvenient Truths: Sex Buyers, Sexual Coercion, & Prostitution-Harm-Denial,” *Logos Journal of Modern Society & Culture*, October 9, 2016.

<sup>59</sup> Durchslag and Goswami, 14.

raped.<sup>60</sup> Although the interviewees rationalized that women had some choice in the prostitution, and though they believed that they were not at fault for forcing women to do whatever they asked because money was exchanged, 75% of the interviewees acknowledged seeing women who were managed by pimps and 40% admitted to purchasing sex from women with pimps. Most of the men perceived that the women they had purchased had experienced trauma and violence that they had seen and that some admitted to committing. Regarding pimp control, one buyer stated, “I’ve seen situations where you could call it mind control - just verbal. No escalating voice, no physical violence, just mind control.”<sup>61</sup> When asked why they currently bought sex, their reasons included obtaining sex acts they could not get from a partner (47%), physical actions without commitment (36%), feeding their sex addiction (83%), feeling a sense of companionship (19%), peer pressure, influences in the workplace, and acting out pornographic fantasies.<sup>62</sup> Multiple interviewees also described purchasing sex as an outlet for violence instead of taking their anger out on their wife or kids.<sup>63</sup> Many buyers expressed views that objectified CSE victims as products for consumer purchase.<sup>64</sup>

Throughout the years, the community has acted as if sex buyers either do not exist or play so minimal a role that they are the least responsible for the issue of sex trafficking. Statistically, there are significantly more sex buyers than traffickers or trafficked persons.<sup>65</sup> Without consumers, there would be no demand for sex trafficking in the first place.<sup>66</sup> In recent years, anti-traffickers have pushed to update a focus on decreasing buyer demand by using strategies such as

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<sup>60</sup> Durchslag and Goswami, 21-22.

<sup>61</sup> Durchslag and Goswami, 25.

<sup>62</sup> Durchslag and Goswami, 12-14.

<sup>63</sup> Durchslag and Goswami, 13-15.

<sup>64</sup> Durchslag and Goswami, 16.

<sup>65</sup> Moran, *Paid For: My Journey through Prostitution*, Ch. 19. Rachel Moran indicates that there is an estimated 40-50 sex buyers to every 1 CSE victim.

<sup>66</sup> King, *Raised in Pimp City: The Uncut Truth about Domestic Human Sex Trafficking*; Farley, et al., “Comparing Sex Buyers with Men Who Don’t Buy Sex,” 45.

criminal arrests, financial penalties, sting operations, and increased visible accountability of sex buyers to the community.<sup>67</sup> One study, led by internationally recognized researcher Melissa Farley, asked sex buyers to rate the consequences that would most likely deter them from buying sex in the future. The highest-rated deterrent was to be registered as a sex offender. The second biggest motivator toward behavior change included various forms of public visibility, such as publishing their faces in newspapers, social media, and billboards. Another consequence that would deter some from reoffending was sending written letters to their family members explaining their offense.<sup>68</sup> Although fines, arrests, and education programs may be important, it was the threat of being identified as a sex buyer that buyers rated as the most significant motivator toward behavior change.<sup>69</sup> When the community protects the perpetrator from a visible consequence, the community is shielding them from what buyers self-report as the most essential and sobering consequence that a community can provide.

### **Sex Traffickers:**

When the community thinks of sex traffickers, they may be picturing a few stereotypical descriptions. One common assumption is a foreign trafficking ring, as described in the movie *Taken*.<sup>70</sup> Although trafficking rings exist, this is not the description of the traffickers most likely to thrive in local communities in the United States. Another common stereotype emerges out of the cinematic or theatrical caricature of pimps with big colorful hats, coats, and fancy cars. This stereotype is often deeply immersed in racism, portrays the trafficker as being Black, and overgeneralizes an outdated 1970's concept of trafficking as if it were the common rule. In his

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<sup>67</sup> Farley, et al., "Comparing Sex Buyers with Men Who Don't Buy Sex."

<sup>68</sup> Farley, et al., "Comparing Sex Buyers with Men Who Don't Buy Sex," 36-38.

<sup>69</sup> Farley, et al., "Comparing Sex Buyers with Men Who Don't Buy Sex," 36-38 and 44.

<sup>70</sup> Jonathan Todres, "Movies and Myths about Human Trafficking," *The Conversation*, January 20, 2016; *Taken*, DVD, *IMDb*, 2008, *IMDb.com*, [www.imdb.com/title/tt0936501/characters/nm0000553](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0936501/characters/nm0000553).

book, *Raised in Pimp City*, Armand King writes about growing up in Los Angeles in the 1980s, and he gives the historical context of how pimping in the 1970s, crack cocaine, the war on drugs, the increase in gangs, and the emergence of a new generation of pimps were all deeply intertwined.<sup>71</sup> King shares about his decision to become a pimp, his first-hand knowledge of the system, and his journey of leaving the life. King has dedicated his work to getting other pimps out of the life of trafficking and into healthier ways of making money that do not harm other people.<sup>72</sup> His story is heartbreaking, informative, and provides a crucial perspective that is missing in most anti-trafficking conversations. King's book is the only ex-trafficker autobiography recommended to this writer by trafficking survivors. Some survivors have said that his book has helped them to further identify the trauma they experienced and has provided a way to articulate the complexities of urban prostitution that few have been willing to discuss.<sup>73</sup>

If these common stereotypes cannot be generalized to the type of trafficking that occurs today in local communities across the nation, then how can local traffickers be identified? These days traffickers still exist, but they lure people in different ways. The use of online marketplace websites, online dating resources, online gaming, and social media apps are common places for traffickers to target and recruit people. Only a few years ago, Craigslist voluntarily closed the commercial sex portion of their website after receiving pressure from 17 attorneys general across the US.<sup>74</sup> The concerted effort to hold Craigslist accountable happened amid a nationwide effort by law enforcement, lawyers, and congress to shutdown Backpage.com for profiting off of the commercial sexual exploitation of children.<sup>75</sup> With the rise of the internet, phone apps, online dating sites, and digital currency like bitcoin, sex trafficking has thrived in the shadows of the

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<sup>71</sup> Armand King, *Raised in Pimp City: The Uncut Truth about Domestic Human Sex Trafficking*, Amazon, 1st edition (Original One Publishing, 2019).

<sup>72</sup> King, *Raised in Pimp City: The Uncut Truth About Domestic Human Sex Trafficking*.

<sup>73</sup> King, *Raised in Pimp City: The Uncut Truth About Domestic Human Sex Trafficking*.

<sup>74</sup> Belles, *In Our Backyard: A Christian Perspective on Human Trafficking in the United States*, Ch.1.

<sup>75</sup> *I Am Jane Doe*. 50 Eggs Film, 2017. <https://www.iamjanedofilm.com/>. (Film: Documentary)

web and adapted behind loopholes in the 1st Amendment of free speech.<sup>76</sup> Anonymous locations, such as AirB&Bs outside the knowledge of the homeowner, are beginning to replace the use of hotel rooms providing trafficking locations in the most unassuming neighborhoods. The ability to traffic local victims within their communities makes it possible for victims to suffer without ever disappearing from their homes or crossing state lines. The ability to traffic victims or images of victims from their homes also makes it difficult for families or the community to recognize red flags.

In the eye-opening documentary, *I am Jane Doe*, the film recounts the elaborate steps taken to hold Backpage.com accountable for profiting off the exploitation of CSEC survivors.<sup>77</sup> The documentary indicates that Backpage not only sold current victims, but they refused to remove images of former child sex victims that they continued to sell. When the documentary was made, neither parents, lawyers, nor law enforcement could persuade Backpage to remove the images. Teenage survivors and their families discuss the trauma of the past and the horror of knowing that pornographic images of their teens were still being sold for profit with no way to stop them.<sup>78</sup> In 2018, Backpage was finally held accountable and removed from the internet. Although a trafficking giant fell, many more websites sprang up in its place, giving traffickers easy access to recruit and sell bodies for profit.<sup>79</sup>

Traffickers also look like fellow teenagers. The ability for teens to record explicit images and send them to peers, social media, and websites has had disastrous consequences. Youth are blackmailed by other youth who threaten to expose graphic content if they do not comply with demands placed on them by the aggressor or group of aggressors. One study showed that threats

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<sup>76</sup> *I Am Jane Doe*, 2017.

<sup>77</sup> *I Am Jane Doe*, 2017.

<sup>78</sup> *I Am Jane Doe*, 2017.

<sup>79</sup> "COVID-19 and Crime: The Impact of the Pandemic on Human Trafficking," *United Nations: Office on Drugs and Crime*.

like these are followed through 50% of the time. Anxiety, depression, and suicidality exhibit at alarming rates in youth who are targeted by their peers.<sup>80</sup> Trafficking awareness and prevention groups such as Washington Trafficking Prevention, Adorned in Grace, and Power Over Predators focus on training middle school and high school youth to care for one another, learn to recognize trafficking red flags, and to notify trusted adults.<sup>81</sup> Increased CSE awareness and peer-based empathy programs are making a qualitative difference according to teen self-reports.<sup>82</sup>

### **Community Responsibility:**

The community plays a role in keeping people safe by holding CSE perpetrators accountable however the community must first recognize its culpability in CSE before it can make significant strides to fight it. Prominent issues, such as a lack of trafficking awareness and existing cultural bias such as racism and sexism, prime the community to blame certain groups while absolving others. These two issues will be explored.

### *Lack of Awareness*

The community has a general lack of awareness of how local trafficking and exploitation occurs. Survivor and speaker Savannah Sanders says that the two most common responses she receives at her lectures are, “I thought that only happened in Thailand,” and “Why don’t they run away from their kidnappers?”<sup>83</sup> When a community’s only understanding of human trafficking is a vague concept of foreign trafficking rings, then the community may try to perceive local

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<sup>80</sup> “Citywide Safe Summit 2021,” Digital Livestream, *Power Over Predators* (Power Over Predators and the Pima County Superintendent’s Office, October 28, 2021).

<sup>81</sup> “Citywide Safe Summit 2021,” *Power Over Predators*; “Prevent Trafficking of Youth- Washington Trafficking Prevention,” *WTP*.

<sup>82</sup> “Citywide Safe Summit 2021,” *Power Over Predators*; “Prevent Trafficking of Youth- Washington Trafficking Prevention,” *WTP*.

<sup>83</sup> Sanders, *Sex Trafficking Prevention: A Trauma-Informed Approach for Parents and Professionals*.



trafficking issues from an uninformed perspective. This distortion causes the community to remain oblivious to common red flags occurring in public areas in broad daylight. In his book *The Slave Next Door*, Kevin Bales explained that labor and sex trafficking victims regularly encounter potential “Good Samaritans” who fail to recognize clues that an individual is being trafficked. But Bales explains that nearly a third of all labor and sex trafficking survivors who are rescued by authorities were initially recognized by a Good Samaritan who noticed the signs and who called authorities.<sup>84</sup> If the community is trained to recognize local trafficking red flags, then there will be more Good Samaritans equipped to identify victims and perpetrators in public settings.

Not only are most community members oblivious to signs of local human trafficking, but so are professionals. In a 2008 study with social service providers in Seattle, WA, Debra Boyer found that most social service providers reported a lack of training on prostitution and a hesitancy to talk with youth about behaviors indicative of trafficking red flags.<sup>85</sup> Despite resources on how to provide social services and mental health care to CSE survivors, most professionals remain unaware.<sup>86</sup> In Boyer’s interviews, social service providers said “I do not know how to talk about this,” “We do not know how to have the conversation,” and “We are just unaware.”<sup>87</sup> Kevin Bales states that although state and local law enforcement are responsible for responding to human trafficking reports, few were trained to do so. A survey conducted with state and local law enforcement indicated that “most state and local police either have no idea that human trafficking actually occurs or don’t believe it happens within their jurisdiction.”<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Kevin Bales and Ron Soodalter, *The Slave Next Door: Human Trafficking and Slavery in America Today* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2010), 165.

<sup>85</sup> Boyer, 16.

<sup>86</sup> Nichols, Edmond, and Heil, *Social Work Practice with Survivors of Sex Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation*.

<sup>87</sup> Boyer, 16.

<sup>88</sup> Bales and Soodalter, 265.

Bales strongly recommends that law enforcement establish anti-trafficking units and utilize nationwide training programs already developed by anti-trafficking groups.<sup>89</sup>

Other gaps in knowledge could be remedied by educating consumers about human trafficking tactics used in various industries and maximized by certain companies. Past and present Dirty Dozen lists are an excellent resource for consumers to see the front lines of anti-trafficking progress and ongoing pursuits. The *Slavery Footprint* is another informative resource that invites people to complete a survey that estimates how many enslaved individuals they may be “employing” based on consumer and lifestyle choices. The website educates the individual and offers them alternative consumer options.<sup>90</sup>

### *Existing Cultural Bias: Intersectionality of Racism and Trafficking*

Human trafficking did not begin as an international crime that infiltrated the United States. The ugly truth is that the United States profited from human trafficking long before the online global giants, social media, and pornography sites came into existence.<sup>91</sup> American history has been steeped in slavery, racism, and violence against marginalized groups for hundreds of years. During the era of legal institutional slavery in the United States, many Black men, women, boys, and girls suffered severe forms of physical and sexual abuse. Both men and women were forced to have intercourse to produce children whom the enslavers could use for profit and leverage. Families were separated and sold at the discretion of the oppressor. Enslavers could assault enslaved people with no fear of legal consequences. As a result, enslaved adults and children were targets of abuse, including molestation, voyeurism, rape, and castration.<sup>92</sup> In a

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<sup>89</sup> Bales and Soodalter, 266.

<sup>90</sup> “How Many Slaves Work for You?,” *slaveryfootprint.org*, n.d., <http://slaveryfootprint.org/>.

<sup>91</sup> West, “*Let Me Tell Ya’ll ‘Bout Black Chicks: Images of Black Women in Pornography.*”; Farley, “Prostitution and the Invisibility of Harm,” 9.

<sup>92</sup> Yewande Adeleke, “African Male Slaves Experienced Untold Hardship during the Slave Trade Era,” *Medium*, July 10, 2021, <https://historyofyesterday.com/african-male-slaves-experienced-untold-hardship-during-the-slave->

chapter dedicated to comparing historical slavery to modern-day slavery, Bales writes, “Today, we are still conflicted about our slaveholding past and its ugly aftermath. We study it, lament it, and argue it as a haunting presence from our darker history. Yet while we were looking the other way, slavery in America evolved into a whole new beast that lives in darkness among us and feeds on ignorance and misery.”<sup>93</sup> The intersectionality of racism, sexism, and bias against anyone paid for sex, has primed the culture to judge victims and to ignore, justify, or absolve perpetrators.<sup>94</sup>

Commercial sexual exploitation targets people across every demographic, but people of color are disproportionately exploited in America and by Americans across the globe. Although most people in a local community may not associate racism with sex trafficking, research shows that racial bias plays a significant role in commercial sexual exploitation.<sup>95</sup> In a study conducted in Boston that interviewed 100 men who bought sex, 50% of the men selected women based on their ethnicity, using “blatant race stereotyping” and 27% of the men said that they had gone to other countries to use women in prostitution.<sup>96</sup> Several studies referred to sex tourism as modern-day colonialism and CSE in America as a continuation of blatant and brutal forms of racism and sexism evidenced in US History.<sup>97</sup> In a recent presentation on the topic of racism against black women and pornography, University of Washington professor Dr. Carolyn West said that “the idea that black women would do things that other ethnicities would not do is embedded in US history, and pornography plays that out.”<sup>98</sup> In her research on word content in pornography film

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trade-era-b4ef68b980ed; Bales and Soodalter; West, “*Let Me Tell Ya’ll ‘Bout Black Chicks: Images of Black Women in Pornography.*”

<sup>93</sup> Bales and Soodalter, 17.

<sup>94</sup> Farley, “Prostitution and the Invisibility of Harm,” 9-10.

<sup>95</sup> Farley, “Prostitution and the Invisibility of Harm.”; Farley, “Very Inconvenient Truths: Sex Buyers, Sexual Coercion, & Prostitution-Harm-Denial.”; Farley, et al., “Comparing Sex Buyers With Men Who Don’t Buy Sex.”

<sup>96</sup> Farley, et al., “Comparing Sex Buyers With Men Who Don’t Buy Sex,” 17-18.

<sup>97</sup> Farley, “Prostitution and the Invisibility of Harm.”; Farley, “Very Inconvenient Truths: Sex Buyers, Sexual Coercion, & Prostitution-Harm-Denial.”; Farley, et al., “Comparing Sex Buyers With Men Who Don’t Buy Sex.”

<sup>98</sup> West, “*Let Me Tell Ya’ll ‘Bout Black Chicks: Images of Black Women in Pornography.*”

titles and magazine headlines, Dr. West found that over 6,000 pornographic DVDs had the word *black* in the title and countless others films and magazines had derogatory language that blatantly objectified historical or modern-day racist stereotypes of Black women and girls.<sup>99</sup> When slavery was legal, West stated that an estimated 58%-70% of women and girls who were sold into slavery were sexually assaulted or raped without legal support for justice. A Mississippi law established in 1854 declared that enslaved women were “hypersexual,” and therefore “unrapeable.”<sup>100</sup> Contemporary pornography exacerbates this toxic concept by inferring that when women of other ethnicities may say no, black women won’t.<sup>101</sup> West described how some of the films depicted White men wearing confederate flags while assaulting Black women while other films mixed pornography with extreme symbols of historical violence such as nooses and KKK clothing.<sup>102</sup>

Melissa Farley, a leading expert in research on commercial sexual exploitation, has found that men who buy sex in Asian and Caribbean countries perceive women of color as “natural-born sex workers, sexually promiscuous, and immoral by nature.” She continues, “Over time, women of color come to be viewed as ‘exotic others’ and were defined as inherently hypersexual on the basis of race and gender.” When explaining why men might buy sex in other countries, she wrote, “He may feel like a millionaire in a third or fourth world economy and rationalize that he is helping women out of poverty.” She related this rationalization to a form of colonialism and racist exploitation.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> West, “*Let Me Tell Ya’ll ‘Bout Black Chicks: Images of Black Women in Pornography.*”

<sup>100</sup> Patricia Broussard, “Black Women’s Post-Slavery Silence Syndrome: A Twenty-First Century Remnant of Slavery, Jim Crow, and Systemic Racism--Who Will Tell Her Stories?,” *J. Gender Race & Just* 373 (2013): 373–421, <https://commons.law.famu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1067&context=faculty-research>, 381; West, “*Let Me Tell Ya’ll ‘Bout Black Chicks: Images of Black Women in Pornography.*”

<sup>101</sup> West, “*Let Me Tell Ya’ll ‘Bout Black Chicks: Images of Black Women in Pornography.*”

<sup>102</sup> West, “*Let Me Tell Ya’ll ‘Bout Black Chicks: Images of Black Women in Pornography.*”

<sup>103</sup> Farley, “Prostitution and the Invisibility of Harm,” 9.

## *Existing Cultural Bias: Intersectionality of Sexism and Trafficking*

Although gender equality has been an ongoing fight in the United States for over a century and monumental changes have been made, gender-based power abuse still thrives in the shadows of American culture. The last few years have seen breakthrough cases in which powerful sex offenders have been held accountable for their actions. Pulitzer Prize-winning New York Times journalists Jodi Kantor and Megan Twohey were the first to courageously publicize the sexual harassment and assault allegations against Harvey Weinstein that led to the #MeToo Movement.<sup>104</sup> In their book *She Said*, the journalists shared how arduous the journey toward publishing the article was. They describe how difficult it was to unearth decades of sexual assault allegations that had been silenced by settlement checks, intimidation, and physical and legal threats. They stated that although settlement checks gave the women some financial retribution for their suffering, the system designed to pay victims to stay silent “may be perpetuating the problem and protecting the perpetrator.”<sup>105</sup> One of the first women to break the silence was Gwyneth Paltrow, who stated that Weinstein “counted on my shame to keep me silent.”<sup>106</sup> The journalists said of the #MeToo Movement that followed the New York Times article that “this was the first time that telling the truth would lead to belief or action.”<sup>107</sup> Within a month, pushback emerged criticizing that the #MeToo allegations were victimizing men. As more allegations against male public figures hit national news, the New York Times asked their readers if they had ever done anything to women that they regret. Hundreds of readers responded by sharing times when they upheld gender inequality, engaged in sexual harassment, and even admitted to committing assault against women.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Jodi Kantor and Megan Twohey, *She Said: How Two Reporters Broke the Story That Changed the Rules about Sex and Power* (London: Bloomsbury Circus, 2019).

<sup>105</sup> Kantor and Twohey, 54.

<sup>106</sup> Kantor and Twohey, Ch. 3.

<sup>107</sup> Kantor and Twohey, Ch. 8.

<sup>108</sup> Kantor and Twohey, Ch. 9.

However, during the #MeToo movement, when women all over the nation willingly disclosed being sexually harassed or assaulted, one group of women in the community did not appear to be invited to openly say “me too!” For women and men who identify with the #MeToo Movement and who are empathetic to hearing the personal stories of others, the #MeToo Movement could act as a bridge for the community to learn to recognize the humanity of sexually trafficked women and the crimes that occur against them. To those who may feel an immediate internal response to say, “that’s different,” researcher Melissa Farley would disagree. In order to challenge and deconstruct implicit bias regarding commercial sexual exploitation, Farley chose to use the more charged word “prostitute” in her article. She challenges the reader to consider that if prostitution is the exchange of sexual behavior for money, security, food, or any other basic need, then sexual harassment in the workplace could also be viewed as prostitution.<sup>109</sup> She also challenges that just as victims of workplace sexual harassment, assault, and rape should be believed and perpetrators should be held accountable, so too should prostitutes be given the same voice about the atrocities that occur to them regularly. Without minimizing the #MeToo accounts, but by using the accounts as a shared place of understanding, Farley quotes a statement from a CSE survivor, “Everything the women are describing in #MeToo are common everyday experiences of women in prostitution. Women in prostitution are seen as a legitimate target for men’s violence, that we somehow deserve what we get.” Farley follows the quote by adding, “In prostitution, women are defined as rentable sex organs, as unrapeable, less than human, as having no feelings.”<sup>110</sup>

Melissa Farley’s work focuses on helping the general community gain a better understanding of the reality of commercial sexual exploitation, thereby challenging the

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<sup>109</sup> Farley, “#MeToo Must Include Prostitution.”

<sup>110</sup> Farley, “#MeToo Must Include Prostitution.”

community to change their own conscious or implicit biases regarding CSE victims and survivors. However, some of her research directly focuses on shedding light on the men who buy sex. Farley led a study that compared 100 men who bought sex to 100 men who had not bought sex. The men, who resided in the greater Boston area, volunteered to be part of the study by responding to a newspaper advertisement. Each man underwent a two-hour interview on many subjects, including their attitudes toward women in prostitution and women in general. When the men were asked if prostitution was viewed as consenting sex, a choice, or sexual exploitation, 62% of sex buyers considered prostitution to be consenting sex compared to 37% of non-sex buyers, however when the question was restated as a “choice” then the rate significantly increased to 93% sex buyers and 66% non-sex buyers who found the concept of legalizing prostitution to be acceptable.<sup>111</sup> Farley found that men who bought sex exhibited “expressions of male sexual entitlement” and that their “perceptions of masculinity and entitlement to sexual access seem to be related to their use of women in prostitution.”<sup>112</sup> One sex buyer justified his actions by stating, “They can choose who they want to have sex with as much as the man can choose.” However, the study found that 37% of buyers and 21% of non-sex buyers believed that “once sex is paid for, women are obligated to do whatever the buyer wants.”<sup>113</sup> When explicit and implicit racism, sexism, and many other forms of prejudice are already present, the inclusion of payment for sex ignites a host of excuses, justifications, and rationalizations for committing harm to another individual. As a result, victims of CSE have been the targets of horrors worse than can be described in the scope of this paper but are courageously documented in films, research interviews, and autobiographies.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Farley, et al., “*Comparing Sex Buyers With Men Who Don’t Buy Sex*,” 18.

<sup>112</sup> Farley, et al., “*Comparing Sex Buyers With Men Who Don’t Buy Sex*,” 8.

<sup>113</sup> Farley, et al., “*Comparing Sex Buyers With Men Who Don’t Buy Sex*,” 19.

<sup>114</sup> Barnes, *And Life Continues: Sex Trafficking and My Journey to Freedom; I Am Jane Doe*, 2017; Smith and Coloma, *Renting Lacy: A Story of America’s Prostituted Children* (Vancouver, Wa: Shared Hope International, 2013).

### *Existing Cultural Bias: The Danger of Community Silence*

Jodi Kantor, Megan Twohey, and the brave women who came forward to confront Harvey Weinstein were pivotal in breaking the cultural silence surrounding sexual abuse. The Weinstein case challenged the world to expand its understanding that sexual abuse and power abuse tactics could silence people as powerful as Gwyneth Paltrow and other celebrities. In 2021, Olympic gymnasts Simone Biles, McKayla Maroney, Maggie Nichols, and Aly Raisman challenged the system that kept their stories silent. They testified in front of the US Senate Judiciary Committee and described how the FBI was negligent in investigating US women's national gymnastics team physician, Larry Nassar, after receiving multiple accusations that Nassar was sexually assaulting athletes.<sup>115</sup> The athletes explained that the FBI's negligence silenced those who spoke out, prolonging their abuse, and allowing Nassar to assault more athletes. At the time of the hearing, an estimated 70 athletes were believed to have been sexually assaulted by Larry Nassar. The athletes' courageous journey to make a difference by speaking to the Senate has revealed that the system was negligent on multiple levels before, during, and after the sexual assault. This case brought a new form of accountability to the national stage as sexual assault survivors sought to hold both the perpetrator and the system responsible for their role in the abuse that occurred.

Only a few months after the gymnasts' senate hearing, another landmark trial hit national news. In December 2021, Ghislaine Maxwell was found guilty of sex trafficking minors with Jeffery Epstein. Although, as of this writing, Maxwell is attempting to appeal the verdict, the

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<sup>115</sup> Tierney Sneed, "Takeaways from the Senate Hearing on the FBI's Failures to Investigate Gymnasts' Charges against Nassar," CNN, September 15, 2021, <https://www.cnn.com/2021/09/15/politics/simone-biles-aly-raisman-senate-hearing-larry-nassar-takeaways/index.html>.



trial has put CSE by US traffickers on the nations' radar.<sup>116</sup> This case has the potential to help the nation recognize the similarities and power abuse tactics between sexual assault perpetrators such as Weinstein and Nassar and human traffickers such as Epstein and Ghislaine. Furthermore, the nation could break stereotypes that hinder the ability to recognize actual traffickers.

Although survivors are speaking out, the community must also be willing to break the silence. However, even though the topic of sex trafficking has increased in news headlines and social media, most local communities are not dealing with the realities of holding local sex buyers and traffickers accountable. Although sex buyers self-reported that the most effective way of preventing them from buying sex in the future was public shaming by the greater community, the public often remains silent on local community commercial sexual exploitation.<sup>117</sup> This silence injures victims by keeping them invisible, without voice, and little to no access to resources or exit strategies. The community's silence allows perpetrators such as traffickers and buyers the ability to remain anonymous as they thrive under the public myth that only particularly deranged "boogie men" may be out on the prowl rather than average individuals within the local community who, by their own self-report, need to be held publicly accountable. The implicit bias embedded in the community that stigmatizes the victim and protects the anonymity of the perpetrator must be challenged personally and corporately for change to occur.

In a study conducted by Bintliff, Stark, Brown, and Alonso, CSE survivors were asked to explain what community collaboration might look like for CSE prevention, intervention, and survivor support. One of their findings was that the community does not understand the dynamics of CSE and continues to remain silent or blame the victim. They suggest the

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<sup>116</sup> Laura Smith-Spark and Tara John, "Who Is Ghislaine Maxwell? Socialite and Ex-Girlfriend of Jeffrey Epstein Goes on Trial," CNN, December 29, 2021, <https://www.cnn.com/2021/11/29/us/ghislaine-maxwell-epstein-profile-intl/index.html>.

<sup>117</sup> Melissa Farley, et al., "Comparing Sex Buyers With Men Who Don't Buy Sex."

importance of reframing the conversation about what it means to experience and survive CSE.

Regarding the study, the team concluded:

The participatory process gave researchers, practitioners, and survivors a space to discuss the larger societal issue of how human trafficking for sex is named and framed in our world. It was noted that the language is passive, that being trafficked has no subject, and to some degree exculpates the perpetrator (or at least allows perpetrators to stay in hiding). Victim blaming, in subtle and overt forms continues. Somehow, the crime, shame, and stigma attach to the victim, while the perpetrator is forgotten. These concerns led the collaborative team to want to explore other kinds of categories and framing for survivors. For example, social narratives related to survivors of torture often connote strength and sometimes heroics –almost never social stigma. Further, we wondered, why are the heinous experiences that are experienced by victims of trafficking not classified as torture in popular narrative or media? This conceptual trajectory, not anticipated at the start of our work, could lead to additional strategies to achieve justice for survivors and to address societal stigma.<sup>118</sup>

One of the most effective ways to break the toxicity of silence is to listen to CSE survivors and follow their leadership in anti-trafficking endeavors. In the past few years, many of the anti-trafficking organizations that were originally founded by allies have recently passed the mantle of leadership to CSE survivors.<sup>119</sup> The shift to amplify survivor-informed and survivor-led anti-trafficking engagement has been instrumental in challenging cultural bias and in making positive strides at local, national, and international levels.<sup>120</sup>

### **The Church’s Responsibility**

As participating community members, it is important for Christians and local churches to consider ways that they may be sustaining local CSE. Many Christians likely exhibit the same community biases arising from racism, sexism, and judgment about paid sex. In addition,

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<sup>118</sup> Bintliff et al., “*Lifelong Wellbeing for Survivors of Sex Trafficking: Collaborative Perspectives from Survivors, Researchers, and Service Providers*,” 29.

<sup>119</sup> “Washington Trafficking Prevention,” WTP, n.d., traffickingprevention.org; “Linking Arms across American in the Fight against Human Trafficking,” *In Our Backyard*, 2021, <http://inourbackyard.org/>.

<sup>120</sup> National Center on Sexual Exploitation, “Coalition to End Sexual Exploitation 2021 Global Summit,” *Virtual Conference*, July 2021, <https://endsexualexploitation.org/cese-summit-2021/>; United Nations, “Survival Stories: Kyra Doubek,” *United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime*, accessed December 18, 2021, <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/human-trafficking/kyra-doubek.html>.

Christian culture has been historically vocal on relationship values such as sexual abstinence until marriage, monogamous marital relationships, modest clothing and appearance for women, and abstinence from sexually suggestive entertainment. In her book *Jesus and John Wayne*, Author Kristin Kobes Du Mez raises concerns over decades of reinforced sexist views of masculinity embedded in American evangelical denominations and infused under the guise of family values.<sup>121</sup> If a victim who may have come from a “broken family” becomes sexually active and begins to exhibit red flags such as a change in their appearance, drug use, lying, skipping school, anxiety, depression, or isolation from friends, would Christians judge this person or would they recognize these changes as possible victimization? Similarly, would a Christian be able to recognize the red flags of a married family man who is voluntarily putting in extra hours and going on more frequent business trips as a potential sex buyer? If a teen in “poor standing” accused an adult in “good standing” of assaulting them, would they be believed or silenced?

A church that seeks to become anti-trafficking allies must consider another cultural hurdle. Christians are taught to be wary of explicit information, such as violence and pornography, but there is a certain amount of realistic information that will need to be understood in order for survivors to be believed and for buyers to be held accountable. The crime of commercial sexual exploitation thrives in the shadows and will not begin to lose power until the community is willing to bring it into the light. Grooming, recruitment, and abuse against sexually exploited individuals are not commonly discussed topics in Christian circles, but to lean into the fight against CSE is to become aware of abusive situations that may fit the most extreme levels of graphic content from which Christians tend to flee. Although the crime of human

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<sup>121</sup> Kristin Kobes, *Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation* (New York, Ny: Liveright Publishing Corporation, A Division Of W.W. Norton & Company, Inc, 2020).

trafficking is painful to discuss, Christians must acknowledge the reality of the trauma before they can minister to victims or hold perpetrators accountable. Nevertheless, most churches remain oblivious to the crime occurring in their local communities and potentially in their own congregations. How might a culture founded on biblical principles cultivate bias and complicity to so terrible a crime?

### **Examining Bias in Christian Culture**

Although the Bible directs believers to “learn to do right, seek justice, and defend the oppressed,” there are aspects that have emerged within church culture that prime Christians to blame victims and protect perpetrators while remaining oblivious to their personal responsibility in the ongoing problem.<sup>122</sup> Christians and churches who desire to take anti-trafficking action must first become aware of the role they play in their circles of influence. Biblical accounts of God’s response to victims and perpetrators of oppression and sexual assault should inform Christians to respond similarly to CSE victims and perpetrators. However, when Christians omit, diminish, or distort biblical accounts, then problematic beliefs, along with corresponding actions, may arise and thrive if left unchallenged.

When Christians speak or act in ways that contradict the heart of God as it is expressed in the Bible, then these distortions speak volumes to victims, perpetrators, the congregation, and the community. One example has been in the news for decades and has significantly impacted how the community perceives the church. Throughout the years, there has been a growing distrust of leadership in Catholic and Protestant churches who were informed of sexual assault accusations against clergy and who failed to protect victims or hold perpetrators accountable.<sup>123</sup> One of the

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<sup>122</sup> Isa 1:17 (NIV)

<sup>123</sup> Al Jazeera, News Agencies, “*Pope Calls for ‘Concrete Measures’ against Child Abuse,*” [www.aljazeera.com](http://www.aljazeera.com), February 21, 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/2/21/distrust-and-anger-cast-a-shadow-over-vatican->

more prominent patterns was the sexual assault of altar boys by priests. For decades and into the present, men continue to speak out about being sexually assaulted as minors when they served the church as altar boys. Survivor Chris Graham wrote about the assault against him, the decades of trauma resulting from the crime, and his journey back to faith in God.<sup>124</sup> Graham states that his goal in telling his story is to inspire reform in the Catholic Church and in State laws, and to “make it easier for victims to come forward with their abuse when they’re ready.”<sup>125</sup> In 2019, Pope Francis held an international summit to recognize the plight of sexual abuse survivors who were abused by clergy and to make changes that would disrupt the pattern of predatory behavior within the church.<sup>126</sup> Although some saw the summit as an important step forward, the Pope received significant criticism for speaking out about the topic. Pope Francis entreated the church to, “heal grave wounds the pedophilia scandal has caused to both the young and the believers.”

Sexual assault scandals have harmed many survivors and have negatively impacted the community’s perception of the church. Churches must recognize how abuse patterns and cover-ups occur in order to make changes for a better future. When religious leaders abuse people within their congregation, the devastation is often two-fold. The first layer of trauma occurs when the perpetrator engages in abuse, and the second form of trauma happens when the church community ignores indications of potential abuse or denies outright accusations that abuse has occurred. How can this happen? Diane Langberg researches and analyzes instances when churches were complicit during abuses of power such as racism, genocide, sexual assault, and exploitation. In her book *Redeeming Power*, Langberg describes how churches become seduced

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summit-on-sex-abuse.

<sup>124</sup> Danae King, “‘There’s No Escape’: Memories of Being Raped by Catholic Priest Haunt Columbus Man,” [www.dispatch.com](https://www.dispatch.com) (The Columbus Dispatch, September 8, 2021), <https://www.dispatch.com/in-depth/news/2021/09/08/columbus-man-raped-catholic-priest-child-haunted-memories/7504888002/>.

<sup>125</sup> Danae King, “‘There’s No Escape’: Memories of Being Raped by Catholic Priest Haunt Columbus Man,”

<sup>126</sup> Danae King, “‘There’s No Escape’: Memories of Being Raped by Catholic Priest Haunt Columbus Man,”

by the allure of power and can end up protecting abusive leaders rather than helping those being harmed by the leader. Langberg describes a common way that churches are deceived:

“Deception can easily lie below the surface of a high position, great theological knowledge, stunning verbal skills, and excellent performance. As a matter of fact, those are power tools that allow people to live deceptively and to hide the fact that they are doing so. Those external factors become a motive for deception. If the enemy of our souls can appear as an angel of light, then surely an evil human being, who is in fact mimicking him, can appear well clothed, theologically articulate, and beautiful to the human eye.”<sup>127</sup>

Langberg explains that when a loved church leader is accused of sexual abuse, the church often responds, first by deceiving themselves, and then by using their power in the church to protect the perpetrator. She provides the following example:

“We might learn that a well-loved church leader has been sexually abusing multiple women in the church. No one wants that to be true, so we jump to his defense, desperate to prove the accusers false. The deception becomes groupthink. We use our collective power to circle the wagons and to protect what we desire to be true. The deception grows to envelop many people who have corporately injected the narcotic rather than face the destruction and the pain that will accompany the truth. Deception has now become systemic.”<sup>128</sup>

The self-deception that leads Christians to abuse power can happen in many ways.

Langberg describes common ways that Christians deceive themselves into collaborating with abuse. One form of self-deception is to assume that the acknowledgment of abuse could taint the overall “good” cause that is happening in God’s name, so “for the sake of God’s name” they deceive themselves into concealing darkness.<sup>129</sup> This deception assumes that God needs human protection to harbor the very sin eradicated by Jesus’ death and resurrection. To justify the harboring of sin for God’s sake is to divert from Biblical teaching in disastrous ways. John 2:23-

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<sup>127</sup> Diane Langberg, *Redeeming Power: Understanding Authority and Abuse in the Church*, 34.

<sup>128</sup> Diane Langberg, *Redeeming Power: Understanding Authority and Abuse in the Church*, 35.

<sup>129</sup> Diane Langberg, *Redeeming Power: Understanding Authority and Abuse in the Church*, 32.

25 can serve to remind Christians that Jesus could not be swayed by human accolades because he knew what was in their hearts, and he did not trust them. Although people may deceive themselves or others, God cannot be deceived.

Another tactic used in self-deception is the temptation to take a short cut that appears to lead to the same positive outcome. Langberg points out that the enemy used this tactic when he deceived Adam and Eve, who were already in relationship with God, to eat the fruit in order to be like God. She adds that the enemy attempted to use this tactic with Jesus in the wilderness when he tried to present shortcuts to seemingly produce what could only be accomplished through death on the cross.<sup>130</sup> This end-justifies-the-means deception plays out when people conceal abuses to protect a person or ministry from consequences such as a tarnished reputation, accusations, or criminal investigations.

A third common deception happens when people who exhibit specific actions, positions, or character traits are automatically exempt from being perceived as an abuser. On the contrary, Langberg points out that “niceness” is not a character trait but rather a social interaction.<sup>131</sup> She explains that an abuser often cultivates good deeds, kind words, and an excellent reputation in order to deceive others. She explains this tactic by saying that “socially responsible behavior in public causes people to drop their guard and allow access to themselves or to their children. The ability to charm, to be nice, and to be likable is critical to gaining access.”<sup>132</sup> Elsa Tamez’s survey of oppressors in the Old Testament offers multiple biblical accounts that point toward God’s reproach for people who appear to uphold the law while deceitfully oppressing others.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Diane Langberg, *Suffering and the Heart of God: How Trauma Destroys and Christ Restores*, Ch. 12.

<sup>131</sup> Diane Langberg, *Suffering and the Heart of God: How Trauma Destroys and Christ Restores*, Ch 12.

<sup>132</sup> Diane Langberg, *Suffering and the Heart of God: How Trauma Destroys and Christ Restores*, Ch 12.

<sup>133</sup> Elsa Tamez, *Bible of the Oppressed* (Eugene, Or.: Wipf & Stock, 2006), p. 51  
Isaiah 58:3; Psalm 55:21; Psalm 10; Isaiah 32:7

Rather than believing that spiritual leaders are incapable of abuse, it may be helpful to recognize how readily the opportunity is left available to do so. Langberg explains that a leadership position in a church includes an inherent level of spiritual authority, even the assumed ability to speak on behalf of God, that invites a heightened level of trust that may not be present in other leadership contexts.<sup>134</sup> Langberg explains that the secular description of leader abilities has permeated the church. She describes the dangers of this demand by stating:

The demand for expertise often forces leaders to be defined in terms of their abilities. A good leader will be an expert, perpetually acquiring more information and demonstrating an ever-increasing proficiency. A pastor, then, is one who demonstrates expertise in theology, teaching, preaching, counseling, budget planning, administration, mediating, and social relationships. A leader is expected to know more, achieve more, and perform better. The more adequate they are in those areas, the more they are declared a success. Leadership is thus reduced to a never-ending treadmill of acquiring more and better skills and achieving impressive results.<sup>135</sup>

Langberg adds that leaders with charisma and charm can rise to the top of these measures of success. A combination of ability, charisma, smooth words, and heightened trust can result in power abuse. When attendance and funds increase in the church, these measured forms of success are often credited to the leader as the one who made it happen, often affirming and spiritualizing this form of leadership. When a successful leader is accused of abusing someone, the church will often come to the defense and protection of the leader. Langberg summarizes, “It follows that any attack on or criticism of that leader will not be believed or must be denied. A threat to the leader is a threat to all.”<sup>136</sup> God is not deceived by abusive leaders, so the church need not fall into the deceptive trap. In Matthew 7:15-20, Jesus warns his disciples about abusers

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<sup>134</sup> Diane Langberg, *Redeeming Power: Understanding Authority and Abuse in the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, a Division of Baker Publishing Group, 2020), 127.

<sup>135</sup> Diane Langberg, *Redeeming Power: Understanding Authority and Abuse in the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, a Division of Baker Publishing Group, 2020), 128.

<sup>136</sup> Diane Langberg, *Redeeming Power: Understanding Authority and Abuse in the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, a Division of Baker Publishing Group, 2020), 128.



who “come disguised as harmless sheep but are really vicious wolves,” and he teaches them to recognize them by their fruit.<sup>137</sup> Ezekiel 34 states that God will seek those who were driven away by abusive shepherds. Verse 10 states,

“This is what the Sovereign Lord says: I now consider these shepherds my enemies, and I will hold them responsible for what has happened to my flock. I will take away their right to feed the flock, and I will stop them from feeding themselves. I will rescue my flock from their mouths; the sheep will no longer be their prey.”<sup>138</sup>

### **A case of sexual abuse in the church:**

No victim or perpetrator will be more or less deserving of justice, but some cases will be more straightforward for the general population to recognize the importance of giving victims a voice, holding perpetrators accountable to past and present abuse, and protecting others from future abuse. Before discussing problematic biases that are often reinforced by the complex layers of sexual assault and trafficking, it may be helpful to begin by describing a clearer case. In 2013, Dura-Vila, Littlewood, and Leavy interviewed five nuns who shared their traumatic experiences of being sexually assaulted by priests and their process of coping with the aftermath of sexual abuse.<sup>139</sup> In these cases, both the nuns and the priests had taken vows of celibacy, and both were within a system that clearly articulates that sexual behavior is not permitted. Although each case was distinct, all five nuns experienced trauma that exhibited as shock, disbelief, distress, self-doubt, and anger at the abuse and at the perpetrator.<sup>140</sup> The researchers summarized that the nuns experienced a shattering of beliefs in the goodness of the church and the integrity of the priests.<sup>141</sup> Unlike many sexual assault victims, all five of the nuns reported a clear

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<sup>137</sup> Matthew 7:15-20

<sup>138</sup> Ezekiel 34:10

<sup>139</sup> Glòria Durà-Vilà, Roland Littlewood, and Gerard Leavy, "Integration of Sexual Trauma in a Religious Narrative: Transformation, Resolution and Growth among Contemplative Nuns," *Transcultural Psychiatry* 50, no. 1 (2013), doi:10.1177/1363461512467769.

<sup>140</sup> Glòria Durà-Vilà, et al., 26.

<sup>141</sup> Glòria Durà-Vilà, et al., 26.

understanding that they were the victims and that the priests perpetrated against them.<sup>142</sup>

However, even in the midst of a clear report of victimization, the nuns described times of “doubting their own innocence when they were tormented by feelings of shame and guilt.” The researchers added, “They wondered if they had done something wrong to provoke the abuse or even whether the abuse was something normal that they had somehow misunderstood.”<sup>143</sup> Most of the nuns reported thoughts of leaving their vow to a monastic life, but they reported being able to fight against the thoughts of leaving by recognizing that God was not at fault for the crime that had occurred. One nun stated, “It did cross my mind to throw away the vocation and everything, but in a second, instantaneously I told myself: No, no, God has not let me down, this man has let me and Jesus down.”<sup>144</sup>

When the interviewers inquired about how the monasteries responded to the nun’s reports of assault and whether or not they were believed, their experiences varied. One nun discussed the trauma that she felt when her Mother Superior had believed the priest’s denials over the nun’s testimony, “This was for me a very hard test, I had to be very strong, I felt very lonely, very lonely, that my Mother Superior would not believe me.”<sup>145</sup> Another nun said that she told another priest what had happened only to discover that he had told multiple priests her story without her consent and used her accusation to leverage rivalries against the perpetrating priest instead of helping her or taking legal action.<sup>146</sup> Another nun said that she was not initially believed, but she continued to share her accusations that the priest has assaulted her. It was not until more evidence was discovered that the priest was removed from the monastery.<sup>147</sup> The nuns who were not believed reported the distress of having to receive sacraments from their perpetrator and to

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<sup>142</sup> Glòria Durà-Vilà, et al., 28.

<sup>143</sup> Glòria Durà-Vilà, et al., 28.

<sup>144</sup> Glòria Durà-Vilà, et al., 31.

<sup>145</sup> Glòria Durà-Vilà, et al., 32.

<sup>146</sup> Glòria Durà-Vilà, et al., 32.

<sup>147</sup> Glòria Durà-Vilà, et al., 33.

serve the Lord under his oversight. Other nuns experienced being believed when they spoke about the abuse. One nun said that the moment she told her Mother Superior and her Mother Teacher about the abuse that had occurred at a previous monastery, she said, “They ended up crying and hugging me.” Having received empathy from her leadership, she decided to tell the rest of her monastic community. She reported that they offered support, sympathy, and encouragement, saying that they now understood why she had been “like a stone.”<sup>148</sup>

The nuns shared their perception of God in the midst of the sexual assault and aftermath of trauma. Some felt that Jesus was also a victim of the assault. One nun who felt this way reported feeling great solidarity with Jesus after having both undergone the assault together. Others described that their perspective of Jesus as the suffering savior grew deeper. The nuns who believed that Jesus could relate to being the innocent victim of trauma found great comfort. Others saw the abuse as a test of faith and obedience to the Lord. They identified as successfully passing the test when they rejected and resisted abuse and stayed in vocational service to the Lord. To these nuns, it was the overcoming of this test that “reassured them of their worthiness to be God’s brides.”<sup>149</sup>

Throughout the study, it was evident that all five nuns had a deep belief in a loving God prior to the sexual assault, and they leaned on their beliefs to overcome the pain of trauma. Those who were believed by peers and leaders in the monastery experienced relief compared to the nuns who reported intense distress when they were not believed.<sup>150</sup> Regardless of whether or not the monastic community believed them, all five nuns reported certainty that they were the victims and the the priests who abused them were the perpetrators. A critical difference between the nuns in this study and other sexual assault victims is to remember that many victims may not

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<sup>148</sup> Glòria Durà-Vilà, et al., 33.

<sup>149</sup> Glòria Durà-Vilà, et al., 34.

<sup>150</sup> Glòria Durà-Vilà, et al., 34.

have as developed a relationship and trust with the Lord before the assault. When trauma occurs in the church, or when the church is complicit to traumatic reports, then God is often seen either as an abuser or as too weak or apathetic to have intervened.<sup>151</sup>

This study is unique in that perpetrators, victims, and potential allies are clearly identified. Within the context of a monastic community, it is easy to see how a priest can exploit power. Even when the victim, who is a nun who has taken a vow of celibacy, dresses and behaves modestly, and lives among a group of women, can still experience the distress of not being believed when she reports that she has been sexually assaulted by a spiritual leader, then what might happen to victims who do not exemplify the epitome of modest dress, simple living, and devout Christian faith? In most cases of sexual assault that may happen in or be reported to a church, the variables will be less clear. It is essential for Christians to recognize that complex variables may lure them into blaming victims and protecting perpetrators. This study may be helpful to keep in mind when Christians need to check their biases amid confounding variables that can lure churches into self-deception, justification, and complicity.

### **Biblical Response to the Oppressed and their Oppressors**

How should churches respond? A Christian approach to trafficking awareness, prevention, and accountability should conform to God's values and response as recorded in scripture. The Bible provides many examples of God's response to injustice, and it is here that a Christian approach to sexual assault and exploitation can emerge. In order to address CSE from this perspective, a biblical understanding of God's response to victims and perpetrators of oppression must be considered.

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<sup>151</sup> Elsa Tamez, *Bible of the Oppressed* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 59-64.

Throughout the Old and New Testaments, Scripture records many instances of oppression. There are times when God’s people are being oppressed and times when they are warned not to become the oppressors. Through these themes of blessing to the oppressed and warning to the oppressors, it is evident that God has deep compassion for those who are oppressed by individuals or by society, both inside and outside the people of God; and God fully expects God’s people to liberate those who are under the yoke of oppression.<sup>152</sup> These accounts implore God’s people to bring justice and liberation to the oppressed while simultaneously warning that God will personally protect the oppressed from anyone who endeavors to exploit them.<sup>153</sup>

Author Elsa Tamez describes sixteen different words that are used in the Old Testament to refer to oppression, oppressors, or the oppressed.<sup>154</sup> She summarizes describing that “the oppressed are (1) exploited, and (2) afflicted: they live in a permanent state of anxiety as they carry out the orders of the oppressor.”<sup>155</sup> Tamez points out that the very words used to describe types of oppression are the exact words used to describe how God will oppress the oppressor. For example, the Hebrew word *daka* means to grind, pulverize, or crush, is used to describe the actions of oppressors in scriptures such as Job 5:4 and Psalm 94:5.<sup>156</sup> However, in Psalm 72:4, the same word *daka* is used to describe how a just ruler will rescue the oppressed and *daka* the oppressor.<sup>157</sup> The word *daka* is also used to describe the suffering savior who is “pierced for our transgressions” and “crushed (*daka*) for our sins.”<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Luke 4:16-21; Luke 10:33-37

<sup>153</sup> Psalm 72:11-14; Psalm 146

<sup>154</sup> Elsa Tamez, 9.

<sup>155</sup> Elsa Tamez, 11.

<sup>156</sup> “H1792 - Dākā’ - Strong’s Hebrew Lexicon (NIV),” Blue Letter Bible, accessed April 24, 2021, <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=H1792&t=NIV>.

<sup>157</sup> Elsa Tamez, 24.

<sup>158</sup> Isaiah 53:5

Author and trauma expert Diane Langberg explains that abuse of power over one another is outside God's will for humankind. In her book, *Redeeming Power*, she states, "nowhere does he call humans to rule over each other."<sup>159</sup> She adds, "Abuse of any kind is always damaging to the image of God in humans. The self is shattered, fractured, and silenced and cannot speak who it is into the world."<sup>160</sup> When ongoing, complex, or multi-generational trauma occurs, often present in trafficking survivor stories, the impacts of not receiving the safety and care they needed was passed down to further generations who experienced oppression.<sup>161</sup> In her book, *Suffering and the Heart of God*, Langberg expands by stating, "Trauma destroys the essence of what it means to be human and to have the dignity of carrying the image of God. Dignity, vibrancy, impacting, creativity, building, producing, all life-bearing, are silenced and crushed by trauma, especially chronic trauma."<sup>162</sup> Everyone is made in the image of God, yet oppression from and toward others is evident throughout the Bible.

In the New Testament, the Gospels record many moments where Jesus encounters people who are oppressed by the community. Jeffrey Miller focuses on Jesus' interactions with marginalized individuals and groups that are recorded in the Gospel of Luke. Miller proposes that there were two broad categories of marginalized people recorded in Luke; those who were marginalized by no fault of their own and those who were marginalized as the result of breaking cultural laws, rules, or expectations.<sup>163</sup> Miller suggests that Jesus interacted with each group differently while the Pharisees and other members of society appeared to treat all marginalized individuals with equal contempt.<sup>164</sup> He explains that Jesus showed compassion "unconditionally

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<sup>159</sup> Diane Langberg, *Redeeming Power: Understanding Authority and Abuse in the Church*, 5.

<sup>160</sup> Diane Langberg, *Redeeming Power: Understanding Authority and Abuse in the Church*, 7.

<sup>161</sup> Diane Langberg, *Redeeming Power: Understanding Authority and Abuse in the Church*, 20.

<sup>162</sup> Diane Langberg, *Suffering and the Heart of God: How Trauma Destroys and Christ Restores*, Ch. 10

<sup>163</sup> Jeffrey Miller, "Jesus Among Luke's Marginalized" PhD diss., Divinity School of Duke University, 2017, vi.

<sup>164</sup> Jeffrey Miller, 23.

redignifying” those whose marginalization was the result of forces outside their ability to control.<sup>165</sup> By reading the Isaiah scroll in the synagogue, Jesus proclaimed that his mission was to bring Good News to the poor, proclaim freedom to captives, and set the oppressed free.<sup>166</sup> But Miller explains that Jesus was not afraid to call sin what it was, whether the sinner was oppressed or whether they were the oppressors.<sup>167</sup> He explains that those who were marginalized by their own sin were invited to repent. Miller suggests that the modern-day reader who fails to distinguish Jesus’ actions will misunderstand why Jesus showed compassion to some while expecting repentance from others. He cautions that if we lump all marginalized people together, then we may justify sin rather than invite people into a repentant life. Miller describes how Jesus’ actions can be misunderstood by unpacking the account of Jesus dining in the tax collector’s home. Prior verses had already recorded that Matthew had heard Jesus’ call and had dropped everything to follow him. This was an act of obedience, just like Peter dropping the nets. Rather than perceiving the dinner as a group of unrepentant sinners, Miller suggests that Matthew brought his friends who also dropped all to follow Jesus. This feast was thrown as a celebration of the prodigal children come home, rather than a dinner party with unrepentant sinners.<sup>168</sup> Miller explains that differentiating the two oppressed groups will help the modern-day reader to more easily interpret Jesus’ harsh responses to Pharisees who judged the innocent rather than extending compassion, and who judged the penitent rather than rejoicing with them.<sup>169</sup> Jesus spoke harshly to those in power who used their religious stature to abuse others. He scolded the religious leaders and warned the crowds about their hypocrisy and shameless

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<sup>165</sup> Jeffrey Miller, vi.

<sup>166</sup> Luke 4:16-21

<sup>167</sup> Jeffrey Miller, 42.

<sup>168</sup> Jeffrey Miller, 28.

<sup>169</sup> Jeffrey Miller, 48.

exploitation of the very people they were meant to help.<sup>170</sup> In contrast, Jesus instructs his own disciples by washing their feet and teaching them to go and do likewise.<sup>171</sup>

Elsa Tamez cautions Christians not to fall into the trap of spiritualizing poverty and attempting to turn poverty into a virtue.<sup>172</sup> She explains that two dangerous outcomes can arise. The first is to assume that God's compassion toward the poor signals that being poor is a favorable state rather than an "evil that reflects the socioeconomic conditions of inequality in which people live."<sup>173</sup> The second danger happens when those who are not experiencing oppression, or may even be oppressors themselves, interpret Bible passages about the poor to include "the poor in spirit," a group among which they self-identify. This self-inclusion affirms their actions, without convicting their role in oppression or complicity within their community.<sup>174</sup> Using scriptural support, Tamez summarizes by saying "This situation of poverty is not the result of some historical inevitability nor is it 'just the way things are,' it is the result of the unjust actions of oppressors."<sup>175</sup>

As disciples of Jesus, Tamez reminds the reader that Christians have professed that they have turned toward God and have been converted to act in the ways that please God.<sup>176</sup> Referring to Jeremiah 22:15-16, Tamez states, "to know God means to do justice to the poor and needy." Today, as Christians seek ways to minister to people in the midst of modern-day oppression, such as human trafficking, it is vital that they allow God to search their motives in order to recognize their role in power dynamics that can change in varying contexts. Diane Langberg reminds Jesus' followers that they cried out to Jesus, and giving them the gift of being heard, he

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<sup>170</sup> Luke 20:45-47

<sup>171</sup> John 13:1-17

<sup>172</sup> Elsa Tamez, 69-70.

<sup>173</sup> Elsa Tamez, 74.

<sup>174</sup> Elsa Tamez, 70-71.

<sup>175</sup> Elsa Tamez, 72.

<sup>176</sup> Elsa Tamez, 77.



invites them, in turn, to give it to others. Describing the work Jesus has commissioned his followers to do, Langberg states,

“He longs for us to walk with him, caring for the distressed, the fleeced, the ones damaged by violence and tossed aside. He desires us to look with his eyes of love and hear with his keen ears. He has invited us to labor with him and to be with others just as he was.”<sup>177</sup>

For the Christian who is willing to look at the world through Jesus’ loving eyes and keen ears, they may concur with Langberg that “trauma is perhaps the greatest mission field of the 21st Century.”<sup>178</sup> However, Langberg warns that awareness is the first step that leads to two problematic outcomes. First, the person may want to blame others while justifying their own actions. Second, the person cannot shirk the responsibility for the knowledge they now have without sinning.<sup>179</sup> To turn a blind eye is an act of self-deception and is a significant factor in sustaining abusive systems.<sup>180</sup> Regarding silence about sin, Langberg states, “When it comes to injustice, silence is not a virtue, it is a vice two times compounded because it contains both indifference to the victims and complicity with the destroyers.”<sup>181</sup> As Christians consider how they might minister to people impacted by sex trafficking, it is vital to recognize that problematic biases already exist throughout churches and communities that, if left unchecked, can harm the very people that Christians want to help.

### **Sexual Assault Accounts in the Bible**

The Bible is clear that God sees injustice, oppression, and marginalization, holding oppressors responsible and victims innocent. It is within a biblical understanding of oppression

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<sup>177</sup> Diane Langberg, *Redeeming Power: Understanding Authority and Abuse in the Church*, Kindle Location 168.

<sup>178</sup> Diane Langberg, *Suffering and the Heart of God: How Trauma Destroys and Christ Restores*, Ch. 1.

<sup>179</sup> Diane Langberg, *Suffering and the Heart of God: How Trauma Destroys and Christ Restores*, Ch. 1.

<sup>180</sup> Diane Langberg, *Suffering and the Heart of God: How Trauma Destroys and Christ Restores*, Ch. 6.

<sup>181</sup> Diane Langberg, *Suffering and the Heart of God: How Trauma Destroys and Christ Restores*, Ch. 2.

that sexual assault, as a specific type of oppression, can be studied. There are many biblical accounts where girls, boys, women, or men have been sexually assaulted or exploited. The way Christians read scripture informs how they perceive the world, God, and themselves. But if scripture accounts are distorted or omitted, then a misinterpretation of the biblical account can arise. Distortions can impact the perception of the assault account and can lead to a misunderstanding of God's response to victims and perpetrators. To construct a biblically founded Christian response to CSE, it is vital that Christians study sexual assault recorded in the Bible. Although the Bible addresses many forms of sexual assault and exploitation, the following section will narrow its focus to sexual servitude and sexual assault resulting from power abuse.

#### *Sexual Servitude:*

The definition of servitude is “the state of being a slave or completely subject to someone more powerful.”<sup>182</sup> Sexual servitude, referred to more commonly under the larger umbrella of sex trafficking, is the captivity of a person for the purpose of sex. Although the laws within Old Testament culture allowed for slavery and polygamy, Mosaic laws reveal God's imperative that those who are marginalized including foreigners, slaves, and women are to be treated with dignity.<sup>183</sup> Although the accounts of sexual servitude that will be reviewed in this section occur before the Mosaic law, it is the belief of this writer that the existence of the Mosaic law reveals the character of God and can be trusted to be at work within the context of God's people prior to the revelation of the written law.

Hagar, Bilhah, and Zilpah are not names that are often declared from the pulpit, yet Hagar is the mother of many of the Arab nations and Bilhah and Zilpah birthed four of the

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<sup>182</sup> Oxford Lexico, “Servitude,” in *Oxford US Dictionary*, accessed November 5, 2020, <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/servitude>.

<sup>183</sup> Exodus 21; Leviticus 25:39; Deuteronomy 23:15-16; Deuteronomy 24:7

twelve tribes of Israel.<sup>184</sup> Who were they and why are they not discussed openly as matriarchs of the nations? All three women are initially brought into the biblical account as household servants. Hagar was enslaved by Sarah and two generations later in the same family household, Bilhah and Zilpah enter the biblical account. Bilhah and Zilpah are originally enslaved by Jacob's father-in-law Laban, but as a wedding gift, he gives each of his daughters a "servant girl."<sup>185</sup> Thus Bilhah is owned by Leah and Zilpah is owned by Rachel. Since Laban forced both of his daughters to marry the same man, Jacob, these two maidservants serve their respective mistresses within the same household. Within the biblical account, all three women are required by their mistresses to become impregnated by Jacob. Hagar becomes pregnant once and Bilhah and Zilpah each become pregnant twice. In all five incidents, it is the privilege of the slave's mistress to take credit and ownership for the children that resulted in these forced pregnancies. In Genesis 35:22, Bilhah experiences a second form of sexual assault when she is raped by Jacob's eldest son, Reuben.<sup>186</sup> Regarding this assault, Womanist Midrash author, Wilda Gafney writes,

"Reuben is young enough to be her son. He may have been like a son or nephew to her. But he uses her nevertheless, whether for his own sexual pleasure or as a pawn in a battle with his father. The pain, anguish, rage, and shame that Bilhah must have felt are difficult to imagine. In the text no punishment is meted out to Reuben. No comfort is offered to Bilhah in the text."<sup>187</sup>

The torture that these three women endured occurred within the privacy of their masters' households 4,000 years ago, and yet it could not be hidden from the light of the Lord. Each of these forced pregnancies and failed attempts at stealing credit for bearing children have been preserved in the Bible. Bilhah's rape, although seemingly ignored by the family, has been remembered in the Bible. Not only did scripture include Reuben's rape of Bilhah in Genesis 35,

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<sup>184</sup> Genesis 16; Genesis 30:1-24

<sup>185</sup> Genesis 29:21-30

<sup>186</sup> Genesis 35:22

<sup>187</sup> Wilda Gafney, *Womanist Midrash: A Reintroduction to the Women of the Torah and the Throne* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017), 72, Kindle Location 1525.

but it is recorded again nearly 1400 years later in 1 Chronicles 5. Here, scripture proclaims that Reuben, the firstborn of Jacob's sons, defiled his father's marriage bed, and so the Lord removed his birthright and gave the rights of the firstborn to Reuben's nephews.<sup>188</sup> The loss of the birthright blessing of the firstborn of Israel's twelve tribes has unfathomable ramifications altering the trajectory of the line of Reuben.

One significant detail that should not be overlooked regarding Bilhah, Zilpah, and Hagar is that God chose to record the names of each of these household servants. Because scripture recorded their names and the role they played in birthing these tribal leaders, their significance can be remembered and taught today. Furthermore, when the Bible lists the sons of Israel, they are not listed by birth order. Instead, they are listed by mother.<sup>189</sup> Regardless of Rachel and Leah's attempts to lay claim to the children they named, the Bible recorded four tribal leaders as the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah.<sup>190</sup>

While modern day preachers say little about Bilhah and Zilpah, the occasional preacher may bring up Hagar. However, when she is discussed, she is usually seen as the surrogate used by Sarah to force God's promise of a child. Hagar is not always blamed for the actual pregnancy, but she is often judged for her contempt toward Sarah or held responsible for birthing enemy nations.<sup>191</sup> In contrast, the biblical account explains that Sarah treated Hagar so harshly that Hagar ran away. Although scripture details her wilderness experience and later, Sarah's expulsion of Hagar from the family household, these critical details are often overlooked.<sup>192</sup>

Author Phyllis Tribble explains, "Read in light of contemporary issues and images, her story

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<sup>188</sup> 1 Chronicles 5:1-2

<sup>189</sup> Genesis 35:23-26

<sup>190</sup> Genesis 30:3-13; Genesis 35:23-26; Genesis 46:18, 25.

<sup>191</sup> Phyllis Tribble and Letty M. Russell, *Hagar, Sarah, and Their Children: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Perspectives* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), Kindle Location 3119.

<sup>192</sup> Phyllis Tribble and Letty M. Russell, *Hagar, Sarah, and Their Children: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Perspectives* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), Kindle Location 3091.

depicts oppression in three familiar forms: nationality, class, and sex.”<sup>193</sup> Most often, Sarah is blamed for attempting to expedite God’s promise but she is not held accountable to committing forced sexual servitude, physical violence, or excommunication that nearly led to the deaths of both Hagar and the child that Sarah forced her to conceive in Sarah’s name. In this skewed interpretation of the account, Hagar becomes the scapegoat. Her failure to die in the desert leads to the enemy nation of God’s promised people. Does that make Hagar’s descendants God’s enemies as well? By this interpretation, it would seem the only logical explanation. However, God’s interaction with Hagar during the expulsion and wilderness experience are crucial to understanding the character of God and the value he puts on humankind.

Genesis 16: 6-16 describes the account of Sarah’s mistreatment to Hagar resulting in her flight to the desert. The angel of the Lord finds Hagar and enters a dialogue with her. He tells her to return to her mistress and submit to her, but before ending the conversation, he gives her two blessings. The first blessing is nearly identical to the blessing given to Abraham: “I will so increase your descendants that they will be too numerous to count,” and the second blessing resembles Gabriel’s message to Mary over her immaculate conception of Jesus.<sup>194</sup> Although the sexual assault against Hagar was clearly outside the will of the Lord’s promise, God pursued Hagar and blessed her in the desert. There are debates on why God told Hagar to go back to her mistress. Tragically, some Christians have used this text to justify slavery. Others refer to this text as evidence of a slave-centric society in which Hagar and, apparently, even God were forced to comply. However, immediately after Hagar’s interaction with the angel of the Lord and reentry into Abraham’s household, the Bible records God’s covenant with Abraham, his blessing

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<sup>193</sup> Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1997), Kindle Location 446.

<sup>194</sup> Genesis 16:10; Genesis 16:11-12. Abraham’s blessing from the Lord can be found in Genesis 12:2-3 and Genesis 17:1-8.

over Ishmael and Isaac, and the required act of circumcision of all men and boys under God's covenant. It is this writer's opinion that the messenger of God sent Hagar back to her mistress so that Ishmael might receive the full blessing that the Lord promised Abraham and his descendants in Genesis 17 and to obediently follow God's requirement of male circumcision.<sup>195</sup> By Genesis 22, Sarah's promised child Isaac has been born and weaned. When the teenaged Ishmael mocks the toddler Isaac, Sarah tells Abraham to "get rid of the slave woman and her son, for that slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with my son Isaac."<sup>196</sup> God allows Abraham and Sarah to send Hagar and Ishmael away, but rather than complying with Sarah's declaration that Ismael will be excommunicated from inheritance, God confirms to Abraham the steadfast blessing over Ishmael.<sup>197</sup> By all earthly accounts, Sarah sent Hagar and Ishmael to certain death. Scripture states that when the rations and water ran out and Ishmael was near the point of death, Hagar placed him under the bushes and wept. It was here that God told Hagar not to be afraid. He provided her a well of water and helped them to thrive in the desert.<sup>198</sup>

Leaving these crucial sections of scripture out of the biblical teaching not only erases Hagar, but it also erases significant accounts of God's miraculous work and his compassion for Isaac and Ishmael, and for Sarah and Hagar. Authors Phillis Tribble and Letty Russell describe Hagar as a pivotal figure in biblical theology:

She is the first person in the Bible to flee oppression; the first runaway slave; the first person whom a messenger of God visits; the first woman to receive an annunciation; the only woman to receive a divine promise of descendants; the only person to name God; the first woman in the ancestor stories to bear a child; the first surrogate mother; the first slave to be freed; the first divorced wife; the first single parent; and the first person to

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<sup>195</sup> Genesis 17:18-27 emphasizes that Ishmael was with Abraham and that they were both circumcised on the same day.

<sup>196</sup> Genesis 21:10 (NIV)

<sup>197</sup> Genesis 21:12-13

<sup>198</sup> Genesis 21:14-20

weep. Given all these distinctions, Hagar haunts the biblical narrative and its afterlife in ways that the other characters do not.<sup>199</sup>

What can we learn from the biblical records of Hagar, Bilhah, and Zilpah? First, the plight of these women is highly relatable to people who are being hurt or exploited today. From the child who is victimized within the confines a household to the woman who has been impregnated against her will, and from the immigrant who is a victim of labor trafficking to the teen whose forced intercourse results in the wealth of their abuser, their pain has been recorded in the Bible so that they may know the hope of God. The inclusion of these passages can invite people who have been hurt by others to recognize that God has deep compassion for them and that their plight has not been overlooked. Scripture, if taught openly, will bring hope, dignity, and healing to the all-too-common pain that regularly goes unnoticed from the pulpit. Furthermore, these biblical accounts stand as a clear acknowledgement that even chosen people can do wicked acts and are held accountable. These passages, if taught from the pulpit, send a warning to those who may be justifying their own abusive acts toward others. What is done in darkness will be brought into the light.<sup>200</sup>

#### *Sexual Assault Resulting from Power Abuse:*

If a Bible study description indicated that a king incorporated an Israelite woman into his harem, Christians may assume that the study was about Esther. Although her story is deeply important and the Cinderella-like distortions should be uprooted, Esther still tends to come to Christian minds as the woman forced into a king's household. As a result, this writer chose to highlight three other women whose harem stories are forgotten, ignored, discounted, or blamed

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<sup>199</sup> Phyllis Tribble and Letty M. Russell, *Hagar, Sarah, and Their Children: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Perspectives* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), Kindle Location 1599.

<sup>200</sup> Paraphrased use of Luke 8:17

on them. Sarah, Rebecca, and Bathsheba were each pursued by kings even though they were already married.

On two different occasions, Abraham told Sarah that they would be passing through a foreign land whose inhabitants would most likely kill Abraham if they knew he was married to Sarah, and so Abraham told Sarah to tell people she was his sister. Although somewhat accurate, the explanation successfully distorted the truth that Abraham and Sarah were husband and wife.<sup>201</sup> As a result, Sarah was taken by the Pharaoh in Egypt and later by King Abimelech.<sup>202</sup>

If these verses are discussed at all, it is usually only said in passing to describe Sarah's beauty even in old age when she was chosen by Abimelech. They might even discuss how God protected Sarah from the king implying or even suggesting that Sarah's monogamous sexual relationship to Abraham would be protected in all circumstances. But what does scripture actually record? In Genesis 12:11-13 Abram tells Sarai,

“I know what a beautiful woman you are. When the Egyptians see you, they will say, ‘This is his wife.’ Then they will kill me but will let you live. Say you are my sister, so that I will be treated well for your sake and my life will be spared because of you.”<sup>203</sup>

By Genesis 12:15-16, Abram's plan came to fruition. Sarai was taken into Pharaoh's palace, and Abram was “treated well for her sake, and Abram acquired sheep and cattle, male and female donkeys, menservants and maidservants, and camels.”<sup>204</sup> The World Health Organization defines sexual exploitation as the “actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, power, or trust, for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, profiting monetarily, socially, or

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<sup>201</sup> Genesis 12:11-13; Genesis 20:11-13

<sup>202</sup> Genesis 12:10-20; Genesis 20

<sup>203</sup> Genesis 12:11-13 (NIV)

<sup>204</sup> Genesis 12:14-16 (NIV)



politically from the sexual exploitation of another.”<sup>205</sup> By definition Abram trafficked Sarai. Rather than protecting his wife, he profited from her enslavement.

Although it seems that neither Abram nor the teachers who emphasize Sarai’s beauty over her enslavement seem to care about Sarai as a person, God certainly does. While Sarai is trapped in Pharaoh’s harem, God inflicts diseases on Pharaoh and his whole household.<sup>206</sup> Pharaoh summons Abram, confronts him on his lie, and sends Abram and Sarai away with all Abram’s spoils. Some scholars point out the likelihood that Hagar was one of the maidservants obtained during this offense.<sup>207</sup> If Hagar was bought at the expense of Sarai’s exploited body there may very well be an unexplored layer of tension between Hagar and Sarai.

During the time where Abimelech takes Sarah (note the name change indicating that this occurred after God’s covenant with Abraham), God comes to Abimelech in a dream and declares, “You are as good as dead because of the woman you have taken; she is a married woman.”<sup>208</sup> Unlike the account that leaves details unknown, this scripture passage clearly indicates that Abimelech had not touched Sarah. In the dialogue between God and Abimelech, God states,

“Yes, I know you did this with a clear conscience, and so I have kept you from sinning against me. That is why I did not let you touch her. Now return the man’s wife, for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you will live. But if you do not return her, you may be sure that you and all yours will die.”<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> “*Sexual Exploitation and Abuse-WHO*,” accessed November 22, 2020, [https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/documents/ethics/sexual-exploitation-and-abuse-pamphlet-en.pdf?sfvrsn=409b4d89\\_2](https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/documents/ethics/sexual-exploitation-and-abuse-pamphlet-en.pdf?sfvrsn=409b4d89_2).

<sup>206</sup> Genesis 12:17

<sup>207</sup> Phyllis Trible and Letty M. Russell, *Hagar, Sarah, and Their Children: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Perspectives* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), Kindle Location 2904.

<sup>208</sup> Genesis 20:3 (NIV)

<sup>209</sup> Genesis 20:6-7 (NIV)

Abimelech returns Sarah to Abraham along with sheep, cattle, and male and female slaves.<sup>210</sup>

The timeline of Sarah's second captivity happens after God makes the covenant with Abraham and before Sarah is pregnant with Isaac. Might this play a role in further animosity between Sarah and Hagar? After all, it was Sarah, not Hagar, who was pawned off once again to be the sex slave of a foreign ruler. In less than a chapter, Isaac is born and Hagar is sent away.<sup>211</sup>

Rebecca's account of a similar occurrence threatens to parallel Sarah's second capture. Just like his father Abraham, Isaac lies to the king of the Philistines, coincidentally also named Abimelech, by saying that Rebecca is his sister rather than his wife. Scripture records that he says this because he believes he will be killed because she is beautiful. In this occurrence, the king sees Isaac caressing Rebecca. Realizing Isaac's deception, the king confronts Isaac and decrees that anyone who molests Isaac or his wife will be put to death.<sup>212</sup> The Philistine king's unprecedented response reveals how God miraculously protected Rebecca in spite of Isaac's negligence.

Although what Pharaoh may or may not have done to Sarai is unclear, God clearly protected and rescued Sarah and Rebecca from both Abimelechs.<sup>213</sup> Does this mean that God will always protect and rescue his children from sexual harm? No. Any teaching that would imply such a distortion is inconsistent with scripture and disregards or indirectly blames the one in five people who did not escape sexual assault unscathed. Although the Pharaoh incident is unclear, scripture provides us an exceedingly clear example of a married woman who is sexually assaulted by a king and later incorporated into his harem. Her name is Bathsheba.

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<sup>210</sup> Genesis 20:14; *Womanist Midrash: A Reintroduction to the Women of the Torah and the Throne* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017), Kindle Location 825.

<sup>211</sup> Genesis 21

<sup>212</sup> Genesis 26:11

<sup>213</sup> *Womanist Midrash: A Reintroduction to the Women of the Torah and the Throne* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017), Kindle Location 809.

The debate on how to read the incident that occurred between David and Bathsheba in 2 Samuel 11 is more openly discussed than the other accounts mentioned above. Although no one argues that King David sinned by having sexual relations with the married woman Bathsheba, the dispute lies in Bathsheba's role in the situation. Did Bathsheba intentionally seduce David? If it was not seduction, then why would the Bible describe Bathsheba's beauty, her bath on the roof for all to see, and her visit to the palace? Should we define rape by biblical or modern-day standards? If it was rape, then why is King David referred to as an adulterer?

Let's begin by looking at the most common accusation. Bathsheba seduced David. The only text that could lead to this conclusion would be that Bathsheba was bathing within view, she was beautiful, and she went to the palace without being forced. Regarding the bath, 2 Samuel 2 and 4 may indicate that Bathsheba bathed to purify herself from her uncleanness in obedience to the law found in Leviticus 15. These details alone should exonerate her from the guilt of seduction. If her bath was for the purpose of purifying herself after her menstruation, then the scripture also serves to indicate that she was not yet pregnant. One scholar focuses on the location of the palace, noting, "The passage portrays the rooftop location as neutral. It is neither salacious nor condemned. David's ability to view her body is attributed to the size and position of the royal residence and not to any temptation or solicitation on her part."<sup>214</sup> The scholar goes on to explain that a person on the rooftop of the palace may be the only location in town able to see Bathsheba bathe. In effort to put one more distortion to rest, 2 Samuel 2 reads, "One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing."<sup>215</sup> It was David, not Bathsheba who was on a roof.

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<sup>214</sup> Wilda Gafney, *Womanist Midrash: A Reintroduction to the Women of the Torah and the Throne* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017), 219, Kindle Location 4666.

<sup>215</sup> 2 Samuel 2 (NIV)

What of her beauty? One might think that there is a running theme in these three accounts that beautiful women will be the death of their husbands. Abraham and Isaac believed it and some believe that this is why Uriah was killed. This writer disagrees that Bathsheba's beauty motivated David to murder Uriah and warns that such distortions harm women by assuming they are seductresses based on physical features alone. One scholar writes, "While seminaries warn pastors against 'predatory women' few emphasize the danger of abuse of power."<sup>216</sup> Rather than killing Uriah to take his wife, it is this writer's opinion that David did everything within his power to cover up his transgression by attempting to make Uriah sleep with Bathsheba. David's initial plan was to let them live out their marriage with no one knowing what he had done. It is this writer's opinion that David's plan turned murderous when Uriah unknowingly accused David of the sins he had already committed saying, "The ark and Israel and Judah are staying in tents, and my master Joab and my lord's men are camped in the open fields. How could I go to my house to eat and drink and lie with my wife? As surely as you live, I will not do such a thing!" After Uriah's statement, David used his power to compel Uriah to eat and drink with him, breaking two of the three vows that Uriah said he could not do. However, David could not force Uriah to sleep with Bathsheba. By morning, David plotted to have Uriah murdered.<sup>217</sup>

Why would Bathsheba have gone to the palace alone? Could this have been a sign of consent? 2 Samuel 11:4 indicates that King David sent messengers to get her and take her to the palace. Author Wilda Gafney writes, "I argue that Bathsheba's going with David's soldiers on her own two feet should in no way be read as consent, but rather as holding on to a shred of dignity by not being dragged or carried out. Yet commentators from rabbinic and Christian fathers to contemporary interlocutors describe the event as 'adultery,' signifying consent on

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<sup>216</sup> Sandra Glahn, *Vindicating the Vixens: Revisiting Sexualized, Vilified, and Marginalized Women of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2017), 121, Kindle Location 2117.

<sup>217</sup> 2 Samuel 11:10-15

Bathsheba's part."<sup>218</sup> Although this writer agrees with Gafney that voluntarily walking to the palace does not signify consent, this writer does not assume that Bathsheba should have had reason for being dragged in the first place. In the context of the biblical account, Bathsheba is at home while her husband is away fighting in a war. An unscheduled visit from the king's officials would presumably indicate that either Uriah or Bathsheba's father Eliam, were killed in battle. The messengers are not recorded in telling her the purpose of her presence at the palace. They may have been oblivious to David's intentions, giving Bathsheba no indication to be concerned for her own safety. In this context, Bathsheba may very well have been concerned for her husband's welfare rather than the common assumption that she went to the palace to engage in an affair with a king she had never met.<sup>219</sup> She did not go to the palace alone. Most Bible translations agree that she was taken there.<sup>220</sup> Receiving a summons by royal messengers to be taken to the palace in the midst of her husband's active-duty absence does not indicate a reason for her to fear for her safety, nor does it signify consent toward engaging in extramarital sexual relations.

By biblical standards, was what happened to Bathsheba actually rape? Even scholars who agree that Bathsheba did not consent may disagree on whether or not the action qualifies as rape. The scrutiny lies in how Deuteronomy 22:23-27 is interpreted:

If there is a young woman, a virgin already engaged to be married, and a man meets her in the town and lies with her, you shall bring both of them to the gate of that town and stone them to death, the young woman because she did not cry for help in the town and the man because he violated his neighbor's wife. So you shall purge the evil from your midst. But if the man meets the engaged woman in the open country and the man seizes her and lies with her, then only the man who lay with her shall die. You shall do nothing to the young woman; the young woman has not committed an offense punishable by

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<sup>218</sup> Wilda Gafney, *Womanist Midrash: A Reintroduction to the Women of the Torah and the Throne* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017), 221, Kindle Locations 4703 and 4717.

<sup>219</sup> 2 Samuel 11:3

<sup>220</sup> 2 Sam 11:4; Both ESV and KJV record, "And David sent messengers and took her," while NIV, NLT, and NRSV record "Then David sent messengers to get her."

death, because this case is like that of someone who attacks and murders a neighbor. Since he found her in the open country, the engaged woman may have cried for help, but there was no one to rescue her.<sup>221</sup>

By biblical standards, rape occurs when a woman screams, and the location may help to determine if her scream would likely have been heard. But did Bathsheba scream? Scripture does not record her screaming during the incident, but neither does Nathan's convicting story indicate that the lamb cried out while being slaughtered. Writer Alexander Izuchukwu Abasili examines this scripture and points out that while the coercion by the king would meet the modern-day qualifications for rape, the absence of her scream disqualifies the situation as a biblical description of rape. He writes, "Bathsheba's willingness is drastically reduced but not entirely extinguished. Consequently, Bathsheba, though a victim of circumstances may not be declared entirely innocent; she does share minimally in the responsibility."<sup>222</sup> In contrast, Sandra Glahn suggests that the confines of the palace would relate more similarly to the country than the town scenario described in Deuteronomy 22. She explains, "If Bathsheba cried out, no one would dare enter the king's chamber to stop him. In that sense, there was little difference between a man raping a woman in the country and a king raping a woman in his palace chambers."<sup>223</sup>

If Bathsheba was innocent, why didn't God rescue her like he did with Sarah and Rebecca? This writer suggests that God intervened in a mighty way, but David chose not to heed his warning. When God revealed to Pharaoh and both Abimelechs that Sarah and Rebecca were married, they immediately returned them and made amends. In contrast, 2 Samuel 3 states that David did not know who Bathsheba was and sought to find out her identity. His messenger

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<sup>221</sup> Deuteronomy 22:23-27

<sup>222</sup> Alexander Izuchukwu Abasili, "Was It Rape? The David and Bathsheba Pericope Re-examined," *Vetus Testamentum* 61, no. 1 (2011), 11.

<sup>223</sup> Sandra Glahn, *Vindicating the Vixens: Revisiting Sexualized, Vilified, and Marginalized Women of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2017), 104.

responds, “Isn’t this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite?” Not only has David learned that she is married, but he should see this as a significant warning against any further action. This scripture confirms Bathsheba’s marital status, but when paired with 2 Samuel 23:34 and 39, the significance of these men becomes clear. These verses reveal that Bathsheba’s father Eliam and her husband Uriah are two of David’s 37 mighty men and among his most trusted counsel. They are away fighting David’s war alongside the Ark of the Covenant in David’s absence. The mention of these two men should sober David and should remind him that he is not where he is meant to be. The warning is not heeded, and David devises a plan to knowingly pursue the wife of one of his most trusted warriors.

If it was rape, then why is King David referred to as an adulterer? It is this writer’s opinion that this may be a case where one person is an adulterer interpreted as a married person who voluntarily enters sexual relations with a person outside of marriage, and the other person is non-consenting and therefore not an adulterer. For example, if Pharaoh or Abimelech had slept with Sarah, who was incorporated into their harems against her will, would she be an adulteress or would she be a victim? The term adulterer used for a king is interesting in and of itself. It may shed light on the fact that King David had no intention of incorporating Bathsheba into his harem. By 2 Samuel 11, David already had at least six wives.<sup>224</sup> The fact that King David summoned her, lay with her, and sent her home seems to be evidence that David had no intentions of a longstanding union. Furthermore, when the Prophet Nathan confronts David of his sin, he does not place any guilt on Bathsheba. Rather, he relates her to the loved lamb that is slaughtered and eaten by the king. Rather than an active participant, Bathsheba is portrayed as a victim of the king’s apathy, greed, covetousness, and consumption.<sup>225</sup>

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<sup>224</sup> 1 Chronicles 3:1-9

<sup>225</sup> 2 Samuel 11:12

What might the vindication of Sarah, Rebecca, Esther, and Bathsheba who were sexually pursued by people in power mean for sexual assault victims today? Common modern day lies about those who are harmed by people in power imply that they must have pursued it, benefited from it, or that they should feel lucky to have been chosen in the first place. If Esther or Bathsheba are interpreted as lucky ladies whose beauty bought them a free ticket to royalty, then we distort the scriptures while we vilify the one in five victims in our midst. When teachers deliberately leave out scripture so that Abraham and Isaac can be taught in the most positive light, then they have distorted the biblical account, edited out the actions that God saw fit to include, and silenced the plight of people they hurt along the way. The act of covering up the “character flaws” of those deemed righteous by the church is a dangerous endeavor. Present-day examples could include religious leaders vouching for the character and piety of potential perpetrators in the midst of accounts that would argue otherwise.

### **Go and Do Likewise**

Through multiple accounts of sexual assault and oppression in the Bible, God shows dignity to victims while persuading perpetrators to repent and reconcile. God compels Christians to go and do likewise. Using the parable of *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, Henri Nouwen describes the father’s compassion for both prodigal sons saying, “the father’s unreserved, unlimited love is offered wholly and equally to both his sons.”<sup>226</sup> Nouwen suggests that God is imploring the church to acquire the role, not of the sons, but of the compassionate father. While describing his epiphany as he contemplated the parable, Nouwen writes, “To become like the Father whose only authority is compassion, I have to shed countless tears and so prepare my

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<sup>226</sup> Henri Nouwen, *The Return of the Prodigal Son: A Story of Homecoming* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 90.



heart to receive anyone, whatever their journey has been, and forgive them from that heart.”<sup>227</sup> Likewise, Diane Langberg reminds Christians of God’s compassion and protection over others by writing, “There is no human being we will ever meet, no matter how wounded, disordered, or evil, no matter their theology, style of worship, or ways of thinking, who was not created by the God we love. Any culture- nation, denomination, city, church, or family- that leads us to treat someone otherwise is seducing us to behave in ways that break the heart of our God.”<sup>228</sup> As Christians embrace the transformative compassion of God, they experience for themselves the dignity and comfort from having been hurt as well as the conviction and repentance from hurting others. As a recipient of God’s compassion, cloaked in humility, they are to show compassion to others as they walk through the darkness to reflect God’s light.<sup>229</sup> It is in this place of humility and compassion that the church may best reach out to CSE victims, perpetrators, and the community.

## **Thesis**

### **A Christian Approach to Sex Trafficking Awareness in the Local Community**

Over the past decade, discussion has increased in Christian circles about sex trafficking in the United States and around the world. Many Christians express deep concern for the plight of victims and outrage regarding the existence of traffickers, but they do not know enough about CSE in the local community to identify red flags, perpetrators, victims, or their own role in the community system. Heightened feelings paired with a lack of knowledge can lead to well-intentioned actions that miss the mark. As a result, uninformed actions can harm victims and

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<sup>227</sup> Henri Nouwen, *The Return of the Prodigal Son: A Story of Homecoming*, 142.

<sup>228</sup> Diane Langberg, *Redeeming Power: Understanding Authority and Abuse in the Church*, 56.

<sup>229</sup> Diane Langberg, *Suffering and the Heart of God: How Trauma Destroys and Christ Restores*, Ch. 10; Henri Nouwen, *The Return of the Prodigal Son: A Story of Homecoming*, 129

survivors, protect or harbor perpetrators, and burn bridges with legitimate anti-trafficking groups in the local community. Prior to entering the fight against CSE, Christians would benefit from biblically founded anti-trafficking education.

The creation of an educational tool that is both biblically founded and trafficking-informed can guide participants to approach CSE in a way that honors God and neighbor. Through scripture accounts of sexual assault and exploitation, God's comfort toward victims and discipline of perpetrators is an established pattern. Christians are called to be Christ's ambassadors as if God is making an appeal through Christians.<sup>230</sup> Following God's example, Christians are to be a beacon of hope to both the victim and the perpetrator. Christians are called to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with their God.<sup>231</sup> Scripture not only establishes God's commission to followers, but it also guides Christians to recognize God's movement toward justice and mercy amid sexual assault accounts in the Bible.

This theme is evident in both the Old and New Testaments. Many values can be gleaned from biblical accounts of sexual assault and can form a Christian approach to trafficking prevention. Here are some of the points established by accounts in the Bible and applied to a Christian approach to CSE. God does not tolerate injustice and is not pleased when God's people ignore the cries of the oppressed.<sup>232</sup> To do nothing is to ignore the heart of God.<sup>233</sup> God's people are not immune from the impacts of sexual assault or exploitation. The Bible records God's people as having been victims, survivors, and perpetrators of sexual abuse. Some victims and survivors experienced justice in their lifetime while others died in bondage.<sup>234</sup> Scripture records accounts of perpetrators being identified and called to account even when the community failed

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<sup>230</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:20

<sup>231</sup> Micah 6:8

<sup>232</sup> Elsa Tamez, 24.

<sup>233</sup> Matthew 25:41-46

<sup>234</sup> See section entitled *Sexual Assault Accounts in the Bible* for examples of Sarah and Hagar exiting exploitation while Bilhah and Zilpah did not.

to show justice to victims in their lifetime.<sup>235</sup> The Bible acknowledges that both men and women can be victimized, and both can be perpetrators. Furthermore, there are no perpetrators too prominent to be called to account. By naming Abraham, Sarah, King David, and other prominent names, the Bible indicates that no one is above being held responsible for their abusive actions. God confronts perpetrators through conviction rather than condemnation. As evidenced in God's warnings to Pharaoh, King Abimelech, and King David, God warns oppressors, even disciplining them, with the opportunity to repent. Likewise, the Prophet Nathan, as a servant of God, convicts David rather than condemning him. Christians are to approach occurrences of CSE in the local community, both inside and outside the church, in the manner modeled in scripture.

Although these values are embedded in scripture, it is more important for Christians to study scripture and discover these values for themselves than to be told that they exist. Once they have a biblically based understanding of God's values, character, and response to victims and perpetrators, then they can form a modern-day application. As Christians study scripture, they may realize that their initial perspective of specific passages was not previously aligned to God's values and response. Awareness may lead to the spiritually transformative work of conviction, repentance, and a new resolve to align with a God-honoring approach to CSE. A Bible study focusing on sexual assault and exploitation accounts is crucial for introducing Christians to God's response to the layers of trauma found in scripture and familiar to lived experiences of CSE victims in the local community. A discovery-style approach to studying sexual assault in the Bible invites the participant to experience a safe space to deal with their own discomfort as they grapple with concepts of victimization and perpetration they may not have noticed before. Using scripture accounts rather than modern-day testimonies encourages Christian participants to align with God's movement rather than falling into the homeostatic trap of defensiveness,

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<sup>235</sup> 1 Chronicles 5:1-2

justification, or denial. The goal is to use scripture to guide participants toward their own moments of accountability and healing while simultaneously inspiring them to make a God-honoring and survivor-informed difference in their local communities.<sup>236</sup>

Although a biblical understanding supports Christian involvement in anti-trafficking work, it is crucial that Christians also have a realistic grasp of how CSE takes place in their local communities. Human trafficking morphs and changes as new opportunities arise in the shadows of the culture and the local community. Therefore, trafficking in the United States will differ from trafficking in Thailand or Sweden. Local community CSE can vary significantly within the same country as well. Local trafficking in Seattle will look different from a city that legalizes sex work like Las Vegas, and both will differ from a Super Bowl host city and the influx of tourism and sex trafficking that capitalizes on the event. Upon learning that Christians should be involved in anti-trafficking work, it is essential to learn how CSE manifests in the local community and what anti-traffickers are already doing to oppose it.

There is a fact that is underutilized in most trafficking prevention models that may serve as a catalyst in accessing community empathy, awareness, and anti-trafficking engagement. Commercial sexual exploitation is a form of the broader crime of sexual assault. Research indicates that 20% of the general community population are sexual assault survivors, yet sexual assault survivors are not usually invited to relate their trauma and grief work to that of commercially exploited individuals. If this fact is brought up at all, it is most commonly presented to critique the hypocrisy within the community culture to allow some sexual assault survivors to share their stories, receive legal protection, and justice, but fail to extend the same dignity and accessibility to community resources when someone has been sexually assaulted in

<sup>236</sup> The terms “survivor-led” and “survivor-informed” are commonly used to describe anti-trafficking work that follows the leadership or recommendations of CSE survivors, respectively. In recent years, the amplification of survivor voices has been a crucial in evaluating the applicability of anti-trafficking language and images, education, intervention, and survivor support services.

exchange for drugs, money, food, or housing.<sup>237</sup> Clearly stating the fact that CSE survivors are by definition SA survivors may assist the local community to cultivate a better understanding and deeper sensitivity toward CSE survivors. Sexual assault survivors within the local community could approach trafficking prevention and awareness from a space of shared experience and peer-based empathy. Recently, the trafficking prevention curriculum designed for 6th-12th grade students emphasized the importance of peer-based empathy. Results indicate that teens are not only learning the signs of trafficking, but they are recognizing their responsibility in helping other teens who are being targeted by traffickers.<sup>238</sup> Inviting sexual assault survivors into peer-based empathy may cultivate lasting awareness and sensitivity within the general community.

An educational tool designed to prepare Christians to engage in anti-trafficking work must be two-fold. First, Christians must align with biblical values and respond to victims and perpetrators accordingly. Next, Christians must become informed about the realities of victimization and perpetration in the local community. The process of Christian anti-trafficking education needs to offer opportunities for spiritual transformation and an educational learning curve. Trafficking content is disturbing and may trigger learners, so an educational approach needs to inspire change in a gentle, compassionate, and encouraging way.

## **Alternative Solutions**

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<sup>237</sup> Melissa Farley, "Prostitution, Trafficking, and Cultural Amnesia: What We Must Not Know in Order to Keep the Business of Sexual Exploitation Running Smoothly," *Yale Journal of Law & Feminism* 18, no. 1 (January 13, 2016), <https://digitalcommons.law.yale.edu/yjlf/vol18/iss1/5/>.

<sup>238</sup> "Citywide Safe Summit 2021," Digital Livestream, *Power over Predators* (Power Over Predators and the Pima County Superintendent's Office, October 28, 2021), <https://www.poweroverpredators.org>; "Prevent Trafficking of Youth — Washington Trafficking Prevention," *WTP*, accessed December 14, 2021, <https://traffickingprevention.org/youth>.

Many creative approaches to Christian anti-trafficking education could have been developed. The gap between Christian engagement and anti-trafficking work is so immense that multiple approaches could co-exist, benefiting local communities around the United States. One solution that this author chose not to pursue was writing a curriculum customized to specific demographics, roles, or local communities. The proposed artifact is designed to be general in nature so that it may be tailored to the group using the curriculum. For example, although a group is encouraged to be gender-specific, the curriculum is written to be used by groups of men or women. Within the first session, victims, perpetrators, and community members are each welcomed into the six-week learning experience. This allows participants to be honest with themselves about how their words, beliefs, or actions have impacted the CSE system. The inclusive nature of the curriculum also opens the opportunity for the artifact to be used in a variety of contexts such as independent study, small group discussions, prison ministry, local mission teams, sex-buyer accountability groups, or a Bible Study for CSE survivors. An alternative approach could focus on narrowing the scope to procure distinct goals sought by specific groups. A curriculum that scrutinizes the intricacies of healing and accountability of certain groups could be advantageous, but the absence of a general curriculum that bridges biblical literacy to anti-trafficking work has yet to be published to this writer's knowledge.

This writer initially thought about developing a two-day in-person conference but opted not to do so. There are positive aspects to a two-day training. Many people can acquire training simultaneously, making the two-day conference an ideal option for continued education in professional fields. However, three concerns deterred this writer from developing a conference. Due to the impacts of COVID, it is uncertain that a two-day in-person training will be embraced in the future. The format of a two-day conference is not accessible to anyone who is unable to

accommodate a two-day time frame. Single parents, bi-vocational pastors, and many people who are marginalized in society may find it impractical to dedicate two full days to a conference. A second concern is that a two-day conference may be overwhelming due to the disturbing nature of CSE. An extended timeline allows participants time to process painful information in healthy ways rather than burying their newfound knowledge. A third concern is that conferences risk emphasizing the speaker rather than the content. This writer is an ally rather than a survivor. It is important for survivors to lead the charge in the anti-trafficking movement. As the sole presenter in a two-day conference, this writer would be standing in the place of the true experts. A two-day conference in partnership with CSE survivors or survivor-informed anti-trafficking organizations may be a viable option in the future.

Another option is to develop a webinar or video training. Online anti-trafficking trainings already exist, but they are most often used as a visual aid used by the instructor who is teaching the course in person or by livestream.<sup>239</sup> These digital accompaniments benefit the speaker by offering mixed media options to impart fact-based information such as legal definitions, statistics, and local community trends. Although an online tool could be an excellent accompaniment to the artifact in the future, an exclusively digital tool cannot provide the personal camaraderie of an in-person group discussion. This writer determined that the benefits of meeting face-to-face outweighed the accessibility of online learning platforms. A goal within the in-person group experience is to develop a growth environment that inspires group engagement while simultaneously grappling with complex topics. An in-person group provides

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<sup>239</sup> “Adult Programs — Washington Trafficking Prevention,” WTP, accessed December 14, 2021, <https://traffickingprevention.org/adult-programs>; “Citywide Safe Summit 2021,” Digital Livestream, *Power over Predators* (Power Over Predators and the Pima County Superintendent’s Office, October 28, 2021), <https://www.poweroverpredators.org>.

accountability, open dialogue, and a place to be vulnerable with a cohort of participants who have committed to the same six-week journey.

## **Proposed Solution and Methodology**

### **Proposed Artifact**

This writer chose to develop an educational tool in the form of a 6-week group discussion curriculum. The goal of the 6-week curriculum is to assist participants in engaging a Bible study and group dialogue intended to inform a Christian approach to anti-trafficking based on practices recorded in the Bible. Biblical accounts of sexual assault and exploitation will be examined to identify how God addresses victims and perpetrators in the Bible. Each week, basic facts about CSE and how it manifests in the local community will be presented by utilizing content commonly taught in introductory anti-trafficking awareness and prevention courses. Application of the *Personal Development Approach* to curriculum, the utilization of therapeutic techniques, and a combination of scripture passages and CSE facts will be used to guide participants toward biblical study, self-awareness, group dialogue, and introductory-level anti-trafficking involvement in the local community. The artifact can be found in the Appendix.

### **Scope**

The six-week curriculum consists of six 75-minute group sessions and six mid-week independent studies. Each group session and corresponding mid-week study will occur weekly. The independent study time commitment may vary by the participant but should be able to be completed within 30-60 minutes. The breadth and depth of the curriculum content is two-fold. In



her book, *To Set One's Heart*, Sara Little presents a variety of approaches to curriculum writing. Little states that many curriculum procedures focus on either “making the familiar strange” or on “making the strange familiar.”<sup>240</sup> She explains that both procedures indicate the need for further church education. These two categories represent the goal of the scope of the curriculum. Since the curriculum is designed for a Christian audience, the biblical accounts may seem familiar. This writer’s goal is to “make the familiar strange” by encouraging the reader to address biblical details that have been distorted or overlooked. The scope of the Bible study will be detailed. In contrast, one premise is that few community members exhibit a basic and realistic understanding of CSE. The goal for the CSE educational piece is to “make the strange familiar” by providing CSE definitions, statistics, resources, and tools accessible to the participant who is learning anti-trafficking material for the first time. Although someone from the anti-trafficking community may perceive this portion as elementary, it is common practice for most anti-trafficking literature, no matter how deep the scope, to begin by offering basic information. Aligning with this standard practice helps set a clear foundation offered in a style accepted by many sources in the anti-trafficking community.

The artifact is written to engage individuals or groups from three primary audiences: CSE survivors, CSE perpetrators, and community members. These three audiences make up the CSE system. Acknowledging all three groups and welcoming each audience to engage the curriculum clarifies the presence of the CSE system regardless of who is present or absent in the group. The acknowledgment of all three audiences also encourages participants to create a shared growth environment for all to learn to become anti-trafficking allies. Welcoming all three groups also encourages authentic wholeness. The parameters between survivors, perpetrators, and the community are less distinct than is usually discussed. Welcoming all three groups allows people

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<sup>240</sup> Sara Little, *To Set One's Heart : Belief and Teaching in the Church* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1983), 74.

who predominantly identify in one group to acknowledge times when they resonate with aspects of other groups. For example, a perpetrator who has been the victim of sexual assault may learn to use the experience of past victimization to identify the trauma and needs of CSE survivors. Likewise, a community member may realize that their inability to recognize red flags may have led them to blame and abandon victims rather than being an anti-trafficking resource in the community.

The weekly sessions are designed for individual and small group use. Although the group discussion sections are meant to inspire group dialogue, the study can be completed independently if someone chose to engage the curriculum without a group. The weekly curriculum is developed to support group learning, but the mid-week section is designed for independent study and self-awareness. The scope of the mid-week content is to dive deeper into the scripture and anti-trafficking content than the content addressed in the group setting. Building on the group session topic, the mid-week section offers the participant a personal opportunity for spiritual growth and transformation.

### **Sequence:**

The sequence of each session will follow a consistent pattern that offers a familiar structure for the weekly discussions. The body of the session is divided into two distinct group discussions. The first group discussion will focus on studying a passage from the Bible. The second group discussion will build on the topics discussed in the Bible study while incorporating modern-day facts and resources about CSE prevention. Each session will conclude with an invitation to go deeper in the mid-week study and a teaser suggesting the importance of next week's topic. Each weekly session sequence assumes the following basic pattern.

### *Opening Prayer and Feelings Identification (3 Minutes)*

The group facilitator will open the group in prayer. As the weeks progress, the group facilitator can invite others to open the group in prayer. After prayer, the group facilitator will invite the group to use the Feelings Wheel to share 1-2 words that represent how they are feeling at the beginning of group.<sup>241</sup> This practice invites each member to be present in the moment, to have an audible and authentic voice in the group, and to learn to value combinations of feelings within themselves and others as the group journeys through the multi-week process. Feelings identification also allows the facilitator to get a quick pulse on how the group is approaching the session. Are people anxious but curious? Are they feeling angry and isolated? It is not the facilitator's responsibility to attempt to comfort, engage, or alter the feelings of group members. Doing so may disrupt the contemplative process. Group members are welcome to engage the content and group discussion from an authentic and honest space. Once the participants, including the facilitator, have had an opportunity to share their words, the facilitator will simply thank the group for sharing.

### *Debrief the Week (15 minutes)*

The group facilitator will guide an open-ended discussion allowing participants to process what they discovered throughout the week considering the prior group discussion and mid-week study. Participants may share concepts that resonated with them, ideas they are wrestling with, new perspectives about the community or culture, or anything else they would like to debrief.

### *Opening Statement (2 minutes)*

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<sup>241</sup> Gloria Willcox, "The Feeling Wheel," *Transactional Analysis Journal* 12, no. 4 (October 1982): 274–76, <https://doi.org/10.1177/036215378201200411>.

After prayer and feeling identification, each session will open with a brief story, scripture, or paragraph designed to help set the theme for the group discussion. Sometimes there may be a short group interaction, and other times the opening statement will move directly to the first scripture reading.

*Group Discussion- Part 1 (30 minutes)*

Scripture will be read aloud to the group by any group participant. Group Discussion- Part 1 is designed to guide the group by exploring actions and responses within a biblical account of sexual assault or exploitation. Some accounts are more complex and may be read in segments with group discussion in between each scripture passage.

*Group Discussion- Part 2 (20 minutes)*

Using anti-trafficking resources and statistics, this section is designed to allow the biblical response discussed in Group Discussion- Part 1 to inform the group on how to perceive CSE survivors, perpetrators, the community, and anti-trafficking pursuits from a biblical point of view. Although care has been taken to discuss the topic of sexual assault and sexual exploitation as gently as possible while simultaneously being true to the subject matter, there may be disturbing or painful content difficult for participants to read and discuss. In an effort to inform the group that difficult passages, topics, or questions are about to be addressed, the phrases “A Hard Word” and “The Ugly Truth” will be used to address painful scripture passages and challenging CSE content respectively.

*Concluding Thoughts and Closing Prayer- (5 minutes)*

The conclusion is meant to bring closure to the group discussion while affirming participants for engaging in the session. Next week's topic will be introduced in this section in order to build anticipation and continuity between sessions. Each session will end by inviting participants to apply the tools they learned in their own lives and in the local community. The group facilitator will read the concluding thoughts section and will end the session in a closing prayer.

#### *Mid-Week Study- Going Deeper (30-60 minutes)*

This section is meant to engage each participant in a deeper study later during the week and prior to the next group session. The mid-week study is designed to explore the richness of the text that cannot be unpacked within the limited time constraints of the group discussion. This section allows the group discussion to remain content-rich without being overwhelming while allowing participants to dive deeper at their own desired pace.

### **Curriculum Function and Approach**

In his book, *The Educational Imagination*, Elliot Eisner describes that curriculum has two primary purposes. The first function is to teach students to “learn how to learn,” and the second function is to provide students with “the opportunities to use and strengthen the variety of intellectual faculties that they possess.”<sup>242</sup> He explains that the mind has the ability “to infer, to speculate, to locate and solve problems, to remember, to visualize, to extrapolate, and so on,” and he suggests that the function of the curriculum is to strengthen cognitive processes to be equipped to learn to solve future problems.<sup>243</sup> From Eisner's perspective, content is not the most valuable aspect of the curriculum, but rather the context in which the process of learning can take

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<sup>242</sup> Elliot Eisner, *The Educational Imagination: On the Design and Evaluation of School Programs* (New York: Macmillan, 1979), 51.

<sup>243</sup> Elliot Eisner, 51.

place. He states, “Teaching is not to impart, but to help students learn to inquire.”<sup>244</sup> This writer resonates with the concept that the student is recognized as being involved in the process of learning. This approach acknowledges that a student is fully capable of utilizing the curriculum as a means of learning past the content confined to the page. Viewing curriculum in this way empowers individuals and groups to co-create their own learning experience.

Elliot Eisner cautions curriculum writers to be mindful of the presence of implicit and null curricula. He describes implicit curriculum as the content that is not written yet still learned. Implicit curriculum that may be present in a group learning about CSE could be inferences regarding the tension in the room, cultural cues, or the facilitator’s tendency to call on some participants and not others. Eisner describes the null curriculum as the absence of content or perspectives, whether conscious or subconscious, that impacts what is learned just by being omitted. He states, “It is my thesis that what schools do not teach may be as important as what they do teach. I argue this because ignorance is not simply a neutral void; it has important effects on the kinds of options one is able to consider, the alternatives that one can examine, and the perspectives from which one can view a situation or problem.”<sup>245</sup> Since the artifact is founded on the premise that distorted or absent information can lead to bias, it is crucial to acknowledge the inevitable presence of implicit and null curricula that impacts this artifact as well. While the purpose of this artifact is on correcting common distortions and omissions in scripture references and CSE facts, there is a limited amount of information that can be offered in a six-week curriculum. The proposed artifact does not attempt to be an exhaustive introductory course but endeavors to be an invitational process that inspires personal growth, increased empathy, and positive anti-trafficking engagement. Another inevitable downfall of written curricula on CSE is

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<sup>244</sup> Elliot Eisner, 51.

<sup>245</sup> Elliot Eisner, 83.

that the grooming and recruitment tactics continue to evolve, following the latest trends in technology. Offering modern-day examples of how sex trafficking happens in the local community can both help and hinder trafficking awareness. In an effort to offer content that stands the test of time, this writer provides less contested information such as federal law definitions, explanations on how trafficking happens regardless of the latest recruitment tactics and offers links to the most reputable anti-trafficking online resources that will continue to update their pages as trends evolve. Although content is necessary, the process of open-ended questions designed to encourage group interaction will be a valuable aspect of remaining relevant to groups over time.

Author Sara Little offers a variety of approaches used to write a Christian curriculum. This artifact is fashioned in the style that most aligns with the *Personal Development Approach*.<sup>246</sup> Little describes this approach as being a “pilgrimage toward self-awareness and wholeness” where participants seek to become “authentic human beings.”<sup>247</sup> Rather than experts, the writer and group facilitator are also perceived as pilgrims on the same journey. Students are recognized as unique, each exhibiting gifts, strengths, and untapped potential, who need opportunities to grow in their awareness of self, the environment, and their relationship with the Lord. The purpose of the curriculum is to offer these opportunities in a safe space that allows the group to express their unique feelings and perceptions as they discuss curriculum content.<sup>248</sup> This approach seeks to offer dialogue but allows many questions to remain unanswered, leaving space for the work of the Holy Spirit by giving participants “time to brood” and wrestle with what has been presented.<sup>249</sup>

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<sup>246</sup> Sara Little, 67.

<sup>247</sup> Sara Little, 68-69.

<sup>248</sup> Sara Little, 69-70.

<sup>249</sup> Sara Little, 70.

Sarah Little's *Personal Development Approach* harmonizes with the therapeutic undertones that are present throughout the curriculum. Although the artifact is not meant to provide group therapy, therapeutic tips and resources are provided within the sessions and Appendix. In a discussion in which *In Our Backyard* Executive Director and survivor Cheryl Csiky gave this writer valuable feedback, Cheryl pointed out that a curriculum that addresses sexual assault and CSE will inevitably expose participants to a mild form of trauma, potentially triggering participants who have a history of primary or secondary trauma.<sup>250</sup> She added, "It's important that participants do not require therapy after the six-week study ends."<sup>251</sup> In response to her feedback, this writer included therapeutic concepts to encourage participants to stay present in the midst of complex feelings, to allow scripture to navigate an informative and healing process, and to motivate participants to use past and present trauma to embrace new outcomes regarding local community CSE. Therapeutic resources such as the Feeling Wheel are used. Gloria Willcox first developed the Feeling Wheel in 1982, and it remains a popular tool in professional counseling, pastoral care, peer-support groups, and 12-step programs.<sup>252</sup> The purpose of the Feeling Wheel is to help people learn to identify specific ways that they feel rather than generalizing to broader feelings such as feeling *happy*, *angry*, or *sad*. When individuals learn to identify specific feelings or several co-occurring feelings, they report increased self-understanding and an improved ability to articulate their feelings and needs to others. The Feelings Wheel will be used at the start of each session and occasionally within group discussion when tough topics arise. The facilitator may choose to utilize the Feelings Wheel as needed within the session. Another therapeutic tip that can be found in the Appendix is a basic deep breathing tips. This can be used by participants who are feeling agitated or

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<sup>250</sup> Cheryl Csiky, interview by Amanda Montgomery, *Zoom Meeting*, August 20, 2021.

<sup>251</sup> Cheryl Csiky, interview by Amanda Montgomery, *Zoom Meeting*, August 20, 2021.

<sup>252</sup> Gloria Willcox, "The Feeling Wheel."



distressed in the midst of a session or mid-week study. Deep breathing is a simple strategy to help calm the body down when a person experiences feelings of distress. Deep, controlled breathing relaxes the heart rate as it counteracts adrenaline-charged fight or flight process.<sup>253</sup> Other therapeutic elements woven throughout the curriculum are inspired by Solution-Focused, Narrative, and Cognitive Behavioral theories.<sup>254</sup> Solution-Focused Therapy assists people in finding solutions that are already in their wheelhouse and adapting it to new challenges. Solution-Focused Therapy inspires this writer's theory that people within all three CSE populations will participate in solving the problem of CSE in the local community if they are able to recognize their responsibility in the system and access solutions together and from their own life experiences such as utilizing solutions from their journey of healing from sexual assault to now inform them of the plight of CSE victims and survivors. Techniques from Narrative Theory are used when participants are asked to approach seemingly familiar biblical passages from a different point of view. Creating space through study and dialogue in order to recognize victims and perpetrators hidden within the verses can be a powerful tool in reframing a Christian approach to anti-trafficking efforts. Cognitive-Behavioral Theory informs the movement to gently uncover commonly held cognitive distortions about CSE in the local community.

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<sup>253</sup> Harvard Health Publishing, "Relaxation Techniques: Breath Control Helps Quell Errant Stress Response," Harvard Health Publishing (Harvard Medical School, July 6, 2020), <https://www.health.harvard.edu/mind-and-mood/relaxation-techniques-breath-control-helps-quell-errant-stress-response>.

<sup>254</sup> Andrea J Nichols, Tonya Edmond, and Erin C Heil, *Social Work Practice with Survivors of Sex Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018); "Commonly-Asked Questions about Narrative Approaches to Therapy, Community Work, and Psychosocial Support," The Dulwich Centre, accessed December 17, 2021, <https://dulwichcentre.com.au/articles-about-narrative-therapy/common-questions-narrative-therapy/>; Institute for Solution-Focused Therapy, "What Is Solution-Focused Therapy?," Institute for Solution-Focused Therapy, 2017, <https://solutionfocused.net/what-is-solution-focused-therapy/>; "The Home of Cognitive Behavior Therapy and Recovery-Oriented Cognitive Therapy," Beck Institute for Cognitive Behavior Therapy, 2015, <https://beckinstitute.org/>.

Although the curriculum has been written as gently as possible without minimizing the importance of addressing content with clarity, there is no guarantee that a discussion about CSE in a diverse group can be truly safe. Authors Brian Arao and Kristi Clemens suggest the importance of developing brave spaces rather than safe spaces when diverse groups are meeting to discuss complex and vulnerable topics. Brave spaces anticipate the presence of fear, discomfort, and even pain when learning new concepts about complex topics. Often, participants' views may change on topics as they learn more about it, and a brave space allows participants to grow and change throughout the process. However, rather than assuming that the curriculum outcome is to win a group over to a particular set of beliefs, the goal instead is to create a space where participants can enter conflict within the parameters of civility.<sup>255</sup> Arao and Clemens explain that controversy with civility allows all participants the freedom to have strong emotions and differing opinions. However, it does not permit majority groups to use aggression, silence, or other tactics to reinforce dominant opinions that shut down the learning process.<sup>256</sup> Brave spaces allow participants to wrestle with ideas and to grow in the process of learning. One goal in writing the curriculum was to provide parameters that the facilitator and group participants could use to increase the likelihood of developing brave spaces throughout the six-week process.

### **Standards of Publication**

The curriculum approach and structure used to develop the scope, sequence, and pacing reflects suggestions offered by Dr. Dean Blevins in his video seminar entitled Curriculum

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<sup>255</sup> Brian Arao and Kristi Clemens, "8 from Safe Spaces to Brave Spaces a New Way to Frame Dialogue around Diversity and Social Justice," 2013, [https://tlss.uottawa.ca/site/perspective-autochtone/1d-\\_From-Safe-Spaces-to-Brave-Spaces.pdf](https://tlss.uottawa.ca/site/perspective-autochtone/1d-_From-Safe-Spaces-to-Brave-Spaces.pdf).

<sup>256</sup> Brian Arao and Kristi Clemens, "8 from Safe Spaces to Brave Spaces a New Way to Frame Dialogue around Diversity and Social Justice."

Writing for DMin Artifact.<sup>257</sup> Dr. Mark Hayse introduced this writer to the concept of implicit and null curricula and offered multiple resources that explained the importance of approaching curriculum with the awareness of the existence of these unseen, but impactful curricula. This writer approached curriculum writing with implicit and null curricula in mind, mainly as it applied to scripture topics and CSE content that has historically been distorted or omitted from Bible Studies or general community knowledge. Curriculum organizing principles and learning outcomes follow language style suggestions from *Bloom's Taxonomy of Action Verbs*.<sup>258</sup> The curriculum and writing approach follows Sarah Little's *Personal Development Approach*.<sup>259</sup> Therapeutic tips and resources are inspired by Solution-Focused, Narrative, and Cognitive Behavioral Theories.<sup>260</sup>

Bible study content was influenced by the published works of Phyllis Trible and by a variety of books and commentaries deriving from Feminist, Womanist, and Liberation theological perspectives.<sup>261</sup> Most of the resources came from Protestant roots, but one informative book entitled *Womanist Midrash* by Wilda Gafney came from biblical interpretations resulting from the blend of Womanist and Messianic Jewish theology. An article based on the trauma and faith of Catholic nuns after being sexually assaulted by priests also inspired this writer's impression of Christian faith as a place of resilience in cases of sexual

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<sup>257</sup> Dean Blevins, "Curriculum Writing for DMin Artifact," [www.youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2bAhNEc5UXw), February 16, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2bAhNEc5UXw>.

<sup>258</sup> L.W. Anderson and D.R. Krathwohl, *A Taxonomy for Learning, Teaching, and Assessing*, Abridged Edition (Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 2001).

<sup>259</sup> Sara Little, *To Set One's Heart: Belief and Teaching in the Church* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1983).

<sup>260</sup> "Commonly-Asked Questions about Narrative Approaches to Therapy, Community Work, and Psychosocial Support;" Institute for Solution-Focused Therapy; "The Home of Cognitive Behavior Therapy and Recovery-Oriented Cognitive Therapy."

<sup>261</sup> Alice Ogden Bellis, *Helpmates, Harlots, and Heroes: Women's Stories in the Hebrew Bible* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007); Sandra Glahn, *Vindicating the Vixens: Revisiting Sexualized, Vilified, and Marginalized Women of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Academic, 2017); Phyllis Trible and Fortress Press, *God and Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 2005); Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1997); Wilda Gafney, *Womanist Midrash: A Reintroduction to the Women of the Torah and the Throne* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017).

assault. Although a diverse range of theological perspectives impacted the Bible study approach, this writer intends that all content, although inspired by various theological origins, wholly aligns with the Church of the Nazarene Statement of Beliefs.<sup>262</sup>

Commercial Sexual Exploitation content reflects definitions, statistics, and tools commonly presented in human trafficking prevention and awareness training and resources. This writer utilized resources published on Nationally recognized websites, participated in multiple training opportunities by two local anti-trafficking nonprofit organizations and received personal feedback on dissertation and artifact content from *Washington Trafficking Prevention* Founder Rose Gunderson, *Washington Trafficking Prevention* Executive Director Kyra Doubek, *In Our Backyard* Founder Nita Belles, *In Our Backyard* Executive Director Cheryl Csiky, and *Adorned in Grace* Founder Christine Gilge.<sup>263</sup>

## Conclusion

Commercial sexual exploitation is a form of oppression that has traumatized people since biblical times, but it has only reached international and national public awareness in the past decade. Many Christians have expressed outrage over sex trafficking and an urge to do something to make a difference, but CSE survivors have warned that when people get involved in anti-trafficking work prior to having a basic understanding of how the crime manifests in local communities, then they run the risk of harming CSE victims and survivors. The 6-week

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<sup>262</sup> Church of the Nazarene, *Church of the Nazarene Manual, 2017-2021: History, Constitution, Government, Ritual*. (Kansas City, Mo.: Nazarene Publishing House, 2017), Section: Articles of Faith.

<sup>263</sup> “Adorned in Grace’s Anti-Trafficking Work in the Puget Sound,” *Adorned in Grace Bridal & Formalwear*, accessed November 23, 2021; “Linking Arms across American in the Fight against Human Trafficking,” *In Our Backyard*, 2021; “Washington Trafficking Prevention,” *WTP*, n.d., <https://traffickingprevention.org/>.

curriculum is developed as a tool to help Christians who are passionate about trafficking prevention to be challenged to grow in empathy and awareness prior to taking action.

Throughout the Bible, scripture records that God is against oppression in all its forms. In sexual assault and exploitation accounts, scripture reveals that God responds to perpetrators with reprimand and conviction while showing comfort and dignity to victims and survivors.

Following God's example and with the inclusion of anti-trafficking research, Christians can learn how to approach the topic of human trafficking in ways that honor God and neighbor. The curriculum encourages Christians who want to approach trafficking prevention to start with active learning such as scripture study, prayer, self-reflection, group discussion, and introductory anti-trafficking education prior to active involvement in the fight against trafficking. The desired outcome is that Christians who participate in the 6-week group discussion and independent mid-week studies will have increased awareness of CSE in the local community, a more profound empathy for those impacted by CSE, and a readiness to participate in anti-trafficking practices that are both God-honoring and survivor-informed.

### **Artifact Development**

The artifact emerged from a place of passion, concern, personal awareness, and professional experience. This writer is an ordained pastor in the Church of the Nazarene and has served the same local church for ten years. Prior to ministry, this writer was a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist whose main clientele were male and female sexual assault survivors.

Although this writer took many courses and continuing education hours on therapeutic best practices with sexual assault survivors, this writer does not recollect learning how to treat CSE survivors or perpetrators. Ten years ago, the topic never came up in the context of formal and

accredited graduate education. This writer resonated with the anti-trafficking research indicating that mental health professionals were not educated about CSE red flags or how to treat CSE perpetrators or survivors. As this writer continued to pursue dissertation research, there was a growing concern that the community's mental health professionals are listed along with other local professionals, such as physicians, school educators, and law enforcement, who knew little to nothing about CSE.

The local church where this writer ministers as Associate Pastor has partnered with *Washington Trafficking Prevention* for years; however, the church is still alarmingly uneducated about how CSE manifests in the local community, considering the longstanding partnership with an anti-trafficking organization. This writer has engaged in many conversations with congregants through this research. Many initially assume that CSE looks like a foreign trafficking ring from the movie *Taken*, an outdated and racially biased stereotype of a pimp, or the corruption surrounding the Jeffrey Epstein case. Most congregants have been willing to discuss CSE as long as the topic remains surface level. However, if dialogue hints to community responsibility, then congregants tend to respond with mild discomfort or a decreased interest in continuing the topic of conversation. Other congregants have expressed interest in this research and have been curious about the evidence of sexual assault in the Bible. Some congregants have been willing to discuss sexual assault accounts in Scripture when the church has traditionally perceived the perpetrator as the aggressor, if the perpetrator was outside the nation of Israel in the Old Testament, or not a member of the early church in the New Testament. Examples of accounts that have seemed acceptable to discuss include the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah, the rape of Dinah, and Joseph's near victimization by Potifar's wife. In instances where perpetrators such as David or Abraham are discussed, this writer has received interested engagement by some, and

a defensive response on behalf of the biblical character by others. This writer has witnessed problematic messages within the local church such as Sunday School facilitators interpreting David and Bathsheba as engaging in adultery brought on by Bathsheba's seduction, statements about Rahab as God using "even a prostitute," and old sayings such as "I don't smoke, drink, or chew or go with girls who do." These messages indicate that the local church may be an unsafe atmosphere for trafficking survivors. The disconnect between the church's desire to continue to sponsor *Washington Trafficking Prevention* while remaining unknowledgeable about red flags inside and outside the church motivated this writer to research implicit bias, forms of power dynamics, and Bible interpretations from Feminist, Womanist, and Liberation Theologies.

Kyra Doubek, Executive Director of Washington Trafficking Prevention, has played an integral role in shaping this writer's understanding of CSE in the local community. Her experience as a Christian, a CSE survivor, and an anti-trafficking leader and her willingness to openly discuss her concerns about negative experiences with Christian volunteers who were more confident than they were knowledgeable have been instrumental in this research. Kyra introduced this writer to the anti-trafficking field of research and recommended survivor autobiographies that helped this writer confront biases, power imbalances, and false information that hindered this writer in recognizing the plight of local survivors. In many ways, this writer has been a case study of a passionate Christian who is in the process of moving from ignorance to awareness. As trust and friendship grew between Kyra Doubek and this writer, deeper discussions about biblical accounts emerged. At one point, Kyra said, "I have been a Christian for four years, and I never knew my story was in the Bible. You have to tell others. Survivors have to know." Prior to this conversation with Kyra, this writer intended to develop a two-day conference as the research artifact that would focus on uprooting implicit bias that hindered

churches from getting involved in anti-trafficking work. However, after this conversation with Kyra, this writer decided to focus heavily on what the Bible reveals about sexual assault and exploitation.

### **Gaps in Research**

This writer endeavored to bridge local missional work with anti-trafficking research. The artifact was developed to initiate a strong encouragement for Christians to become aware of sexual assault and exploitation and to do something about it when it occurs in the church or in the community. The first step was to lay groundwork explaining how the Bible addresses the issues of sexual assault and exploitation, compels God's people to do justice as it is biblically defined, and warns that God's people are held responsible when they are abusive or complicit in injustice. The complexity of CSE is extensive, and the crime continues to evolve and grow in local communities across the United States. This writer is aware that there are gaps in the research and that there may potentially be a whole field of research that is yet to be explored by the Christian community.

The most apparent gap in the research is that this writer is not a CSE survivor but is instead a member of the community group within the CSE system. As a result, this writer is on a personal journey of uprooting the problematic effects of years of lack of awareness, implicit biases, and misinformation. This writer has attempted to amplify survivor voices by reading autobiographies, interviewing survivors, and learning from survivor-recommended anti-trafficking allies. However, this writer is keenly aware that the research is a summarized compilation that only scratches the surface of addressing the layers of trauma that survivors have been forced to endure. This research should be read from the perspective of a researcher who is a



community member, and it should not be interpreted as if it had come from a survivor's perspective. This writer has invited multiple survivors and survivor-recommended anti-trafficking allies to review the dissertation and artifact throughout the writing process, but most experts only had time to review segments rather than the entire work. No aspect of this research should be used to refute a survivor's story or experience. One of the best ways to address this gap is for the community to listen to CSE survivors and follow their insight and leadership. Survivor-informed and survivor-led research and anti-trafficking engagement has significantly improved global and national anti-trafficking approach to research and advocacy. It is essential for local community work to be survivor-informed and survivor-led as well.

Several gaps in research result from the ever-changing politics and technology prevalent in the culture. The polarization and politicization of topics such as racism, sexism, and other forms of marginalization hinder what could be a united community effort to resist CSE that runs rampant in the local community. As the community fights against itself, the crime continues to flourish and thrive. Technology advances and new levels of dependence on the internet during COVID continue to create more shadows that community members may not know exist. Rather than thriving in the shadows of the local community, CSE may continue to infiltrate technology forming a digital underworld that makes the crime increasingly harder to detect. Further research is needed by researchers with a substantial understanding of advancing technology along with a working knowledge of church structure and missional work.

Another gap exists in the examination of the Bible accounts. The curriculum is a survey of primarily Old Testament accounts of sexual assault and exploitation. This writer would have liked to include examples from the New Testament but decided to contain an introductory curriculum to span six weeks. The goal was not to attempt an exhaustive study on sexual assault

accounts. This writer wanted to add many more examples of men whose abuse was recorded in the Bible because the topic of male victims seemed to be more astonishing to Christians than the writer had expected when receiving feedback from those who have read parts of this research. In the future, this writer's goal is to create a curriculum that specifically addresses male survivors.

### **Considerations for the Future**

This curriculum emphasized the importance of increasing biblical and anti-trafficking awareness rather than encouraging the pursuit to take action. This was a conscious decision to give participants at least six weeks of contemplation and spiritual growth before engaging the church or community in anti-trafficking work. A future project that focuses on how Christians can cultivate healthy relationships with anti-trafficking groups would be an excellent follow-up to this artifact. The project could utilize this current tool by introducing participants to initial CSE awareness, then lead participants to develop ways to engage the community in God-honoring and survivor-informed ways. This future step would optimally be developed by a survivor leader or by an anti-trafficking ally who is learning from and in partnership with a survivor leader. Anti-trafficking organizations generally focus on an aspect of anti-trafficking work, such as prevention, intervention, or survivor support services. Future projects could focus on developing the next steps for a specific action phase while emphasizing the importance of partnering with organizations specializing in each of the other action phases. This writer encourages future projects to consider adding an action category to include the need for perpetrator-accountability and recovery services since this anti-trafficking approach rarely exists in local communities.

Other future projects could address the intricacies of certain groups while maintaining a systemic perspective. This writer wanted to help the Christian community recognize the basic system of CSE and how they play a role in either sustaining or challenging CSE, but future projects could build on this systemic analysis by focusing on other specific groups such as youth, young adults, therapists, or educators. One example would be to develop a tool to help pastors learn to discuss sexual assault accounts in a biblically-sound yet publicly acceptable way. Finally, future researchers could utilize the systemic thinking to address other forms of social injustice. A systemic perspective is common in fields such as Sociology or Marriage and Family Therapy, but it is less common in ministry. This writer intended to introduce a process that could be reproduced to address other kinds of social injustice. As Christians allow biblical accounts to inform their perspectives of power abuse while recognizing their systemic relationship to all involved, then they will likely begin to recognize other forms of marginalization as it manifests in the church or local community. These are just a few suggestions, but the sky is the limit on how the church could serve alongside survivors, ex-perpetrators, anti-trafficking allies, or any other groups that seek to challenge injustice in all its forms.

## **Conclusion**

Christianity is meant to be a beacon of hope and good news to the marginalized. Throughout the Old and New Testament, the Bible indicates that God's character, values, and response, as recorded in scripture, is in direct contrast to power abuse and oppression. The presence of outrage that many Christians experience about CSE positively reflects the concern for issues of injustice, but when these initial feelings are left unaddressed and are permitted to fuel the passion of anti-trafficking engagement, well-meaning individuals have the potential of

harming CSE victims, protecting perpetrators, and sustaining the crime of CSE within the local community. Christians can benefit from a tool that helps them formulate their initial outrage into a biblically founded response that is both God-honoring and survivor-informed. While studying biblical accounts of sexual assault and simultaneously differentiating CSE realities from stereotypes, Christians can enter a brave space of group discussion and self-reflection that allows them to uproot old biases and acquire a perspective of newfound awareness that may form a Christian response to CSE as it manifests in the local community.

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**Appendix**  
**Artifact: Curriculum**  
**A Christian Approach to Sex Trafficking Awareness in the Local Community**

**Purpose:**

Commercial Sexual Exploitation (CSE) is a crime that hides in plain sight, and it is happening in our local communities. It thrives in the shadows by our lack of awareness and banks on our discomfort and preconceived notions. But research shows that teaching about the realities of CSE makes a significant impact in the lives of victims, perpetrators, and the local community.<sup>264</sup> How should Christians respond? In the past few years, it has become popular for churches to get involved in anti-trafficking efforts, but trafficking survivors have reported that while some ministries are beneficial, other ministries are harmful, and most are nonexistent. These problematic responses have the potential of harming victims, protecting perpetrators, and sustaining the crime of CSE within the local community. Before Christians consider anti-trafficking engagement, it is important to discover what the Bible can teach us. An exploration of the sexual assault and exploitation accounts in scripture can guide the way to inform the Christian perspective. If the biblical foundation step is ignored, then Christians will likely respond to CSE victims with bias, judgment, and power abuse resulting from omitted or distorted interpretations of scripture. A Christian approach to confronting commercial sexual exploitation must be both biblically founded and anti-trafficking informed.

In this six-week curriculum, participants will study and discuss biblical accounts of sexual assault and exploitation along with CSE facts and statistics to gain a new perspective on

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<sup>264</sup> Amy Vatne Bintliff et al., “Lifelong Wellbeing for Survivors of Sex Trafficking: Collaborative Perspectives from Survivors, Researchers, and Service Providers,” *Dignity: A Journal on Sexual Exploitation and Violence* 3, no. 3 (October 2018), <https://doi.org/10.23860/dignity.2018.03.03.03>; Nita Belles, *In Our Backyard: A Christian Perspective on Human Trafficking in the United States* (United States: Free River, 2011).

how CSE manifests today. Using scripture accounts rather than modern-day testimonies encourages participants to observe God's movement as they consider a Christian response to anti-trafficking engagement in the local community. Trafficking content can be disturbing and may trigger learners, but efforts have been made to approach this content in a gentle, compassionate, and encouraging way. The goal is to provide a spiritually transformative process using scripture to guide participants toward their own moments of awareness, accountability, and healing while simultaneously inspiring them to make a God-honoring and survivor-informed difference in their local communities.

### **Learners and their Context:**

The curriculum is designed to be utilized by participants among the three populations that form the basic CSE system within any given community. The three populations are CSE survivors, CSE perpetrators, and local community members. Although most groups who use the curriculum may identify as being from only one of the populations, all three groups will be addressed to offer each group a deeper understanding of how the system of CSE works within the local community context.

There are positive aspects to acknowledging the presence of all three groups in the midst of group discussion and awareness. One positive outcome is that CSE victims and survivors can be shown the respect and dignity that God role models throughout the Bible. One form of dignity is to shift the focus from victims and survivors and toward perpetrators and the community. The latter two populations are often left out of the equation leaving survivors to be scrutinized and objectified. Presenting the CSE system helps participants to quickly recognize patterns that lead to a community context that either ignores CSE or holds it accountable. Another positive

outcome to acknowledging the presence of all three populations is that of hope. Each participant, regardless of their path, can become an anti-trafficking advocate. Welcoming all three populations into the group discussion, regardless of their physical presence in the group, challenges each group to hold firmly to a belief in the convicting and transforming work of the Holy Spirit. The parameters between survivors, perpetrators, and the community are less distinct than is usually discussed. Welcoming all three groups allows people who predominantly identify in one group to acknowledge times when they resonate with aspects of other groups. For example, a perpetrator who has been the victim of sexual assault may learn to use the experience of past victimization to identify trauma and needs of CSE survivors. Likewise, a community member may realize that their inability to recognize red flags may have led them to blame and abandon victims rather than being an anti-trafficking resource in the community. At times, participants may recognize that their own actions, silence, or misinformation have harmed others, and it is here that the invitation to engage in transformative work encourages each member to embrace authentic wholeness and healing.

Although there are benefits, the decision to address all three populations introduces challenges as well. Commercial sexual exploitation is an extreme form of sexual assault. Research indicates that 20% of the general population are sexual assault survivors, and the acknowledgment of the presence of perpetrators, whether in person or in discussion, may bring about feelings of fear, discomfort, and anxiety.<sup>265</sup> Group discussion about CSE victims, perpetrators, and community responsibility in the Bible and in the modern-day context may introduce participants to a mild form of trauma, potentially triggering participants who have a history of primary or secondary trauma. Care has been taken to provide a curriculum that inspires

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<sup>265</sup> “The 1 in 6 Statistic - Sexual Abuse and Assault of Boys and Men,” *1 in 6*, 2017, <https://1in6.org/get-information/the-1-in-6-statistic/>; “Sexual Assault Statistics,” accessed November 19, 2021, <http://www.ncdsv.org/images/sexualassaultstatistics.pdf>.



participants to stay present in the midst of complex feelings, to allow scripture to navigate a personal and communal healing process, and to motivate participants to use past and present trauma to embrace new outcomes in the fight against trafficking.

### **Unit Scope:**

- 6 weeks
- 75 minute Sessions
- 30-45 minute Mid-week study

### **Index**

- **Lesson 1:** *Standing Together in the Pain*
- **Lesson 2:** *Betrayed by Someone You Know*
- **Lesson 3:** *The God Who Sees*
- **Lesson 4:** *“See if There is any Offensive Way in Me...”*
- **Lesson 5:** *Vigilantes: Heroes or Villains?*
- **Lesson 6:** *Sexual Assault of Men and Boys*
- **Appendix:** *Tools and Resources*

### **Lesson Sequence:**

- **Opening Prayer and Feelings Identification. (3 Minutes)**
  - The facilitator will open the group in prayer.
  - Using the Feelings Wheel found in the Appendix, the facilitator will encourage each group participant to share 1-2 words that represent how they are feeling at the beginning of group.
  - *This practice invites each member to be present in the moment, to have an audible and authentic voice in the group, and to learn to value a combination of feelings within themselves and others as the group journeys through the multi-week process. Feelings identification also allows the facilitator to get a quick idea of how the group is perceiving the topic. Are people anxious but curious? Are they feeling angry and isolated?*

- *As the facilitator, be sure not to comfort, deflect, minimize, or affirm the feelings shared by group members. Doing so may disrupt the contemplative process. Participants are welcome to engage the content and group discussion from an authentic and honest space.*
- *Once the participants, including the facilitator, have had an opportunity to share their words, the facilitator will simply thank the group for sharing.*
- *The Feeling Wheel may also be used by the facilitator as needed during discussions, or the facilitator may offer it as a resource for participants to use when they wish to articulate complex feelings that may arise.*
- **Debrief the Week (15 minutes)**
  - *The facilitator will guide an open-ended discussion allowing participants to process what they are discovering throughout the week considering the prior group discussion and mid-week study. Participants may share concepts that resonated with them, ideas they are wrestling with, new perspectives about the community or culture, or anything else they would like to debrief.*
  - *Trauma-related content can be tough to discuss. The Debrief the Week section is meant to give the group time to process recent content before introducing the new topic of the week.*
- **Opening Statement (2 minutes)**
  - *The facilitator will read the opening paragraphs found in the facilitator guide.*
  - *The opening statement is usually brief story, scripture, or paragraph designed to help set the theme for the group discussion. Sometimes there may be a short group interaction, and other times, the statement will move the group directly to the first scripture reading.*
- **Group Discussion- Part 1 (30 minutes)**
  - *The facilitator will ask a group participant to read the scripture passage aloud to the group. After the scripture is read, the facilitator will lead the group through the discussion questions.*
  - *Group Discussion- Part 1 is designed to introduce the group with a biblical account of an incident of sexual assault or exploitation. Some sections are more complex and may be read in segments with group discussion in between the Scripture passages.*
  - *Facilitators, Group Discussion-Part 1 is meant to set the context for Group Discussion-Part 2. If your group meeting is 60 minutes or less, be sure to watch the clock. Let the*

*group know that they can continue to discuss scripture learned in Part 1 as they move into Part 2 of the discussion.*

- **Group Discussion- Part 2 (20 minutes)**

- The facilitator will begin Group Discussion- Part 2 by reading the paragraphs provided at the beginning of the section. After the paragraphs are read, the facilitator will lead the group through the discussion questions.
- *Group Discussion- Part 2 integrates anti-trafficking research with the biblical response discussed in Group Discussion- Part 1 to inform a new perspective about CSE victims, survivors, perpetrators, and the community. Human Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation is a complex and nuanced subject. The information is provided to introduce participants to basic definitions, statistics, resources, and tools. The content within the book is meant to inspire conversation that leads to further survivor-informed anti-trafficking research and development from a biblically-based approach. Although this section introduces participants to statistics and resources commonly taught in introductory trafficking prevention and awareness training workshops, it is not meant to replace formal training. The pursuit of further education, particularly with local anti-trafficking organizations, is highly encouraged.*

- **Note to the facilitator:**

- ***The author has attempted to discuss the topic of sexual assault and sexual exploitation as gently as possible while simultaneously being true to the subject matter. However, due to the traumatic theme of the content, there are scripture verses that may be particularly painful for participants to read and discuss. The author has attempted to inform the group that a difficult passage, topic, or question is coming by placing the question under the section “A Hard Word,” for scripture and “The Ugly Truth,” for tough facts about CSE in the modern-day context.***

- **Concluding Thoughts and End in Prayer- (5 minutes)**

- The facilitator will bring the group discussion to a close by reading the paragraphs found in this section. After reading the Concluding Thoughts, the facilitator will close the group by leading them in prayer.
- *The conclusion is meant to bring closure to the group discussion while affirming participants for bravely engaging the session topic. Both the mid-week section and the*

*upcoming topic for next week will be introduced in the Concluding Thoughts in order to build anticipation and continuity between sessions. Each session will end by inviting participants to practice the tools they learned individually and in the local community.*

- **Mid-Week Study- Going Deeper**

- This section is meant to engage each participant in a deeper study later during the week and prior to the next group session. The mid-week study is designed to explore the richness of the text that cannot be unpacked within the limited time constraints of the group discussion. This section allows the group discussion to remain content-rich without being overwhelming, while still providing participants to dive deeper at their own desired pace.

### **Organizing Principles and Learning Objectives:**

- **Lesson 1:** *Standing Together in the Pain*

- **Organizing Principle:** Everyone has a role to play to prevent trafficking in the local community.

- **Learning Objectives:**

- Learners will identify the three groups that make up the basic system of human trafficking in the local community.
- Learners will examine how local industries may profit from labor trafficking.
- Learners will investigate God's response to oppression, the oppressor, and the oppressed according to Bible accounts.

- **Lesson 2:** *Betrayed by Someone You Know*

- **Organizing Principle:** Biblical accounts of sexual assault record God's response to victims, perpetrators, and the community.

- **Learning Objectives:**

- Learners will classify Commercial Sexual Exploitation as a more specific form of the broader crime of Sexual Assault.
- Learners will apply the legal definition of human trafficking to biblical and modern-day trafficking accounts.
- Learners will discuss variables that cause trafficking to thrive in the modern-day context.

- **Lesson 3:** *The God Who Sees*

- **Organizing Principle:** Sex trafficking victims and perpetrators are hidden in plain sight in the Bible and in the local community.

- **Learning Objectives:**

- Learners will discuss moments in scripture when God’s response diverges from human intentions or expectations.
- Learners will construct phrases that challenge community opinions about victims and perpetrators of Commercial Sexual Exploitation.
- Learners will recognize common CSE red flags and recommended anti-trafficking responses.

- **Lesson 4:** *“See if There is any Offensive Way in Me...”*

- **Organizing Principle:** A Christian approach invites perpetrators to a place of conviction rather than condemnation.

- **Learning Objectives:**

- Learners will distinguish differences between God’s response to perpetrators compared to God’s response to victims.
- Learners will discover the role of power abuse in cases of sexual assault and exploitation.
- Learners will practice shifting evaluative focus to the perpetrator rather than the victim.

- **Lesson 5:** *Vigilantes: Heroes or Villains?*

- **Organizing Principle:** A Christian response to Commercial Sexual Exploitation (CSE) does not repay evil for evil.

- **Learning Objectives:**

- Learners will differentiate a theatrical vs realistic approach to CSE.
- Learners will recognize how support for vigilantes negatively impacts community awareness, attitude, and response to victims and perpetrators of sexual assault and exploitation.
- Learners will examine the overlap between pornography, sex addiction, and CSE.

- **Lesson 6:** *Sexual Assault of Men and Boys*

- **Organizing Principle:** A Christian response recognizes male victimization and responds with compassion and dignity.

- **Learning Objectives:**

- Learners will contrast the world's response from God's response to male victims of sexual assault and exploitation.
- Learners will discover ways that the community has hindered men and boys to discuss sexual assault.
- Learners will formulate ways that church communities can be more approachable to sexually assaulted men and boys.

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## Lesson 1

### *Standing Together in the Pain*

**Organizing Principle:** Everyone has a role to play to prevent trafficking in the local community.

**Learning Objectives:**

- Learners will identify the three groups that make up the basic system of human trafficking in the local community.
- Learners will examine how local industries may profit from labor trafficking.
- Learners will investigate God’s response to oppression, the oppressor, and the oppressed according to Bible accounts.

**Opening Prayer, Welcome, and Feelings Identification: (12 minutes)**

*Facilitator notes: This section is longer for the introductory week.*

*Facilitator notes: Open the group in prayer.*

**Facilitator reads:**

*Welcome! Thank you for embarking on this six-week journey! Together, we will learn about sexual assault and exploitation in the Bible and how these important biblical accounts can help us better understand God’s heart for victims, survivors, perpetrators, and the community.*

*Commercial Sexual Exploitation (CSE), commonly referred to as “sex trafficking,” is a crime that hides in plain sight, and it is happening in our local communities. It thrives in the shadows by our lack of awareness and banks on our discomfort and preconceived notions. But research shows that teaching about the realities of CSE makes a significant impact in the lives of victims, perpetrators, and the local community.<sup>266</sup>*

*How should Christians respond? Sexual violence is rarely discussed in church and Christian circles, so you may be surprised how often the Bible records accounts of sexual assault and exploitation. Trauma is hard to talk about, but it happened in the Bible, and it still happens today. The Bible has great hope to share with all who have ears to hear. As we unpack what the Bible teaches us about God’s response to exploitation, we may conclude, as author and trauma expert Diane Langberg has suggested, that “trauma is perhaps the greatest mission field of the 21st century.”<sup>267</sup>*

*Whether you are new to studying the Bible or you have studied scripture for years, this group is for you! Whether you are an expert in human trafficking prevention or whether you aren’t sure that you know anything further than what is portrayed in movies or on the news,*

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<sup>266</sup> Amy Vatne Bintliff et al; Nita Belles.

<sup>267</sup> Diane Langberg, *Suffering and the Heart of God: How Trauma Destroys and Christ Restores* (Greensboro, Nc: New Growth Press, 2015), Ch. 1.

***you are in the right group! Regardless of your knowledge on the subject or the path that brought you to this point, thank you for your interest in learning and making a difference!***

***There are three main groups that make up the basic system of human trafficking in the local community. The three main groups are:***

- ***Victims and Survivors: which is anyone who has been exploited for sex or labor***
- ***Perpetrators: which is anyone who has paid for or profited from sex or labor trafficking (i.e. buyers and sellers of sex)***
- ***The Local Community: which is everyone who lives or works in the local community. Trafficking thrives in the blind spots of the local community, and it is the responsibility of the local community to determine how much they will heed the signs of trafficking and respond accordingly.***

***Although most groups who use this curriculum may identify as being from only one of the three main groups, all three groups will be discussed and referred to throughout the weeks to offer each group a deeper understanding of how the system of Commercial Sexual Exploitation works within the local community context.***

***No matter what path led you to this group, please know that you have the potential to impact the lives of people in your community through trafficking prevention and awareness.***

***Here is an important note to anyone who uses pornography, pays for, or profits from sexual exploitation:***

***Thank you for participating in the next six weeks. Although little has been written about traffickers and sex buyers, the Bible has a lot to say. You have a particularly important role to play in ending sex trafficking. As you commit to participating in the group for the next six weeks, please make a commitment to abstain from pornography and sex buying of any kind. Write down today's date in your book to represent your first day of sobriety from sexual behavior that harms yourself or others. Allow the chapters and group discussion questions to guide you toward a new perspective and lifestyle.***

**Feelings Identification: (3 minutes)**

**Facilitator reads:**

***Each week, we will begin by using the Feeling Wheel developed by Gloria Willcox and found in the Appendix. Please take a moment and look at the words, then we will each share 1-2 words that represent how we are feeling at the beginning of the session. Please abstain from explaining the words you chose or commenting on others' feelings. Simply share your word(s).***

***Facilitator notes: Once the participants, including the facilitator, has had an opportunity to share their words, the facilitator will simply thank the group for sharing.***

***Facilitator notes: Use the Feeling Wheel as needed during discussions or offer it as a resource for participants to use when they wish to articulate complex feelings that may arise.***

**Opening statement: (2 minutes)**



**Facilitator reads:**

*One of the most popular verses in the Bible is John 3:16, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him may not perish but have everlasting life.” But did you know that it was Jesus who said these famous words about himself? He continues by saying, “For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.” This is good news for all of us. Some of us may think, “Yes, but if God only knew...” Let me save you some time, God already does. The Lord knows what you have been through, and so there is no need to hide from a God who sees. Our loving God has provided a pathway out of the darkness and into the light.*

**Group Discussion – Part 1: (30 minutes)**

Read John 3:19-21

*This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.*

Group Discussion:

1. What does Jesus mean by Light coming into the world?
2. What do people love more and why?
3. What is the relationship between truth and light within this passage?
4. Who does the work?

**Facilitator Reads:**

*Human trafficking thrives in the dark shadows and blind spots of our communities. Communities that ignore their own blind spots provide places for Commercial Sexual Exploitation to thrive under the radar. Using scripture, as our guide, we will shine light into the darkness within ourselves and our communities. As we peel back the layers of sexual exploitation in the Bible and in our modern-day communities, you may discover dark shadows you had not previously recognized in yourself or in your community. Remember that God knew before you did. Bring it before the Lord and come into the light. We can learn to live by the truth and come into the light in all aspects of our lives. This is good news, and this news is for you.*

**Group Discussion – Part 2: (20 minutes)**

**Facilitator Reads:**

*What is human trafficking? Human Trafficking is a crime that involves exploiting a person for labor, services, or commercial sex. Let’s look at the legal definition.*

*Facilitator notes: Ask for a volunteer to read the following definition.*

The Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 and its subsequent reauthorizations define human trafficking as:

- a) Sex trafficking in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such act has not attained 18 years of age; or
- b) The recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery.<sup>268</sup>

**Facilitator reads:**

*The term ‘commercial sex act’ means any sex act (stripping, porn, webcamming, dancing, sexting, physical sex acts) on account of which anything of value like (food, shelter, clothing, money, or drugs) is given to or received by any person.*<sup>269</sup>

**Question:**

Notice that force, fraud, or coercion need not be present when a minor is trafficked. Why do you think this may be the case? In what ways might this definition change a community’s understanding about sexually exploited teens?

**Facilitator Reads:**

*The Ugly Truth: Human Trafficking one of the most profitable crimes in the world is second only to drug trafficking.<sup>270</sup> However, human trafficking is projected to surpass drug trafficking in the future if current trends continue.*

*Why might trafficking people be more lucrative than trafficking drugs? Here are three main reasons:*

1. *Force, Fraud, and Coercion: A victim may be manipulated to say that the exploitation is happening by choice. They may say this out of fear of harm to self or loved ones or they may say it out of loyalty to the person who is harming them. As a reminder, a minor cannot give consent. There does not need to be any force, fraud, or coercion when a minor is involved. Any commercial sex act against a minor is sex trafficking.*<sup>271</sup>
2. *Anonymity and Lower Penalties: There is a higher chance of getting caught trafficking drugs than trafficking people, and penalties tend to be more severe for drug traffickers compared to human traffickers<sup>272</sup>. One reason is that it is harder to locate a human trafficker. While a drug trafficker is personally involved in the transaction, a human trafficker does not need to be at the location where trafficking occurs to make a profit. Often it is the victim rather than the trafficker who is arrested.*
3. *Product: The ugly truth is that drugs can only be sold once, but people can be sold over and over again. Online pornography can be distributed for profit without limit; even if the victim has escaped or died.<sup>273</sup> Often perpetrators use pornographic images to*

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<sup>268</sup> The United States Department of Justice, “Human Trafficking,” Justice.gov, November 9, 2018, <https://www.justice.gov/humantrafficking>.

<sup>269</sup> “Washington Trafficking Prevention,” WTP, n.d., <https://traffickingprevention.org/>.

<sup>270</sup> Attorney General of Washington, “Human Trafficking,” Washington State Office of the Attorney General, 2019, <https://www.atg.wa.gov/human-trafficking>.

<sup>271</sup> 106th Congress, “Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000,” Public Law 106–386 (2000), Section 1002.

<sup>272</sup> Attorney General of Washington, “Human Trafficking.”

<sup>273</sup> “I Am Jane Doe,” Online Video, *I Am Jane Doe Film* (50 Eggs Films, November 18, 2016), <https://www.iamjanedofilm.com>.

*blackmail victims, threatening to publicly expose the images if they ever tried to retaliate.*

**Facilitator Reads:**

*There are two main categories of human trafficking: Labor Trafficking and Sex Trafficking. During the next six weeks, we will focus on sex trafficking, but it is important to keep in mind that labor trafficking is prominent in the Bible and in the local community as well. However, in most communities more research, funds, and resources have focused on sex trafficking prevention than to labor trafficking prevention.*

Industries that have been known to exploit people for labor included, but are not limited to:

- Healthcare/Home Health
- Hotels/Hospitality
- Trucking
- Nannies
- Janitorial/House Cleaning
- Familial Trafficking
- Forestry/Logging
- Construction
- Sales Crews/Traveling Sales
- Manufacturing
- Landscaping
- Agriculture/Farming
- Food Service
- Nail/Hair Salons

**Discussion Questions:**

1. As a group, choose an industry listed above that is present in your community.
2. What ways might labor trafficking happen in the industry you chose? Use the legal definition on trafficking to consider how the crime could occur in this industry.
3. What are some blind spots that keep the community from recognizing this form of trafficking?
4. What questions would you want to ask of your own community to discover if there are any blind spots surrounding this industry in the local community?

**Concluding Thoughts:**

**Facilitator Reads:**

*Today we have begun our six-week journey. We have discussed the three main groups that make up the system of Commercial Sexual Exploitation and have learned that all three groups have the potential to become allies in the fight against trafficking. We have read the legal definition and recognize that there are many forms of human trafficking. At times, sex trafficking and labor trafficking can be independent, and other times, they can overlap, adding to layers of trauma to those who are being exploited. The list is not meant to be exclusive. It is*

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**meant to help the community to better recognize where human trafficking might occur. In the next few weeks, we will unpack how trafficking occurs, identify red flags to look for, and learn about resources to contact if you suspect sex or labor trafficking is happening.**

**In the mid-week study, you will explore a variety of Old and New Testament passages that illustrate God's reaction to oppressors and to the oppressed. The mid-week study will help lay a biblical foundation as we explore God's response to sexual assault and exploitation. Next week, we will explore and discuss a case of human trafficking that happened among God's people.**

### **Mid-week study- Going Deeper**

This week, we began by discussing Jesus' most famous words found in John 3:16 and continued through John 3:21.

Questions:

1. What does Jesus say that God loves and what does he say the people love?
2. In what ways are these desires opposed?
3. How do these verses differentiate those who come into the light and those who stay in the darkness?
4. Whose truth matters when it comes to the differentiation of darkness and light?

At the beginning of Jesus public ministry, he went to the synagogue in his hometown of Nazareth and read the scroll of the prophet Isaiah.

Read Luke 4:16-21:

*He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."*

Also Consider John 3:16-19 and Luke 4:16-21.

Questions:

1. God is both loving and just. What does God care about? What does God see?
2. What are some practical ways that Christians are being called to live by the truth and come into the light?
3. God's people are called to love what God loves and respond accordingly, but what happens when God's people harm others? How does God respond when God's people are the abused or are the abusers?

Read Ezekiel 34:

Questions:

1. This chapter indicates that God's people can be both the oppressors and victims. We who follow God are called to be "good shepherds," but what happens when God's people devour the sheep rather than protecting them?
2. How might this chapter enrich your understanding of God as the Good Shepherd?
3. In what ways are Christians called to be good shepherds?

A Time of Reflection:

- Refer back to Luke 4:18-19 and consider more ways that Christians are called to be good shepherds.
- Think back on the group discussion about the ways that sex and labor trafficking can thrive in the shadows of the local community.
- Imagine yourself as a shepherd and the local community as your pastureland. Referring to what you have learned from Ezekiel 34 and Luke 4:18-19 how might you view the local community differently from this perspective?
- If you are a community member, what questions would you want to ask to uncover your own blind spots and the blind spots of the community?
- If you are a survivor, what do you wish the community understood about trafficking? What do you wish the community understood about you?
- If you are or have ever been a perpetrator, what would deter you from exploiting someone in the future? Think of a situation where you would choose to protect someone instead of exploiting them and write it down.
- What are possible ways that trafficking could be reduced in the local community?
- Write a prayer for your local community.

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## Lesson 2

### *Betrayed by Someone You Know*

**Organizing Principle:** Biblical accounts of sexual assault record God’s response to victims, perpetrators, and the community.

**Learning Objectives:**

- Learners will classify Commercial Sexual Exploitation as a more specific form of the broader crime of Sexual Assault.
- Learners will apply the legal definition of human trafficking to biblical and modern-day trafficking accounts.
- Learners will discuss variables that cause trafficking to thrive in the modern-day context.

**Opening Prayer and Feelings Identification: (3 minutes)**

*Facilitator notes: Begin by welcoming the group and opening in prayer.*

**Facilitator Reads:**

*Let’s find the Feeling Wheel located in the Appendix. Take a moment and look at the words, then we will each share 1-2 words that represent how you are feeling at the beginning of the session. Please abstain from explaining the words you chose or commenting on others’ feelings. Simply share your word(s).*

*Facilitator notes: Once the participants, including the facilitator, has had an opportunity to share their words, the facilitator will simply thank the group for sharing.*

**Debrief the Week (15 minutes)**

*Facilitator Notes: Invite the group to share what they have been processing throughout the week considering the prior group discussion and mid-week study. You may facilitate the discussion with open-ended questions, or you may allow the participants to share freely. Trauma-related content can be tough to discuss. The Debrief the Week section is meant to give the group time to process recent content before introducing the new topic of the week.*

**Opening Statement (2 minutes)**

**Facilitator Reads:**

*Research indicates that one in four women and one in six men have been sexually assaulted.<sup>274</sup> That’s one in five people. If this is your story, you are not alone. The Bible has much to say about sexual assault. Although this study is designed to help Christians gain an awareness of how commercial sexual exploitation (CSE) happens in the local community, it is*

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<sup>274</sup> “The 1 in 6 Statistic - Sexual Abuse and Assault of Boys and Men,” 1 in 6, 2017, <https://1in6.org/get-information/the-1-in-6-statistic/>; “Sexual Assault Statistics,” accessed November 19, 2021, <http://www.ncdsv.org/images/sexualassaultstatistics.pdf>.

***important to note that CSE is a specific type of crime that fits under the broader umbrella of sexual assault. The same scripture that will be used to open our knowledge about CSE is also scripture that discusses sexual assault in general. If you are among the one in five who have been sexually assaulted, or if you know someone who is among the 20%, allow these scriptures to speak to you and your healing journey.***

***Today, we will read two biblical accounts of sexual exploitation that occurred within the most prominent family in the Bible. We will allow the scripture verses to guide our group discussion as we consider their actions and God's response. This may be difficult to read but remember that it was God who chose what was to be recorded in the Bible. The purpose of studying scripture is to learn and cultivate God's character in our relationship with God and with others.***

### **Group Discussion – Part 1 (30 minutes)**

#### **Scripture verses to be read aloud**

Genesis 12:10-20

*Now there was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to live there for a while because the famine was severe. As he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai, "I know what a beautiful woman you are. When the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife.' Then they will kill me but will let you live. Say you are my sister, so that I will be treated well for your sake and my life will be spared because of you." When Abram came to Egypt, the Egyptians saw that Sarai was a very beautiful woman. And when Pharaoh's officials saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh, and she was taken into his palace. He treated Abram well for her sake, and Abram acquired sheep and cattle, male and female donkeys, male and female servants, and camels. But the Lord inflicted serious diseases on Pharaoh and his household because of Abram's wife Sarai. So Pharaoh summoned Abram. "What have you done to me?" he said. "Why didn't you tell me she was your wife? Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' so that I took her to be my wife? Now then, here is your wife. Take her and go!" Then Pharaoh gave orders about Abram to his men, and they sent him on his way, with his wife and everything he had.*

Genesis 20: 1-18

*Now Abraham moved on from there into the region of the Negev and lived between Kadesh and Shur. For a while he stayed in Gerar, and there Abraham said of his wife Sarah, "She is my sister." Then Abimelech king of Gerar sent for Sarah and took her. But God came to Abimelech in a dream one night and said to him, "You are as good as dead because of the woman you have taken; she is a married woman." Now Abimelech had not gone near her, so he said, "Lord, will you destroy an innocent nation? Did he not say to me, 'She is my sister,' and didn't she also say, 'He is my brother'? I have done this with a clear conscience and clean hands." Then God said to him in the dream, "Yes, I know you did this with a clear conscience, and so I have kept you from sinning against me. That is why I did not let you touch her. Now return the man's wife, for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you will live. But if you do not return her, you may be sure that you and all who belong to you will die." Early the next morning Abimelech summoned all his officials, and when he told them all that had happened, they were very much afraid.<sup>9</sup> Then Abimelech called Abraham in and said, "What have you done to us? How have I wronged you that you have brought such great guilt upon me and my kingdom? You have done things to me that should never be done." And Abimelech asked Abraham, "What was your reason for doing this?" Abraham replied, "I said to myself, 'There is*

surely no fear of God in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife.’ Besides, she really is my sister, the daughter of my father though not of my mother; and she became my wife. And when God had me wander from my father’s household, I said to her, ‘This is how you can show your love to me: Everywhere we go, say of me, “He is my brother.”’” Then Abimelech brought sheep and cattle and male and female slaves and gave them to Abraham, and he returned Sarah his wife to him. And Abimelech said, “My land is before you; live wherever you like.” To Sarah he said, “I am giving your brother a thousand shekels of silver. This is to cover the offense against you before all who are with you; you are completely vindicated.” Then Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelech, his wife and his female slaves so they could have children again, for the Lord had kept all the women in Abimelech’s household from conceiving because of Abraham’s wife Sarah.

#### Questions:

1. Why was Abraham afraid on these two occasions?  
*Facilitator notes: Abraham feared that the people would kill him to get to Sarah if they knew he was Sarah’s husband.*
2. Describe the actions Abraham took to protect himself.  
*Facilitator notes: Abraham told Sarah to hide that she was his wife. Abraham let Sarah be absorbed into Pharaoh and Abimelech’s harems.*
3. Describe the actions Abraham took to protect his wife.  
*Facilitator notes: Abraham took actions to protect himself, but he did not take actions to protect his wife.*
4. Who rescued Sarah and how was she rescued?  
*Facilitator notes: The Lord rescued Sarah on both occasions.*
5. List the wealth that Abraham received from Pharaoh.
6. List the wealth that Abraham received from Abimelech.
7. Hagar was an Egyptian slave that served in Abraham and Sarah’s household. Under what circumstances did Hagar likely become enslaved in their household?  
*Facilitator notes: Hagar was likely among the enslaved people that Pharaoh gave to Abraham in exchange for Sarah when she was absorbed into Pharaoh’s household.*

#### Group Discussion – Part 2 (20 minutes)

##### Facilitator Reads:

*As a reminder from last week, the legal definition of Human Trafficking is:*

- a) *Sex trafficking in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such act has not attained 18 years of age; or*
- b) *The recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery.<sup>275</sup>*

A Hard Word:

##### Facilitator Reads:

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<sup>275</sup> The United States Department of Justice, “Human Trafficking,” Justice.gov, November 9, 2018, <https://www.justice.gov/humantrafficking>.



***By definition, Abraham trafficked Sarah twice. He received great wealth by receiving Pharaoh's extravagant gifts in exchange for Sarah. It was common for kings to have a household of wives and concubines. Without God's intervention, there was no reason to assume that Sarah would ever have been released from Pharaoh or King Abimelech.***

***You may be shocked to hear that Abraham trafficked Sarah. Use the Feeling Wheel in the Appendix to identify how you are feeling right now. Take turns going around the group to share the word that describes your feeling. Do not explain, just share the feeling.***

*Facilitator notes: Allow each group participant (including yourself) to share.*

#### **Facilitator Reads:**

***Research estimates that 80% of adults and 93% of children who are sexually assaulted knew the perpetrator prior to the abuse.<sup>276</sup> Similarly, the majority of CSE survivors are initially trafficked by someone they know.<sup>277</sup>***

***Both survivors of sexual assault and CSE express that they experienced great distress, shock, denial, and feelings of betrayal when someone they knew, trusted, or loved hurt them.***

#### **Facilitator Reads (prepares group for group prayer)**

***Take a moment in silence and think about the way you are feeling, and let these feelings inspire you to pray for those who are being harmed by someone they know. Note: Please do not share names. This is a general prayer on behalf of those who are suffering from past or present betrayal. Use the pain you may be feeling to lift before the Lord those who are suffering from past or present betrayal.***

#### **Group Discussion:**

1. In what ways does awareness training such as “stranger danger” help minors? In what ways might it hinder them?

*Facilitator notes: Research indicates that 93% minors already know the perpetrator prior to the crime.*

2. What might be other age-appropriate ways that kids could be made aware of dangerous people and learn how to seek the help they need?

*Facilitator notes: There are many great answers to this. Consider ways that help kids focus on actions, red flags, threats if secrets are not kept, etc.*

#### **Concluding Thoughts and End in Prayer: (5 minutes)**

#### **Facilitator Reads:**

***Thankfully, God rescued Sarah twice. But what about the victims who are never rescued? Next week, we will explore the biblical account of two women who were forced to spend their entire lives in bondage. We will explore God's compassion and the how important it is to tell their story.***

*Facilitator notes: End by leading the group in prayer.*

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<sup>276</sup> RAINN, “Children and Teens: Statistics,” Rainn.org, 2021, <https://www.rainn.org/statistics/children-and-teens>.

<sup>277</sup> “Child Sex Trafficking | Polaris,” polarisproject.org, August 21, 2020, <https://polarisproject.org/child-sex-trafficking/>.

### **Mid-week study- Going Deeper**

As you read the two Genesis accounts, did you notice that Abraham and Sarah's names changed? Prior to the journey through Egypt, God had already asked Abram to go to the land God had promised (Genesis 12:1), but God had not yet established a covenant with Abram promising him descendants as numerous as the stars nor had God changed Abram and Sarai's names to Abraham and Sarah (see Genesis Chapters 15 and 17).

Read Genesis 16:1-6. After Egypt and before the account with King Abimelech, we see that Abram and Sarai had attempted to fulfill God's promise of descendants by forcing Hagar to be impregnated by Abram.

1. Who did Sarai think should receive rights to the birth of this child? (Genesis 16:2)
2. Who was looking out for Hagar's safety? Dignity?
3. What do these verses tell us about Sarai and Abram?
4. Hagar, pregnant and beaten, decides it would be better to flee into the desert than stay in Abram and Sarai's household. Using the Feelings Wheel, list 1-3 feelings that Hagar must have felt.
5. Read Genesis 16:7-16 to find out how God responded.
6. Hagar receives a blessing in verse 10. Compare this blessing to the blessing God gave Abram in Genesis 15:5.
7. The angel of the Lord speaks over Hagar's unborn son (v. 9-12). These verses have been likened to Luke 1:26-33 when the angel Gabriel announces to Mary that she will bear a son. What are the similarities and differences between these messages? How did each woman respond?
8. Hagar is the first person recorded in the Bible to give God a name. She calls him the God who sees me (v. 13). Write a prayer of thanksgiving to the "God who sees."
9. If God is compassionate, why might God have commanded Hagar to return to Abram and Sarai's household? Read Genesis 17:18-27 to discover God's blessing and confirmation for Ishmael and his descendants.

A Hard Word: Sarah was both a victim and a perpetrator in the Genesis account. In Genesis 20-21, we see Sarah being abused and abusing others.

By the time Abraham and Sarah encountered King Abimelech, God had already changed Abraham and Sarah's names, Ishmael had already been born, blessed, and circumcised into the covenant under Abraham, and Isaac had already been promised by God to be conceived by Sarah.

Read Genesis 20:1-3.

1. When Sarah was taken into King Abimelech's household, who remained in Abraham's household?
2. Using the Feelings Wheel, identify 1-3 words that describe how Sarah might have felt as she returned home.

After Sarah returns, she conceives and gives birth to her promised son, Isaac. After Isaac's birth, Sarah's violence toward Hagar continues.

Although Sarah played an instrumental role in Ishmael's birth, her perspective has changed drastically. Compare Sarah's words in Genesis 16:2 to her words in Genesis 21:10.

Sarah sends Hagar and Ishmael away into the wilderness to die. This is where we see God's second recorded encounter with Hagar. Read Genesis 21:8-20. How did God respond to Hagar? How long did God stay with Ishmael?

A Time of Reflection:

- What was new for you about the accounts found in Genesis Chapters 12-21?
- Who did you see with more compassion and why?
- Name one way that God showed compassion amid suffering.
- Sarah and Hagar were both released from bondage, but their wounds ran deep. Pray for those who are healing from the aftereffects of sexual assault and human trafficking.

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## Lesson 3

### *The God Who Sees*

**Organizing Principle:** Sex trafficking victims and perpetrators are hidden in plain sight in the Bible and in the local community.

**Learning Objectives:**

- Learners will discuss moments in scripture when God’s response diverges from human intentions or expectations.
- Learners will construct phrases that challenge community opinions about victims and perpetrators of Commercial Sexual Exploitation.
- Learners will recognize common CSE red flags and recommended anti-trafficking responses.

**Opening Prayer and Feelings Identification: (3 minutes)**

*Facilitator notes: Begin by welcoming the group and opening in prayer.*

**Facilitator reads:**

***Let’s find the Feeling Wheel located in the Appendix. Take a moment and look at the words, then we will each share 1-2 words that represent how you are feeling at the beginning of the session. Please abstain from explaining the words you chose or commenting on others’ feelings. Simply share your word(s).***

*Facilitator notes: Once the participants, including the facilitator, has had an opportunity to share their words, the facilitator will simply thank the group for sharing.*

**Debrief the Week (15 minutes)**

*Facilitator notes: Invite the group to share what they have been processing throughout the week considering the prior group discussion and mid-week study. You may facilitate the discussion with open-ended questions, or you may allow the participants to share freely. Trauma-related content can be tough to discuss. The Debrief the Week section is meant to give the group time to process recent content before introducing the new topic of the week.*

**Opening statement (2 minutes)**

**Facilitator Reads:**

***Human Trafficking thrives in the shadows. In both the Old and New Testaments, the Bible likens sin to darkness, explaining that the remedy is to bring it into the light. Jesus says, “This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light and will not come into***

*the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God.” John 3:19-21. Today we will observe how God shines a light upon the dark shadows lurking within a popular account in the Old Testament. Most of the time, the account is told in a way that highlights two sisters without ever recognizing the abuse within the household. For those who grew up in the church, you may have learned about Jacob’s wives, Rachel and Leah. Now, it’s time to get to know Bilhah and Zilpah.*

*Abraham’s grandson, Jacob, married two sisters named Leah and Rachel. As a wedding gift, their father, Laban, gave each daughter a maidservant from his household. Leah acquires Zilpah as a servant and Rachel acquires Bilhah. Scripture records that Jacob favored Rachel more than Leah even though Leah was the first of his wives to have children. The two sisters compete against one another to provide heirs for Jacob. Leah bears four sons while she attempts to win Jacob’s love and Rachel, for the time being, remains childless. (Gen 29:31-35)*

### **Group Discussion – Part 1 (30 minutes)**

#### **Scripture verses to be read aloud**

Read Genesis 30:1-13

*When Rachel saw that she wasn’t having any children for Jacob, she became jealous of her sister. She pleaded with Jacob, “Give me children, or I’ll die!” Then Jacob became furious with Rachel. “Am I God?” he asked. “He’s the one who has kept you from having children!” Then Rachel told him, “Take my maid, Bilhah, and sleep with her. She will bear children for me, and through her I can have a family, too.” So Rachel gave her servant, Bilhah, to Jacob as a wife, and he slept with her. Bilhah became pregnant and presented him with a son. Rachel named him Dan, for she said, “God has vindicated me! He has heard my request and given me a son.” Then Bilhah became pregnant again and gave Jacob a second son. Rachel named him Naphtali, for she said, “I have struggled hard with my sister, and I’m winning!” Meanwhile, Leah realized that she wasn’t getting pregnant anymore, so she took her servant, Zilpah, and gave her to Jacob as a wife. Soon Zilpah presented him with a son. Leah named him Gad, for she said, “How fortunate I am!” Then Zilpah gave Jacob a second son. And Leah named him Asher, for she said, “What joy is mine! Now the other women will celebrate with me.”<sup>278</sup>*

#### **Questions:**

1. In verse 3, Who does Rachel believe should receive credit for Bilhah’s children?
2. The very meaning of each son’s name tells a story. Rachel names Bilhah’s sons Dan which means \_\_\_\_\_ (verse 6) and Naphtali which means \_\_\_\_\_ (verse 7).
3. Even after having four biological sons, Leah forces her maidservant, Zilpah to have children on Leah’s behalf.
4. Leah names Zilpah’s sons Gad, meaning \_\_\_\_\_ (verse 11) and Asher, meaning \_\_\_\_\_ (verse 13).
5. Altogether, Bilhah and Zilpah bore 4 of the 12 sons who became leaders of the 12 tribes of Israel. Even though these two women were never released from Jacob’s household, their names have been recorded and preserved in scripture. Who in the modern-day context might be encouraged by reading Bilhah and Zilpah’s names in the Bible and why?

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<sup>278</sup> Genesis 30:1-13 (NLT)

Read Genesis 35:23-26

*These are the names of the twelve sons of Jacob: The sons of Leah were Reuben (Jacob's oldest son), Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun. The sons of Rachel were Joseph and Benjamin. The sons of Bilhah, Rachel's servant, were Dan and Naphtali. The sons of Zilpah, Leah's servant, were Gad and Asher. These are the names of the sons who were born to Jacob at Paddan-aram.*

Questions:

1. What stands out to you about the order in which these sons are listed?  
*Facilitator notes: Rather than listing Jacob's sons by birth order, they are listed by mother.*
2. Regardless of Rachel and Leah's attempts to lay claim to these children, what does the Bible indicate?  
*Facilitator notes: The Bible records Bilhah and Zilpah as the matriarchs of these four tribes.*
3. For further reading, recall how Rachel and Leah named each of Bilhah and Zilpah's sons, then read the blessings Jacob speaks over each of these four sons in Genesis 49.

### **Group Discussion – Part 2 (20 minutes)**

**Facilitator Reads:**

***Many CSE victims and perpetrators are hidden in plain sight. Why does the community have a hard time recognizing victims and perpetrators? Here are three possibilities.***

Group Discussion:

It's easy to deny abuse:

1. State a phrase that represents denial that Zilpah and Bilhah are being abused.
2. State a phrase that shines light on abuse by eliminating denial.

It's easy to justify the perpetrator's actions:

1. State a phrase that justifies Jacob, Rachel, or Leah's actions toward Zilpah and Bilhah.
2. State a phrase that shines light on abuse by eliminating the justification of sinful actions.

It's easy to blame the victim:

1. State one phrase that blames Zilpah and Bilhah for the abuse that has happened to them.
2. State a phrase that shines light on the abuse by holding the perpetrator accountable.

The Ugly Truth:

**Facilitator Reads:**

***When darkness is left unchecked, a community is primed to protect perpetrators and blame victims. In a community that is in denial of their own shadows, CSE victims and survivors do not know who they can trust.***

Question:

1. Who could Zilpah and Bilhah have turned to in the family or community to end the abuse?  
*Facilitator notes: Zilpah or Bilhah most likely had no one they could turn to for help.*

2. In what ways might your church or local community be perpetuating shadows without even knowing it?

*Facilitator notes: There can be many great answers. Consider what Zilpah and Bilhah needed and come up with ways that the church can become a safer space for people who need help.*

3. In what ways could your church or local community work to earn the trust of survivors or others in the community who need someone to turn to?

*Facilitator notes: There can be many good answers. Consider adding ideas that emphasize treating survivors with compassion and dignity. Ideas could include listening to their needs rather than assuming a formulaic plan, knowing the experts in the local community, and inviting the survivor to become part of the church and local community.*

### **Facilitator Reads:**

***Many people victimized by sex trafficking never get out. Today, the average lifespan for some who is being sex trafficking is 34 years old. Often, the cause of death is homicide by buyer or trafficker.***<sup>279</sup>

***It is not enough for the community to feel sympathy for the plight of trafficking victims. The community must feel a sense of responsibility for the shadows it produces through denial, justification, and blame. It is important to learn to see what is happening in the community. One way we can make a difference in our communities is to learn to recognize red flags look like and to respond accordingly.***

***Here is a list of red flags indicating that a person is potentially being trafficked in the local community.***<sup>280</sup>

- Multiple texting apps when they have a phone plan
- Multiple users on a social media app (ex: multiple Instagram accounts)
- Sending or receiving intimate images
- New phone that parents/caregivers don't pay for
- Sneaking out
- Abnormal amounts of money
- Condoms/lube/sex toys
- Truancy/skipping school and won't share who they were with
- Minors dating adults
- Dramatic change in appearance
- Dramatic change in behavior
- Behavioral health crises
- Substance use/abuse/overdose
- Poor physical health
- Regular ER visits
- Signs of physical/sexual abuse
- Lacking identification
- Unable to speak for themselves
- Unsure of surroundings, location, or own address
- Confused sense of time
- Inconsistencies in story

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<sup>279</sup> Kyra Doubek, Survivor Leaders from around the World Share Their Stories with UN Ambassadors (July 30, 2021).

<sup>280</sup> Washington Trafficking Prevention, "2021 TCCAT Community Conversation," [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com), February 1, 2021.

***It is important to learn to identify red flags that someone in your community may be a victim or perpetrator of human trafficking. If you see red flags, do not intervene. Engaging a victim or perpetrator could put you or the victim in danger. Instead, contact the local police department, or call the human trafficking hotline at (888) 373-7888. For more important resources, refer to the Appendix.***

### **Concluding Thoughts and End in Prayer (5 minutes)**

#### **Facilitator Reads:**

***This week, ask Jesus to shine light in the shadows of your life and your community. Ask the Lord to help you see what you may not have previously recognized. If the Lord reveals shadows in your life, surrender these places to the Lord. Consider using the following prayer that we will end with today. This prayer was originally written by King David who learned firsthand the destructive nature of darkness and the Lord's readiness to forgive him when David chose to turn from lies and face the truth. Next week, we will unpack a dark point in David's story that led him to his knees before the Lord.***

#### **Pray Psalm 139:23-24:**

***"Search me oh God and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me and lead me in the way everlasting."<sup>281</sup>***

### **Mid-Week Study- Going Deeper**

It may be easy to read through a chapter and skip over the meaning within a single verse, but sometimes the significance is in the details.

Read Genesis 35:22

1. What happened in this verse?
2. Who knew that the incident occurred?
3. God gave Jacob this new name when God blessed him in Genesis 35:10.
4. Who is Reuben and what was his special position in the family? (Refer to Genesis 35:23 for reference)

In Jewish culture, the firstborn son is given special recognition in the family. A firstborn son's birthright is secured in scripture and cannot be removed by a parental preference or family favoritism.

Read Deuteronomy 21:15-17.

1. How is the presented scenario similar to Reuben's family?
2. What rights does Reuben have under the law?

What initially appears to be an insignificant verse lays the groundwork for a powerful demonstration of God's response to unrepentant perpetrators.

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<sup>281</sup> Psalm 139:23-24 (NIV)



Read Genesis 48 to find out what happened when Jacob was on his deathbed and ready to give the birthright blessing. Which son did he bless, and which grandsons did he adopt so they could each receive a blessing and an inheritance?

After the birthright blessing, Israel summoned all his sons to gather so he could prophecy over each son and their descendants. In the presence of the crowd of witnesses, read Genesis 49:3-4 to discover what Israel said to Reuben.

1. Now, who was aware of Reuben's crime? How was Reuben held accountable? What did it cost him?
2. What do you think Bilhah's sons, Dan and Naphtali, may be thinking about their brother Reuben?

Read 1 Chronicles 5:1-2

Reuben lost his birthright around 1800s BC when Jacob died. 1 Chronicles is thought to have been written around the 400s BC. Approximately 1400 years had passed since Reuben lost his birthright by raping Bilhah. In what ways does this timespan impact your perspective about God's response to the crime Reuben committed?

Use your imagination to consider the ripple effect through the generations of having lost the original birthright that would have been given to the eldest of the 12 Tribes of Israel.

Something to ponder:

If Reuben lost his birthright over this crime, why didn't the birthright go to the next son in line? How did the 11th son, Joseph, receive the birthright?

Genesis 37 records that Joseph's ten older brothers became so jealous of him that they devised a plan to sell Joseph into slavery. In modern day terms, what did Joseph's brothers do to him?

Consider reasons for why Joseph's nine older brothers may have each forfeited their chance to receive the birthright.

Scripture does not explicitly record why Israel overlooked each older brother before blessing Joseph, but what is clear is that Joseph, receiving the birthright, was placed over all his brothers (see Genesis 48:22).

Write down a few things that stood out to you about God's response to injustice as you studied this week's scripture passages. How might these passages help to inform a Christian response to modern day sexual assault and trafficking?

Closing:

Today we studied God's justice against a perpetrator who did not repent. Next session, we will examine an account where the perpetrator responded differently, and we will find that it is never too late to trust in the Lord and change our ways.

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## Lesson 4

*“See if There is any Offensive Way in Me...”*

**Organizing Principle:** A Christian approach invites perpetrators to a place of conviction rather than condemnation.

**Learning Objectives:**

- Learners will distinguish differences between God’s response to perpetrators compared to God’s response to victims.
- Learners will discover the role of power abuse in cases of sexual assault and exploitation.
- Learners will practice shifting evaluative focus to the perpetrator rather than the victim.

**Opening Prayer and Feelings Identification: (3 minutes)**

*Facilitator notes: Begin by welcoming the group and opening in prayer.*

**Facilitator Reads:**

*Let’s find the Feeling Wheel located in the Appendix. Take a moment and look at the words, then we will each share 1-2 words that represent how you are feeling at the beginning of the session. Please abstain from explaining the words you chose or commenting on others’ feelings. Simply share your word(s).*

*Facilitator notes: Once the participants, including the facilitator, has had an opportunity to share their words, the facilitator will simply thank the group for sharing.*

**Debrief the Week (15 minutes)**

*Facilitator notes: Invite the group to share what they have been processing throughout the week considering the prior group discussion and mid-week study. You may facilitate the discussion with open-ended questions, or you may allow the participants to share freely. Trauma-related content can be tough to discuss. The Debrief the Week section is meant to give the group time to process recent content before introducing the new topic of the week.*

**Opening Statement (2 minutes)**

**Facilitator Reads:**

*Have you ever apologized to someone before you knew what you were sorry for? When we do something wrong, it is important to apologize, but our apology means little if we don’t understand what we did wrong. When we say sorry before knowing what we did, what are we actually sorry about? Are we sorry for getting in trouble? Are we sorry for making the other person mad? Neither of these reasons get to the heart of the actual offense, and both could lead to unhealthy ways of covering up future offenses. If we allow ourselves to only being sorry for getting caught, we may become better at hiding our offenses. If we allow ourselves to*

*only be sorry for making someone else mad, then we may attempt to manipulate others' moods in order to deter them from become upset with us when we have harmed them. These are only two of the many negative outcomes that can occur when we do not take the time to recognize what we have done wrong.*

*It is just as important to be honest with ourselves when we sin against the Lord. If we do not recognize what we have done wrong, then we can get caught up in misunderstanding why God is convicting us. It's not about not getting caught. It's not about sinning as long as we don't hurt others or make God mad. First, we must bring darkness into the light. Only then can we feel remorse that can lead to behavior change.*

*Today, we will dive into the details often overlooked in a popular passage of scripture that has to do with various forms of power abuse. Our goal is to examine the layers of wrongdoing for the purpose of better understanding that God, who is both compassionate and just, extends the same forgiveness to us if we choose to receive it.*

### **Group Discussion- Part 1 (30 minutes)**

#### **Scripture verses to be read aloud**

Read 2 Samuel 11: 1-27

*In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war, David sent Joab out with the king's men and the whole Israelite army. They destroyed the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained in Jerusalem.*

*One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful, and David sent someone to find out about her. The man said, "She is Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite." Then David sent messengers to get her. She came to him, and he slept with her. (Now she was purifying herself from her monthly uncleanness.) Then she went back home. The woman conceived and sent word to David, saying, "I am pregnant."*

*So David sent this word to Joab: "Send me Uriah the Hittite." And Joab sent him to David. When Uriah came to him, David asked him how Joab was, how the soldiers were and how the war was going. Then David said to Uriah, "Go down to your house and wash your feet." So Uriah left the palace, and a gift from the king was sent after him. But Uriah slept at the entrance to the palace with all his master's servants and did not go down to his house.*

*David was told, "Uriah did not go home." So he asked Uriah, "Haven't you just come from a military campaign? Why didn't you go home?"*

*Uriah said to David, "The ark and Israel and Judah are staying in tents, and my commander Joab and my lord's men are camped in the open country. How could I go to my house to eat and drink and make love to my wife? As surely as you live, I will not do such a thing!"*

*Then David said to him, "Stay here one more day, and tomorrow I will send you back." So Uriah remained in Jerusalem that day and the next. At David's invitation, he ate and drank with him, and David made him drunk. But in the evening Uriah went out to sleep on his mat among his master's servants; he did not go home.*

*In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it with Uriah. In it he wrote, "Put Uriah out in front where the fighting is fiercest. Then withdraw from him so he will be struck down and die."*

So while Joab had the city under siege, he put Uriah at a place where he knew the strongest defenders were. When the men of the city came out and fought against Joab, some of the men in David's army fell; moreover, Uriah the Hittite died.

Joab sent David a full account of the battle. He instructed the messenger: "When you have finished giving the king this account of the battle, the king's anger may flare up, and he may ask you, 'Why did you get so close to the city to fight? Didn't you know they would shoot arrows from the wall? Who killed Abimelech son of Jerub-Besheth? Didn't a woman drop an upper millstone on him from the wall, so that he died in Thebez? Why did you get so close to the wall?' If he asks you this, then say to him, 'Moreover, your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead.'"

The messenger set out, and when he arrived he told David everything Joab had sent him to say. The messenger said to David, "The men overpowered us and came out against us in the open, but we drove them back to the entrance of the city gate. Then the archers shot arrows at your servants from the wall, and some of the king's men died. Moreover, your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead."

David told the messenger, "Say this to Joab: 'Don't let this upset you; the sword devours one as well as another. Press the attack against the city and destroy it.' Say this to encourage Joab."

When Uriah's wife heard that her husband was dead, she mourned for him. After the time of mourning was over, David had her brought to his house, and she became his wife and bore him a son. But the thing David had done displeased the Lord.

### **Facilitator Reads:**

***Even though this scripture often refers to David and Bathsheba, we will be discussing each person separately. The mid-week study is dedicated to learning what scripture tells us about Bathsheba, but today we will focus only on David's actions.***

### **Group Discussion:**

David sinned in at least four ways.

1. In what ways did David neglect his royal leadership responsibilities?

*Facilitator notes: As a king, David usually led the charge in the midst of battles, but what did he make his men do on this occasion? (2 Sam 11:1)*

- Even worse, how did David treat the Ark of the Covenant? (2 Samuel 11:11)

*Facilitator notes: What is the Ark of the Covenant? The Ark of the Covenant was built in the time of Moses after the Israelites fled Egypt and were in the wilderness. It contained the 10 commandments, a golden pot filled with manna, and Aaron's budded staff. The presence of the living God rested on the ark. The ark remained within the Most Holy room within the tabernacle and could only be transported by priests.*

2. Whether the act was adultery or sexual assault, King David broke the Lord's 7th and 10th commandments. What are these commandments? (Exodus 20:14; 17)

- Even worse, when David asked who the woman was, he received an answer that should have stopped him in his tracks. Look up the following verses to understand the significance of his servant's response:

- Who was Bathsheba's father, Eliam? (2 Samuel 23:34)

- Who was Bathsheba's husband, Uriah? (2 Samuel 23:36)

*Facilitator notes: David's 30 mighty men were a group of soldiers that stuck with David through thick and thin before he was king and throughout his reign. They stayed by his*

*side when David was fled for his life during King Saul's reign. Eliam and Uriah were two of David's mighty men who had fought alongside David wherever he went. In 2 Samuel 12, they were away fighting a battle for David who stayed behind at the palace.*

3. When David learned that he had impregnated Bathsheba, in what ways did he attempt to use Uriah to cover-up his crime?
  - Even worse, David used his power to force Uriah to break two of the three commitments he said he would not break. What were the three actions Uriah planned not to do? (Verse 11)
  - How did David use his power to get Uriah to do two of the acts? (2 Samuel 11:12-13)
  - What vow was David powerless to force Uriah to break? (2 Samuel 11:13)
4. David decided to murder Uriah, but even worse, who did David command to carry the letter to Joab to carry out the murderous plot?

*Facilitator notes: King David used his authority over his soldiers to carry out Uriah's murder by leaving him exposed to certain death by the Ammonite army. In the process, other soldiers were killed in the battle that was designed to lose.*

  - Consider the contrast in the king's characteristic response in 2 Samuel 11:18-21 compared to his response in verse 2 Samuel 11:22-25. What do you hear?

### **Group Discussion- Part 2 (20 minutes)**

#### **Facilitator Reads:**

***Power abuse can be used to harm others in many ways, but it is prevalent in cases of sexual assault and commercial sexual exploitation.***

#### **Group Discussion:**

1. In what ways might the abuse of power be used in sexual exploitation in the form of:
  - Force:
  - Fraud:
  - Coercion:
2. Abuse of power can also deceive the community to support the perpetrator rather than protecting the victim. In what ways did David use others to harm Bathsheba and Uriah?

***Even though CSE is on the rise, sex traffickers and buyers often remain anonymous. The anti-trafficking movement is working to shift the scrutiny away from the victim and toward the perpetrators. This shift is proving successful. More community members are learning what trafficking looks like and are contacting authorities to step in. In the case of King David, let's read who stepped in to hold David accountable.***

#### **Read 2 Samuel 12:1-14**

*The Lord sent Nathan to David. When he came to him, he said, "There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor. <sup>2</sup>The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle, but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him.*

*“Now a traveler came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveler who had come to him. Instead, he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the one who had come to him.”*

*David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan, “As surely as the Lord lives, the man who did this must die! He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity.”*

*Then Nathan said to David, “You are the man! This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: ‘I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. I gave your master’s house to you, and your master’s wives into your arms. I gave you all Israel and Judah. And if all this had been too little, I would have given you even more. Why did you despise the word of the Lord by doing what is evil in his eyes? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own. You killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. Now, therefore, the sword will never depart from your house, because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own.’”*

*This is what the Lord says: ‘Out of your own household I am going to bring calamity on you. Before your very eyes I will take your wives and give them to one who is close to you, and he will sleep with your wives in broad daylight. You did it in secret, but I will do this thing in broad daylight before all Israel.’”*

*Then David said to Nathan, “I have sinned against the Lord.”*

*Nathan replied, “The Lord has taken away your sin. You are not going to die. But because by doing this you have shown utter contempt for the Lord, the son born to you will die.”*

#### **Facilitator Reads:**

***The Prophet Nathan confronts the king in a clever way that allows him to experience empathy, kingly responsibility, and a desire for justice before convicting his own actions.***

#### **Group Discussion:**

See David’s change by using the Feelings Wheel, to identify in 1-2 words how David may have felt at each stage:

- verses 1-6:
- verses 7-9:
- verses 10-12:
- verses 13-14:

#### **Facilitator Reads:**

***We need more Nathans in the community. Nathan led David toward conviction instead of condemnation.***

#### **Questions:**

1. What is the difference between conviction and condemnation?

*Facilitator notes: Conviction is the realization and acknowledgment that a person has done something wrong and needs to change. Conviction urges a person toward repentance and reconciliation with the Lord. Condemnation is the opposite of conviction in many ways. Condemnation is the accusation that a person has done something wrong and that there is nothing that can be done to reconcile the offense. Condemnation leads people away from the Lord.*

2. How did Nathan show dignity to Uriah and Bathsheba while convicting David?
3. How did David ultimately respond? Did God forgive David? (2 Samuel 12:13)

A Hard Word:

**Facilitator Reads:**

*Even though David repented and received forgiveness, David and Bathsheba's baby dies. Scripture indicates that this is a punishment for David, but why did God punish David in this way? It may be easier to read about the calamity that will come upon David's household than it is to read that the infant will die.*

*It is important to recognize that neither Nathan nor God blame Bathsheba or the baby for David's sin. They are both seen as innocent.*

*The punishment of the baby's death is NOT because a sexual assault or adultery took place, and it is NOT because the baby was conceived before David and Bathsheba were married.*

Questions:

1. These are common distortions that have dangerous implications. What might these distortions imply about how God treats babies who are conceived as the result of sexual assault, adultery, or conception outside marriage?
2. Why did God punish King David by killing his baby?

Verse 14: \_\_\_\_\_

**Facilitator Reads:**

*King David exploited the Ark of the Covenant and his people by forcing his priests to carry it into battle. During the murderous plot against Uriah, David used an army opposed to God to kill soldiers of God's chosen people in the presence of the Ark of the Covenant. Not only did this act exploit the Ammonites, but it caused them to show contempt for God. Throughout the Old Testament, God's chosen people were meant to be a sign to the other nations showing the world the presence of the one true God. Here, David used murder, war, and a lost battle in the presence of God, completely opposing the Lord's will to bring all nations toward God.*

Read Isaiah 45:20-24 to see God's invitation to people across all nations to gather and worship the God of Israel.

*When we recognize that King David is being punished for using his royal authority to attempt to oppress the Lord, God responds by reminding him of his mortality. God's punishment of the death of David's baby resembles God's final plague against Egypt where all the firstborn sons, including Pharaoh's own son, was killed. Pharaoh was considered a deity, yet he was reminded of mortality when his eldest son, and successor to the throne, was killed.*

*The message is clear. David forgot that he served God and not the other way around. God is not a puppet to be dragged onto the battlefield to do David's bidding. David, like Pharaoh, was reminded of his own mortality.*

**Concluding Thoughts and End in Prayer (5 minutes)**

### **Facilitator Reads:**

*Here, we see a perpetrator who repented. Remember that the same invitation is granted to us when we do wrong. God seeks to convict us rather than condemn us. Conviction, like the parent and the child, invites us to stand before the Lord and recognize what we have done wrong. We may feel remorse, or a deep sense of regret for our actions, as we recognize, like David, what we have done. If we are willing, then remorse can lead us to repentance which is a commitment to change our actions. For those who have harmed others, it's never too late to ask forgiveness of the Lord and stop the pattern. This week, use David's prayer of remorse and repentance found in Psalm 51 to meet with the Lord.*

*Throughout this study, you may have been wondering why David is called an adulterer if the act against Bathsheba was rape? This topic, along with a closer look at Bathsheba, will be explored in the mid-week study. Next week, we will study a clear account of rape and the revenge that ensues.*

Close in prayer.

### **Mid-week study- Going Deeper**

It has been long debated or simply assumed that David and Bathsheba had an affair. After all, David is called an adulterer in the Bible. No one condones David's actions, but is Bathsheba actually innocent? What can we learn from scripture? Here are some common questions:

*Why did Bathsheba bathe on the roof in sight of the king?*

Read Leviticus 15:19 and then read 2 Samuel 11: 2 and 4. Why might Bathsheba have been bathing and why is it significant for the Bible to record this detail? What would this mean about her pregnancy?

It is a common mistake to think that Bathsheba was bathing on a roof, but scripture does not record her location. Who was on the roof? (Verse 2)

*Why would Bathsheba go to the palace alone? Could this be a sign of consent?*

Although this question is commonly brought up, it has flaws. 2 Samuel 11:4 indicates that Bathsheba did not go to the palace alone. Who accompanied her and what were their orders? Consider the context that Bathsheba's father and husband, both members of David's 30 mighty men, were away at war. Why might Bathsheba go with the king's messengers to the palace? What news might she have expected to receive?

*Was what happened to Bathsheba actually rape by biblical standards?*

Even scholars who agree that Bathsheba did not consent may disagree on whether the action qualifies as rape. The scrutiny lies in how Deuteronomy 22:23-27 is interpreted.

By biblical standards, rape occurs when a woman screams, and if the location is in a place where someone could hear her scream and rescue her. If the location is determined not to be in earshot, then the assumption is that she may have screamed, but not one was there to help her. So did Bathsheba scream, and if so, did anyone hear her to come to her rescue? Scripture does not record that Bathsheba screamed, but neither does Nathan's convicting story indicate that the lamb (a metaphor for Bathsheba) cried out while being slaughtered.

The next determination has to do with the location. If she screamed, could she be rescued? Author Sandra Glahn suggests that the confines of the palace would relate more



similarly to the country than the town scenario described in Deuteronomy 22. She explains, “If Bathsheba cried out, no one would dare enter the king’s chamber to stop him. In that sense, there was little difference between a man raping a woman in the country and a king raping a woman in his palace chambers.”<sup>282</sup>

*If it is rape, then why is King David referred to as an adulterer?*

If you consider that one act can be viewed from two different points of view, then one could make the case that David, who was married, voluntarily slept with Bathsheba making him an adulterer while Bathsheba, a non-consenting victim, was forced to engage in intercourse against her will.

Consider the case of Abraham trafficking Sarah to Pharaoh and Abimelech against Sarah’s will. Had they slept with Sarah, would she be considered an adulteress or a victim? In both Sarah and Bathsheba’s case, God did not hold these women accountable for the power used against them.

The term adulterer is interesting to use about a king who already has six wives. Perhaps the term is used to emphasize that David had no intention of incorporating Bathsheba into his harem. After the sexual encounter, what does scripture record? Two clues can be found in 2 Samuel 11:4-5 that indicate that this was a single act rather than a relationship.

Where did Bathsheba go after David had sex with her?

How did she tell David that she was pregnant?

Dignity for Bathsheba:

When the Prophet Nathan confronts David of his sins he does not hold back. But amid shedding light on the darkness that occurred, Nathan does not place any guilt on Bathsheba. Rather, he relates her to a loved lamb who is slaughtered and eaten by the king.

Who else does the Bible liken to a slaughtered lamb? (Isaiah 53:7; Acts 8:32-35; Rev. 5:6)

Rather than condemning Bathsheba, Nathan clears her name. Later, Bathsheba names one of her sons Nathan (1 Chronicles 3:5)

Bathsheba’s son, Solomon, becomes King David’s successor, making Bathsheba the first Queen Mother. (1 Kings 1:28-31; 1 Kings 2:19)

Bathsheba is one of the women mentioned in the lineage of Jesus. Prophets foretold that the Messiah would come from the line of David, and though David had many wives and concubines, God chose to have Bathsheba bare the line of the Messiah...twice! Jesus’ lineage is recorded in two different Gospels. Matthew (?) records Joseph’s line while Luke records Mary’s line. Both Mary and Joseph could trace their lineage to King David, as was prophesied, but who was David’s descendent according to Matthew? Who was David’s descendent according to Luke? Bathsheba was the mother of both of David’s sons in Jesus’ lineage on both sides of his family.

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<sup>282</sup> Sandra Glahn, *Vindicating the Vixens: Revisiting Sexualized, Vilified, and Marginalized Women of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2017), 104.

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## Lesson 5

### *Vigilantes: Heroes or Villains?*

**Organizing Principle:** A Christian response to Commercial Sexual Exploitation (CSE) does not repay evil for evil.

**Learning Objectives:**

- Learners will differentiate a theatrical vs realistic approach to CSE.
- Learners will recognize how support for vigilantes negatively impacts community awareness, attitude, and response to victims and perpetrators of sexual assault and exploitation.
- Learners will examine the overlap between pornography, sex addiction, and CSE.

**Opening Prayer and Feelings Identification: (3 minutes)**

*Facilitator notes: Begin by welcoming the group and opening in prayer.*

**Facilitator reads:**

*Let's find the Feeling Wheel located in the Appendix. Take a moment and look at the words, then we will each share 1-2 words that represent how you are feeling at the beginning of the session. Please abstain from explaining the words you chose or commenting on others' feelings. Simply share your word(s).*

*Facilitator notes: Once the participants, including the facilitator, has had an opportunity to share their words, the facilitator will simply thank the group for sharing.*

**Debrief the Week (15 minutes)**

*Facilitator notes: Invite the group to share what they have been processing throughout the week considering the prior group discussion and mid-week study. You may facilitate the discussion with open-ended questions, or you may allow the participants to share freely. Trauma-related content can be tough to discuss. The Debrief the Week section is meant to give the group time to process recent content before introducing the new topic of the week.*

**Opening Statement (2 minutes)**

**Facilitator Reads:**

*Action movies are one of the most popular movie genres. Who doesn't love to see the hero beat the villain? Think of Zorro, Gladiator, the Count of Monte Cristo, and The Princess Bride. Yet scripture says that we are not meant to repay evil for evil and that vengeance is*

**God's alone.<sup>283</sup> Why does a movie like this feel inspiring? The success of a heroic vigilante requires that they receive exoneration that only the audience can grant. The hero has broken societal rules, and society must choose whether or not the broken rules are justifiable. The story feels good because the villains are despicable enough for the audience to grant license to the hero to wreak havoc all over the world to defeat the villain. The victims are rescued, the villain is defeated, the hero is pardoned, and the audience feels as if they have done something good in the world.**

**Far before vigilantes dominated American pop culture, the Bible recorded several accounts of vengeance enacted as a response to an initial act of injustice. Today, we will focus on a classic case of rape and revenge, but rather than focusing on the sexual assault, this section will scrutinize the brothers' actions so that we too do not make age-old mistake exonerating vigilantes by justifying evil for evil. Do Christians regard these brothers as heroes or villains in the biblical account? The way these passages are discussed shapes the attitudes and response of today's listener as they approach scripture, movies, and real life violence.**

### **Group Discussion- Part 1 (30 minutes)**

#### **Scripture verses to be read aloud**

Read 2 Samuel 13:1-19:

*In the course of time, Amnon son of David fell in love with Tamar, the beautiful sister of Absalom son of David. Amnon became so obsessed with his sister Tamar that he made himself ill. She was a virgin, and it seemed impossible for him to do anything to her. Now Amnon had an adviser named Jonadab son of Shimeah, David's brother. Jonadab was a very shrewd man. He asked Amnon, "Why do you, the king's son, look so haggard morning after morning? Won't you tell me?" Amnon said to him, "I'm in love with Tamar, my brother Absalom's sister." "Go to bed and pretend to be ill," Jonadab said. "When your father comes to see you, say to him, 'I would like my sister Tamar to come and give me something to eat. Let her prepare the food in my sight so I may watch her and then eat it from her hand.'" So Amnon lay down and pretended to be ill. When the king came to see him, Amnon said to him, "I would like my sister Tamar to come and make some special bread in my sight, so I may eat from her hand." David sent word to Tamar at the palace: "Go to the house of your brother Amnon and prepare some food for him." So Tamar went to the house of her brother Amnon, who was lying down. She took some dough, kneaded it, made the bread in his sight and baked it. Then she took the pan and served him the bread, but he refused to eat. "Send everyone out of here," Amnon said. So everyone left him. Then Amnon said to Tamar, "Bring the food here into my bedroom so I may eat from your hand." And Tamar took the bread she had prepared and brought it to her brother Amnon in his bedroom. But when she took it to him to eat, he grabbed her and said, "Come to bed with me, my sister." "No, my brother!" she said to him. "Don't force me! Such a thing should not be done in Israel! Don't do this wicked thing. What about me? Where could I get rid of my disgrace? And what about you? You would be like one of the wicked fools in Israel. Please speak to the king; he will not keep me from being married to you." But he refused to listen to her, and since he was stronger than she, he raped her. Then Amnon hated her with intense hatred. In fact, he hated her more than he had loved her. Amnon said to her, "Get up and get out!" "No!" she said to him. "Sending me away would be a greater wrong than what you have already done to me." But he refused to listen to her. He called his personal servant and said, "Get this woman out of my sight*

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<sup>283</sup> Romans 12:17-19

*and bolt the door after her.” So his servant put her out and bolted the door after her. She was wearing an ornate robe, for this was the kind of garment the virgin daughters of the king wore. Tamar put ashes on her head and tore the ornate robe she was wearing. She put her hands on her head and went away, weeping aloud as she went.*

Questions:

1. Describe the trap Amnon set for Tamar.
2. How did Amnon manipulate the community (King David, servants, and other observers) to convince them into assuming that Tamar was safer than she actually was?
3. When Tamar was raped, what did she do and where did she go?
4. What was Absalom’s response and actions in verses 20-29?

**Facilitator Reads:**

*After killing his brother, Absalom seeks revenge against his father, King David. In his attempts to overthrow the king, Absalom rapes ten of David’s concubines to get back at his father and is eventually murdered by the king’s general against David’s will. (2 Samuel 16:20-22; 2 Samuel 18:9-15)*

Questions:

1. If this Scripture passage is shared, Amnon is often portrayed as the rapist and Absalom is portrayed as the angry and protective older brother. What is missing in this portrayal?
2. What might sexual assault victims or perpetrators assume about God or the church when the biblical account is told this way?

*Facilitator notes: Both Amnon and Absalom are sex offenders, but traditionally, only Amnon is portrayed as the perpetrator in this account.*

*Things to consider:*

- *The community may justify Absalom’s actions as a vigilante.*
  - *The community may consider the rape of the virgin princess Tamar to be more deplorable than the rape of David’s concubines.*
  - *There may be implied assumptions that Amnon violated Tamar, but Absalom violated David because the ten women were David’s concubines. This assumption treats the ten women as property rather than people.*
3. In what ways is our culture primed to see some sex crimes (Amnon) and not others (Absalom)?

**Group Discussion- Part 2 (20 minutes)**

**Facilitator Reads:**

*In 2008, the action-thriller film Taken was released. It was a blockbuster hit that remains popular today. And why not? Liam Neeson’s character is the fantasy of who every parent would want to be if their own child were kidnapped and trafficked. In his famous line as he talks over the phone with the kidnapper, he says:*

*“I don’t know what you want. If you are looking for ransom, I can tell you I don’t have money. But what I do have are a very particular set of skills, skills I have acquired over a very long career, skills that make me a nightmare for people like you. If you let my daughter go*

*now, that'll be the end of it. I will not look for you, I will not pursue you. But if you don't, I will look for you, I will find you, and I will kill you.*"<sup>284</sup>

*This powerful line ignites an action-packed thriller that put the topic of sex trafficking on the radar for the general population. But you might be surprised to find out that many trafficking survivors disliked the movie.<sup>285</sup> Since the movie introduced so many to the crime of CSE, community members often assume that CSE occurs as it was portrayed on the screen. In response to growing myths about trafficking, survivors have explained that movies like this distort the trafficking recruitment process and make it seem like sexual exploitation is a foreign enterprise that targets the unsuspecting American girl.<sup>286</sup> These storylines often erase the plight of the victim. They usually remain a side-character hiding in the shadow of the main action hero who wages war on anyone who stands in his way.*

*When a movie like Taken forms the general population's initial awareness to the crime of commercial sexual exploitation, these faulty concepts may become the only perspective from which the population builds their impression of trafficking victims, perpetrators, and heroes. The reality is that Liam Neeson's character does not exist, and anyone who would attempt to take justice into their own hands would be prosecuted. If vigilante characters don't exist, then why might they be so popular? Movies like this play on audience emotions. It may be that the general population, who has a vague understanding that trafficking is real and that it is disturbing, wants to feel that something good is being accomplished. But rather than making a realistic difference by being anti-trafficking change makers in the community, they settle for a Robin Hood-like character to open the door to the disturbance, kill the villains, and close the door behind him. The danger about movies like this occurs when viewers begin to recognize that trafficking is disturbingly real, and then immediately get to witness the vigilante's reactionary violence in response to the injustice. Of course, this can never occur in real life scenarios. The audience leaves feeling that the vigilante has set all things right, but the audience has changed. Now they have a distorted understanding of trafficking and an increased tolerance to the plight of trafficking survivors that results from having felt the resolution of disturbing feelings without recognizing that the resolution could only happen in the movies. Distorted information and built tolerance results in more blindspots in the community and makes it even more difficult for CSE survivors and anti-trafficking organizations to facilitate real awareness and action among the general population.*

Questions:

1. How do movies like this shape our thoughts about victims? Perpetrators? The role of parents of CSE victims?
2. As a group, consider a famous plot from a book, TV show, or movie where the hero's violent actions are justified. In real life, what would be the penalty for these violent actions?

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<sup>284</sup> "Taken (2008) Liam Neeson: Bryan Mills." IMDb, IMDb.com, [www.imdb.com/title/tt0936501/characters/nm0000553](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0936501/characters/nm0000553).

<sup>285</sup> Interview with survivor (2020); Jonathan Todres, "Movies and Myths about Human Trafficking," The Conversation, January 17, 2020, accessed November 22, 2020, <https://theconversation.com/movies-and-myths-about-human-trafficking-51300>.

<sup>286</sup> Andrea J Nichols, Tonya Edmond, and Erin C Heil, *Social Work Practice with Survivors of Sex Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018). Kindle Location 3365.

Facilitator notes: Ideas could include Robin Hood, Zorro, John Wayne movies, or the Jason Bourne series.

**Facilitator Reads:**

*Looking back at the scripture passage, let's turn our focus to Tamar. Tamar can be lost in the details and reactions happening all around her, so let's give her a voice. Tamar didn't need a vigilante.*

Questions:

1. What might Tamar have wanted or needed by verse 2 Samuel 13:18-19?
2. What might Tamar have wanted or needed by verse 2 Samuel 13:21-23?
3. Just like Tamar, a trafficking victim or survivor doesn't need to be avenged by a vigilante. What might they need from the community instead?

**Facilitator Reads:**

*If commercial sexual exploitation in the local community doesn't look like the movie Taken, what does it look like?*

- *The boyfriend who needs a favor "just this once" to get a little money to hold him over. The pattern repeats, often with increased threats of abuse or exposure and the victim is trapped.*
- *Online pornography sites and other large companies (see the Dirty Dozen list to see which companies are currently profiting from CSE)*
- *Peers using threats to publicize sexting images or other forms of blackmail*
- *Family sex abuse and exploitation*
- *Anytime a sex act against a minor is exchanged for any goods, food, or resources*
- *Anytime a sex act against an adult is exchanged for any goods, food, or resources when force, fraud, or coercion has occurred.*

Question:

With these scenarios in mind, what might a victim look like and what might a trafficker look like?

**Concluding Thoughts and End in Prayer (5 minutes)**

**Facilitator Reads:**

*So far, we have focused mainly on women being victims of sexual assault and exploitation, but the Bible gives many accounts of men being the targets of victimization as well. We will wrap up our six-week session by learning about several men and their stories next week.*

*Before we move on to next week's topic, I want to give you a heads up that the focus of your mid-week study will be a little different this week. Rather than diving into a scripture study, we will be learning about the issue of pornography and how it correlates to sex trafficking. Whether or not you struggle with pornography, I encourage you to learn about this addiction that impacts people both inside and outside the church. The goal of this section is to acknowledge an issue that is easy to ignore, to recognize the slippery slope of addiction, and to learn about resources so that people who use pornography can get the help they need.*

End in prayer

### **Mid-week study- Going Deeper**

In the last two sessions, we have studied biblical accounts of sexual assault that began when the perpetrator treated the victim, first as an object of their lust and next as a target of their actions. Objectification and forced actions, often present in sexual abuse and exploitation, are in direct opposition to the way God wants people to treat one another.

Read Genesis 1:26-30

1. Who bears God's image?
2. In what ways might we bear the image of God?
3. How might these verses inform the way we are to value other people?
4. It was not God's original plan for people to rule over one another. Who did God give Adam and Eve the authority to rule over?

Read Genesis 3:15-19

When Adam and Eve sinned and were separated from God, God responded with punishment. While most Christians interpret this passage as God's disciplinary response when people separated themselves from fellowship with God, some have attempted to pull Genesis 3:16 out of its context and use it to infer that it was God's original will for men to rule over their wives.

Notice that the verse specifies "husband" not "men." No Bible verse entitles all men rule over all women.

Read Galatians 3:26-4:7

1. When Jesus bridged the chasm of separation that we could not cross on our own, what hierarchies fell away?
2. Even though man-made structures may not recognize that hierarchical chains have been loosened, how should these verses impact the way Christ followers value others?

Read Romans Chapter 12 and consider ways that Christ followers are expected to treat God, themselves, and others.

**Pornography:**

In this section, we will discuss the issues of pornography and how it overlaps with commercial sexual exploitation. Whether or not pornography is an issue for you, this section may help to shed light on the physical, psychological, and societal effects of porn use in the local community. In light of scripture we have already discussed, pornography is in direct opposition with honoring people, male and female, who are made in God's image. Although many Christians know that viewing pornography is a sin, they can't seem to stop. If this is your story, take heart! This section is here to encourage a change while offering a glimpse into a side of

pornography that is rarely discussed or understood. It is my prayer that you find hope, encouragement, and resources to get the help you need to end your use of pornography.

Patrick Carnes, an expert on sex addiction, has dedicated his research and career to understanding the slippery slope of sex addiction and providing tools for addicts to get the help they need. Carnes explains that pornography is as addictive as heroine, and he describes the process into sex addiction as similar to any other addiction. Just like chemical addiction, the addict becomes dependent on the substance while simultaneously building up tolerance that results in requiring more of the stimulant to achieve the same outcome. Carnes explains that an increased dependence and built-up tolerance to pornography can result in viewing and be aroused by more extreme pornography such as increased violence, fetishes, and underage pornography. Built up tolerance can also lead to buying sex as a means of acting out what the buyer considers to be unacceptable in a dating or married relationship such as fetishes, violence, racism, sexism, and behaviors that are meant to humiliate oneself or degrade the other person.<sup>287</sup> Carnes explains that although many sex addicts are addicted to violent or distorted forms of sex, they often appear to live normal lives in the community. Ironically, many sex addicts tend to exhibit a persona of high morality and near prudishness when it comes to sexuality. When a person who appears to be an upstanding citizen who is in a long-term marriage is accused of buying sex, the community will often protect the perpetrator and accuse the victim of lying. Many sex addicts admit to feeling appalled by their addiction and sincerely want to change their mindset and behavior. Carnes' work focuses on helping sex addicts identify ways that their addiction manifests and abstain from the addiction through 12-step recovery, peer accountability, and professional counseling.<sup>288</sup> His book entitled *Out of the Shadows* is an excellent place to start.

Pornography addiction expert and author, Gary Wilson, dedicated his career to helping men and women recognize and overcome pornography addiction. In his book, *Your Brain on Porn*, Wilson identifies how porn addiction, like other addictions, requires increased use to achieve an arousal.<sup>289</sup> Wilson explains that some men who are addicted to pornography experience physical ailments such as erectile dysfunction, delayed ejaculation, or the inability to become aroused by anything except violent porn or fetishes.<sup>290</sup> He describes how men are terrified to discuss these issues with physicians or other men, so most continue to remain isolated in their pornography addiction or act out these fetishes by paying for physical sex. Men and women who have found Wilson's book to be a helpful resource have shared their stories on Wilson's online forum.

Both Patrick Carnes and Gary Wilson explain that sex addicts are often appalled at their addiction. Many have attested to initially feeling fear, shame, despair, disgust, depression, and suicidal ideation when they were isolated in their compulsive behaviors but have found hope and a way out through peer accountability, books, and resources.<sup>291</sup>

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<sup>287</sup> Gary Wilson, *Your Brain on Porn: Internet Pornography and the Emerging Science of Addiction* (Margate, Kent, United Kingdom: Commonwealth Publishing, 2017); Melissa Farley, et al., "Comparing Sex Buyers With Men Who Don't Buy Sex." Accessed January 24, 2020. <http://www.catwinternational.org/Home/Article/212-comparing-sex-buyers-with-men-who-dont-buy-sex>; Patrick Carnes, *Out of the Shadows: Understanding Sexual Addiction* (Center City, MN: Hazelden Information and Edu, 2001); Rachel Moran, *Paid For: My Journey through Prostitution* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 2015).

<sup>288</sup> Patrick Carnes, *Out of the Shadows: Understanding Sexual Addiction*.

<sup>289</sup> Gary Wilson, *Your Brain on Porn: Internet Pornography and the Emerging Science of Addiction*.

<sup>290</sup> Gary Wilson, *Your Brain on Porn: Internet Pornography and the Emerging Science of Addiction*, Ch. 4.

<sup>291</sup> See resources in Artifact Appendix.



Stephanie Carnes is an author and sex addiction expert who focuses her work on helping partners of sex addicts through the process of betrayal, grief, and potential relational restoration. Her book entitled *Mending a Shattered Heart* is an excellent book for those who are partners or loved ones of a person who is addicted to pornography or other forms of sex addiction.

Jay Stringer is a Christian Mental Health Counselor and author who focuses on sexual brokenness from a theological and therapeutic point of view. His book entitled *Unwanted* is powerful resource for Christians who have experienced sexual brokenness of any kind.

Refer to the legal definition of sex trafficking found in Lesson 1 and consider overlap of trafficking and pornography.

1. In what ways does pornography use overlap with sex trafficking...
  - In terms of minors?
  - In terms of exchange of resources?
  - In terms of force, fraud, or coercion?
  - If a person is forced to commit sex acts while being recorded, then anyone who watches the image or video is directly witnessing what?
  - If a person paid to watch the image or video described above, then what role did they play in the system of human trafficking?
  
2. In what ways can pornography use harm...
  - You and your loved ones?
  - Sex trafficking victims and survivors?
  - Your witness as a Christ follower?
  - Your witness as a community member?

With modern technology, it is easier than ever to objectify others through pornography, sexting, and other forms of sexual exploitation. Pornography profits are estimated at \$6-15 billion per year in the United States alone.<sup>292</sup> But where technology can be used to exploit others, it can also be used to deter the purchase of online sex trafficking and hold perpetrators accountable.

In a chatbot sting operation conducted by Seattle Against Slavery in 2019, over 2,000 buyers tried to buy sex with a minor in a 24-hour period.<sup>293</sup> Since then, the chatbot technology has improved and made significant progress in finding online sex buyers. Here is an excerpt from an article about Microsoft technology, anti-trafficking non-profits, and law enforcement have partnered to deter or arrest online sex buyers.<sup>294</sup>

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<sup>292</sup> "Porn Could Have a Bigger Economic Influence on the US than Netflix," Yahoo! Finance, accessed October 16, 2021, [https://finance.yahoo.com/news/porn-could-bigger-economic-influence-121524565.html?guccounter=1&guce\\_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2x1LmNvbS8&guce\\_referrer\\_sig=AQAAAD5U24iEckP4tqYQntUt0M3-8ljHeqzsYJJ7POUEaUDDZfo08KqS2AIUXjn2TgEZx8675VLcBMpgave9cK4L9yYE0Gp5zJfVdTITAEeSV5etpSj0\\_W3lW8RIQmll9e\\_wz3sPhiwH6Nlfp0fJtbIJALINBQdMB9v1XHv2rq8PDtpe](https://finance.yahoo.com/news/porn-could-bigger-economic-influence-121524565.html?guccounter=1&guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2x1LmNvbS8&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAAD5U24iEckP4tqYQntUt0M3-8ljHeqzsYJJ7POUEaUDDZfo08KqS2AIUXjn2TgEZx8675VLcBMpgave9cK4L9yYE0Gp5zJfVdTITAEeSV5etpSj0_W3lW8RIQmll9e_wz3sPhiwH6Nlfp0fJtbIJALINBQdMB9v1XHv2rq8PDtpe)

<sup>293</sup> Washington Trafficking Prevention, "2021 TCCAT Community Conversation," [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com), February 1, 2021, YouTube video time 16:51.

<sup>294</sup> Microsoft, "Seattle against Slavery Combats Human Trafficking and Saves Lives- at Cloud Scale," Microsoft Customers Stories, September 9, 2019, <https://customers.microsoft.com/en-au/story/724194-seattle-against-slavery-nonprofit-azure>.

*In the greater Seattle area, people conduct as many as 10,000 searches for online prostitution every day, including searches to buy sex with children. Law enforcement agencies use the solution's Intercept Chatbots module to help monitor and disrupt such transactions.*

*The law enforcement agencies use Intercept Chatbots to post decoy trafficking ads online and wait for buyers to respond. The bots—built with Language Understanding, part of Azure Cognitive Services—then use conversational AI to reply, probing prospective buyers' intentions.”*

Read the rest of the article here: <https://customers.microsoft.com/en-au/story/724194-seattle-against-slavery-nonprofit-azure>

Resources for men and women:

There is help! Many people who get clean and sober from alcohol and drugs find help through community resources, support, and accountability. The same is true when you make a commitment to abstain from pornography and other forms of sex addiction. While the community has a long way to go before making it easier for sex addicts to get the help they need, there are many resources out there for you! Here are several ways to get you started.

Recommended Books and Websites:

- Patrick Carnes, Ph.D:  
[drpatrickcarnes.com](http://drpatrickcarnes.com)
- Gary Wilson:  
[yourbrainonporn.com](http://yourbrainonporn.com)
- Stefanie Carnes, Ph.D:  
[iitap.com/page/dr\\_stefanie\\_carnes](http://iitap.com/page/dr_stefanie_carnes)
- Jay Stringer:  
[thejourneycourse.com](http://thejourneycourse.com)

Accountability Groups:

- The Lantern Project (formerly known as *Seattle Against Slavery*)  
[thelanternproject.org](http://thelanternproject.org)
- Reboot Nation (Gary Wilson's online forum)  
[rebootnation.org](http://rebootnation.org)
- Therapist locator and 12-Recovery Groups:  
[drpatrickcarnes.com/getting-help](http://drpatrickcarnes.com/getting-help)

Join the Fight Against trafficking:

Commercial Sexual Exploitation can only exist if there are people willing to view and pay for sex. One of the most amazing ways to break the pattern of sex addiction is to be part of the solution.

Making a difference: Truck stops are high risk areas for trafficking in persons, but one individual who recognized the problem and decided to lean into the camaraderie of long-haul truck drivers decided to make a difference. What started as a ministry initiative grew into an organization that turned long-haul truck drivers into an army of anti-trafficking allies across the

United States and Canada. Find out more about Truckers against Trafficking at their website: [truckersagainstrafficking.org](http://truckersagainstrafficking.org).

There are many groups and organizations that are making significant changes. Airports, hospitals, convenience stores, and many corporations have incorporated anti-trafficking awareness and prevention into their industry in order to combat human trafficking in all its forms.

What industries, organizations, groups are you part of? What can you find out about anti-trafficking work that is being accomplished in your line of work or engagement? How can you get involved? If no work is being done yet, what can you learn from organizations who are making a difference in other industries, and how might it be implemented into your circle of influence?

Close by reading Paul's encouraging words in Philippians 4:4-9:

*Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable- if anything is excellent or praiseworthy- think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me or seen in me- put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.*<sup>295</sup>

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<sup>295</sup> Philippians 4:4-9 (NIV)

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## Lesson 6

### *Sexual Assault of Men and Boys*

**Organizing Principle:** A Christian response recognizes male victimization and responds with compassion and dignity.

**Learning Objectives:**

- Learners will contrast the world’s response from God’s response to male victims of sexual assault and exploitation.
- Learners will discover ways that the community has hindered men and boys to discuss sexual assault.
- Learners will formulate ways that church communities can be more approachable to sexually assaulted men and boys.

**Opening Prayer and Feelings Identification: (3 minutes)**

*Facilitator notes: Begin by welcoming the group and opening in prayer.*

**Facilitator reads:**

*Let’s find the Feeling Wheel located in the Appendix. Take a moment and look at the words, then we will each share 1-2 words that represent how you are feeling at the beginning of the session. Please abstain from explaining the words you chose or commenting on others’ feelings. Simply share your word(s).*

*Facilitator notes: Once the participants, including the facilitator, has had an opportunity to share their words, the facilitator will simply thank the group for sharing.*

**Debrief the Week (15 minutes)**

*Facilitator notes: Invite the group to share what they have been processing throughout the week considering the prior group discussion and mid-week study. You may facilitate the discussion with open-ended questions, or you may allow the participants to share freely. Trauma-related content can be tough to discuss. The Debrief the Week section is meant to give the group time to process recent content before introducing the new topic of the week.*

**Opening Statement (2 minutes)**

**Facilitator Reads:**

*Statistics estimate that 1 in 6 men are sexual assault survivors.<sup>296</sup> Although it has become somewhat more acceptable for women to share their stories, our culture has provided*

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<sup>296</sup> “The 1 in 6 Statistic - Sexual Abuse and Assault of Boys and Men,” 1 in 6, 2017.

*little space for men to speak about their own traumatic experiences. If you are a man and sexual assault is part of your story, you are not alone.*

*It is important that the community and the church give space for everyone who has been traumatized to be shown dignity and a safe space to heal. One important step in beginning to cultivate a safe space is to recognize the prevalence of sexual violence that occurs toward men and boys. Community acknowledgment paves the way for being able to identify red flags of grooming and abuse, believe victims and survivors, and hold perpetrators accountable.*

*You may be surprised to discover that the Bible alludes to many men who were sexually assaulted or exploited. Most of these passages are indirect in their approach compared to the assault accounts of Bathsheba or Tamar, but when we study the passages, God's compassion toward male survivors is just as evident. Today, we will focus on one man's account during the group session, and then you will study the stories of four other men in your final mid-week study.*

### **Group Discussion- Part 1 (30 minutes)**

#### **Scripture verses to be read aloud**

Acts 8:26-39

*Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of the Kandake (which means "queen of the Ethiopians"). This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the Book of Isaiah the prophet. The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it." Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked. "How can I," he said, "unless someone explains it to me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. This is the passage of Scripture the eunuch was reading: "He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth. In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth." The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?" Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus. As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?" And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing.*

#### **Questions:**

1. What do we learn about the man in the Chariot?
2. How is he described?
3. Where did he come from?
4. What does he do for a living?
5. Where is he going and why?
6. Who sent Philip to talk to this man?

### **Facilitator Reads:**

*Although castration was against God’s law, many other nations engaged in the practice. Men who served in the royal council of foreign nations, including times when Israel was captured, were forced to become eunuchs.*

*The Book of Esther records that the men who attended the King Xerxes’ harem, where Esther lived, were eunuchs. (Esther 2:15)*

*In 2 Kings 20:16-18, the Prophet Isaiah foretold that the Kingdom of Judah would be captured by Babylon and that the king’s own descendants would become eunuchs and serve in a foreign palace.*

### **Group Discussion- Part 2 (20 minutes)**

The Ugly Truth:

#### **Facilitator Reads:**

*Castration is a practice that may seem foreign to us in the United States in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, however castration has been a part of the shadows of US history and into the present day.*

*The United States has a dark history of slave masters practicing castration against enslaved Black men and boys. Not unlike foreign nations in biblical times, slave owners would castrate men to eliminate the perceived threat of sexual encounters with white women, to enforce a life of servitude, or as forms of punishment.<sup>297</sup> After the emancipation proclamation, violent assaults that sometimes included castration happened to boys and men in the wave of lynching that took place throughout the Jim Crow Era.*

*Castration was one extreme form of sexual violence against men and boys, but it wasn’t the only way that they were targeted. Slave owners would also assault boys and men through voyeurism, forced sexual relations, and rape. In 2021, the United Nations reported that the number of boys who are being trafficked (labor and sex trafficking) has increased fivefold in the past 15 years.<sup>298</sup> Sexual assault and exploitation is not new to American culture. Just as it existed in the shadows of legalized slavery, it still thrives in the shadows of our culture to this day.*

*These days, surgical and chemical castration is used by multiple States as a legal punishment for sex offenders. The ethics of this practice are widely debated. Some consider it to be a proper societal response to repeat sex offenders while others consider the practice to be cruel and unusual punishment.<sup>299</sup>*

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<sup>297</sup> Yewande Adeleke, “African Male Slaves Experienced Untold Hardship during the Slave Trade Era,” Medium, July 10, 2021, <https://historyofyesterday.com/african-male-slaves-experienced-untold-hardship-during-the-slave-trade-era-b4ef68b980ed>.

<sup>298</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, “Share of Children among Trafficking Victims Increases, Boys Five Times; COVID-19 Seen Worsening Overall Trend in Human Trafficking, Says UNODC Report,” United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, February 2, 2021, <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/press/releases/2021/February/share-of-children-among-trafficking-victims-increases--boys-five-times-covid-19-seen-worsening-overall-trend-in-human-trafficking--says-unodc-report.html>.

<sup>299</sup> “A Flawed Solution to the Sex Offender Situation in the United States: The Legality of Chemical Castration for Sex Offenders,” *Indiana Health Law Review* 5, no. 87 (2008): 87–122.

**God's law was against the practice of castration, but not against the dignity of people who have been victimized. In Deuteronomy 23:1, eunuchs were not allowed to enter the Assembly of the Lord. However, it is important to read this rule while considering the following blessing that God specifically gives to eunuchs who trust in the Lord.**

Read Isaiah 56:3-8:

*Let no foreigner who is bound to the Lord say, "The Lord will surely exclude me from his people." And let no eunuch complain, "I am only a dry tree." For this is what the Lord says: "To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose what pleases me and hold fast to my covenant—to them I will give within my temple and its walls a memorial and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that will endure forever. And foreigners who bind themselves to the Lord to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord, and to be his servants, all who keep the Sabbath without desecrating it and who hold fast to my covenant—these I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations." The Sovereign Lord declares—he who gathers the exiles of Israel: "I will gather still others to them besides those already gathered."*

Questions:

1. When a man is castrated, his opportunity to have descendants is taken from him. What specific blessings in the above passage do you hear for the eunuch?
2. When Philip stood near the chariot, he saw that the Ethiopian eunuch was reading the Book of Isaiah, the same book that contains God's blessing for the eunuch. Refer to Acts 8:31-33 to read the Isaiah passage again. How might a castrated man find hope in these words?
3. In what ways might this passage be meaningful for those who have been assaulted or exploited?
4. In what ways has the church or the local community made it difficult for men and boys to talk about sexual assault?
5. In what ways could the church community be more approachable to men and boys who are survivors of sexual assault or exploitation?

**Concluding Thoughts and End in Prayer- (5 minutes)**

**Facilitator Reads:**

*Throughout the Bible, God's resounding theme is to draw all to the Lord. No matter where you come from, where you have been, what you have done, or what has been done to you, God is in the process of wholeness and healing. To people who have been harmed by others, God shows comfort, and dignity. To people who have harmed others, God offers conviction, repentance, and life transformation. As we each embark on our own journey of healing, God calls us to compassion for others. It is our responsibility to recognize that the community in which we live harbors sexual exploitation that thrives in the shadows, and it is our duty to do something about it.*

*In the past six-weeks, you have committed to yourselves and to one another to dive into the Bible and learn God's heart about trauma and our role as Christ followers to make a*

*difference in a God-honoring way. Before we close in prayer, make a commitment to take what you have learned and get involved in your community.*

*Start with prayer: Ask the Lord to show you your community through God's eyes, and invite the Lord to commission you to participate in changes within your circles of influence.*

*Continue to study the Bible: There are many more passages that could have been included in this curriculum. As you read the Bible, you will now notice clues of sexual assault and exploitation that you may not have noticed before.*

*Educate yourself on the realities of modern-day trafficking: This six-week curriculum only scratches the surface. Read books, watch documentaries, and visit websites that have the latest anti-trafficking research. You may want to begin with the suggested resources in the Appendix.*

*Get involved: Volunteer in survivor-led or survivor-informed anti-trafficking groups and participate in trafficking prevention and awareness trainings. Work to uproot myths or biases in the community that hinder victims and perpetrators from getting the help they need.*

Close in Prayer

### **Mid-week study- Going Deeper**

Remember Isaiah's prophecy in 2 Kings 20:14-18? Today's scripture passage records the fulfillment of this prophecy and takes place in King Nebuchadnezzar's palace in Babylon.

Read Daniel 1:1-7, then consider the following questions:

1. What parts of the Isaiah's prophecy came to pass?
2. What is the supervisor's position title in Daniel 1:7? If your translation refers to the supervisor as the *chief official*, look up several other translations to see his title.
3. What is the most likely inference about Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah?
4. Even though the Bible does not blatantly record that these four men were eunuchs, the prophecy, the royal line, and their overseer being called the *chief of eunuchs* infers that they were slaves in Babylon, stolen from their homeland, castrated, and given new Babylonian names.<sup>300</sup> This is what happened to them, but how does the Bible describe them?
5. List the descriptions of these four men as stated in the Bible:
  - Daniel 1:3
  - Daniel 1:4
  - Daniel 1:8
  - Daniel 1:15
  - Daniel 1:19-20
6. How did God use these men according to Daniel 1:17?

These are some of the most respected biblical heroes because of their faithfulness and obedience to the Lord. Would the church interpret the miraculous works that God did through

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<sup>300</sup> The Kopelman Foundation, "DANIEL - JewishEncyclopedia.com," [www.jewishencyclopedia.com](http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com), 1906, <https://jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/4871-daniel>.



them differently if they, like the Ethiopian eunuch, were known by their victimization rather than their faithful obedience in the Lord? Why or why not?

Whether or not they would have been perceived differently, it is important to recognize that God's view of people is not based on the world's opinions. When someone is abused, what is done to them is known by God, and God holds the perpetrator, not the victim, accountable.

Consider Daniel 1:3-20 and write or speak out how you would teach this passage to someone else in a way that both acknowledges their abuse and recognizes them as faithful leaders in the sight of God.

In further chapters, God uses Daniel as a prophet while he serves in the royal courts of four different rulers. Although Babylon has power over people, the kingdom itself goes through major transition in a short amount of time. Consider returning to read the rest of the Book of Daniel to see how God uses his prophet in this time of major upheaval.

In Daniel chapter 3, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah are now referenced by their Babylonian names, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. King Nebuchadnezzar has set them over the affairs of the province of Babylon, and they have continued to serve the king while honoring God. In Daniel 3:1-12, King Nebuchadnezzar has made a golden statue in his likeness and has demanded that everyone worship it. When he discovers that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refuse to worship his statue, the king becomes furious with rage.

In their lifetime, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah have been kidnapped, enslaved, castrated, acculturated, and are now bound and facing execution by fire. The king offers them one more chance to denounce God and bow down to his statue. Read Daniel 3:13-15 to discover the pressure these men were under to worship the idol and read their response to the king in Daniel 3:16-18.

1. In whom do they put their faith?
2. Was their faith contingent on a certain outcome?

They were thrown into the furnace, but something miraculous happened in the presence of everyone who witnessed their execution.

Read Daniel 3:19-27:

1. What was the miracle?
2. Who saw it first?
3. How did he describe what he saw?
4. What did he call Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego when they walked out of the furnace (verse 26)?

This fourth figure is thought to be the first visual representation of the Messiah. If so, then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were the first to walk with Jesus! Rather than these men worshipping the idol of the Babylonian king, read Daniel 3:28 to find out who worshipped the Lord that day.

### **Wrapping up the six-week course:**

Congratulations! You have completed six weeks of Bible Study, group discussion, and self-reflection on stories within scripture that are not easy to discuss.

1. In the past six-weeks, what Scripture account stood out to you the most and why?

2. What scripture passage(s) gave you hope and why?
3. In what ways have this discussion challenged your views of survivors, perpetrators, or the community?
4. What are three important concepts that you want to remember from this study?

The group discussion concluded by encouraging you to make a commitment to take the next step in learning about CSE or by getting involved in your community. What are some practical next steps that you can make this week?

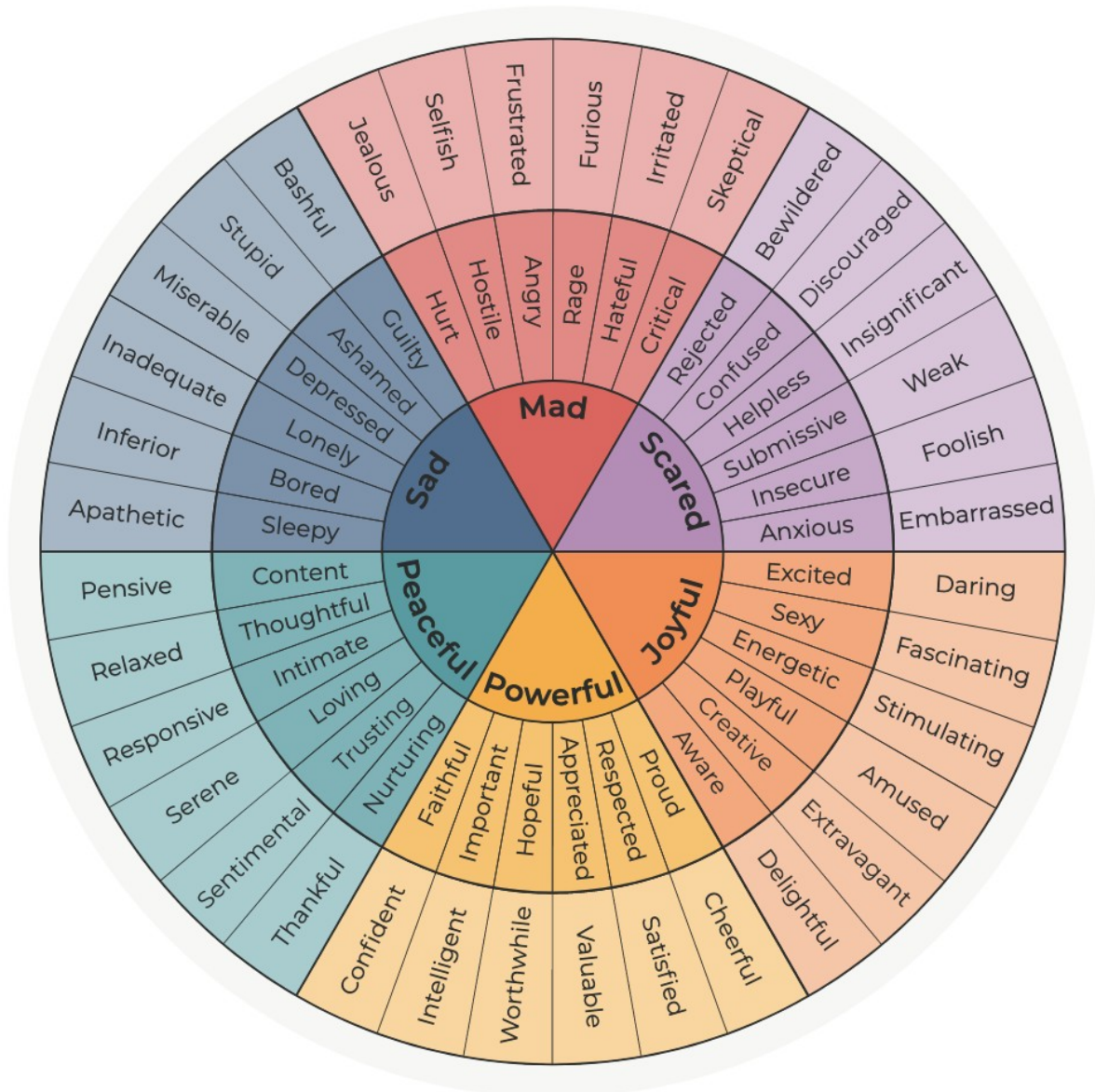
As you consider ways to get involved, read Jesus' words found in Matthew 11:27-29:

*All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your soul. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.*

Close by writing or speaking a prayer inspired by Jesus' words in Matthew 11:27-29. Ask the Lord to guide you toward your next steps in anti-trafficking awareness and action. Pray for local CSE survivors, perpetrators, and your local community, and ask the Lord to help you make the commitment to challenge CSE in your life and in your circles of influence.

## Appendix

- The Feeling Wheel by Gloria Willcox:<sup>301</sup>



- Feeling triggered? Try these techniques!

<sup>301</sup> Gloria Willcox, "The Feeling Wheel," *Transactional Analysis Journal* 12, no. 4 (October 1982): 274-76, <https://doi.org/10.1177/036215378201200411>.

- **Take a break:** Stand up and stretch. Go for a walk. Try the deep breathing or grounding techniques below.
- **Pray:** Debrief your thoughts and feelings with the Lord through prayer. Pray for those who are being harmed. Pray for those who are harming others. Pray for the local community. Pray however you are led.
- **Deep Breathing Technique:** There are many great breathing techniques, but most have the following instructions in common.
  - Slowly take a deep breath in through your nose. Hold for a few seconds.
  - Slowly exhale through your mouth. Hold for a few seconds.
  - Repeat for several minutes.
  - Each deep breath should be a breath that fills your belly rather than only filling your chest.
  - The key is to find a breathing technique that works for you.
- **Grounding Technique:** There are many grounding techniques. This technique helps you to be grounded back to the present. It is a helpful tool if you become flooded with distressing thoughts about the past or fear of the future.
  - Look around your surroundings and state what you see out loud. After a few items, say, “and I’m safe.” For example, “I am sitting in my room. It is 5:00pm and I’m safe. I am reading a tough chapter in the Bible and I’m safe. I see my dog sitting by my feet and I’m safe.”
  - This works well while practicing deep breathing.
- **Resources:**
  - **Add the following numbers into your cell phone so they are readily available:**

- Human Trafficking Hotline: (888) 373-7888
- Suicide Prevention Lifeline: (800) 273-TALK
- Local Police- if there is a special number for trafficking division, add it too
- Local County Crisis Line: \_\_\_\_\_
- **Websites:**
  - Human Trafficking Hotline: [humantraffickinghotline.org](http://humantraffickinghotline.org)
  - National Center on Sexual Exploitation (NCOSE): [endsexualexploitation.org](http://endsexualexploitation.org)
  - Polaris Project: [polarisproject.org](http://polarisproject.org)
  - In Our Backyard: [inourbackyard.org](http://inourbackyard.org)
  - Girls Educational & Mentoring Services (GEMS): [gems-girls.org](http://gems-girls.org)
  - Washington Trafficking Prevention (WTP): [traffickingprevention.org](http://traffickingprevention.org)
  - The Lantern Project: [thelanternproject.org](http://thelanternproject.org)
  - The Journey Course through Sexual Brokenness by Jay Stringer: [thejourneycourse.com](http://thejourneycourse.com)
- **Recommended Reading:**
  - Any research articles and publications by Melissa Farley
  - *Girls Like Us* by Rachel Lloyd
  - *In our Backyard* by Nita Belles
  - *Mending the Shattered Heart* by Stephanie Carnes
  - *Out of the Shadows* by Patrick Carnes
  - *Paid For* by Rachel Moran
  - *Sex Trafficking Prevention: A Trauma-Informed Approach for Parents and Professionals* by Savannah Sanders
  - *The Slave Next Door* by Kevin Bales
  - *Unwanted* by Jay Stringer

- **Trafficking Awareness and Prevention Online Trainings:**
  - Washington Trafficking Prevention: [traffickingprevention.org](http://traffickingprevention.org)
  - Power Over Predators: [poweroverpredators.org](http://poweroverpredators.org)
  - Truckers Against Trafficking (training certification offered for employees of multiple industries): [truckersagainstrafficking.org](http://truckersagainstrafficking.org)
- **National Hotlines:**
  - National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: (800) 273-8255
  - National Domestic Violence Hotline: (800) 799-7233
  - National Sexual Assault Hotline: (800) 656-4673
  - Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline: (800) 422-4453
  - Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services National Helpline: (800) 662-4357
  - YouthLine: (877) 968-8491
  - Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network (RAINN) Hotline: (800) 656-4673
  - National Center for Missing and Exploited Children Hotline: (800) 843-5678
  - National Runaway Safeline: (800) 786-2929
  - Child Find of America: (800) 426-5678