

SHAYNE MOORE,
SANDRA MORGAN, AND
KIMBERLY McOWEN YIM

**ENDING
HUMAN
TRAFFICKING**

A HANDBOOK OF
STRATEGIES FOR THE
CHURCH TODAY



InterVarsity Press
ivpress.com

Taken from *Ending Human Trafficking* by
Shayne Moore, Sandra Morgan, and Kimberly Yim.
Copyright © 2022 by Shayne Moore,
Sandra Morgan, and Kimberly Yim.
Published by InterVarsity Press,
Downers Grove, IL. www.ivpress.com

Introduction

BUILD A SAFETY FENCE

Our task as image-bearing, God-loving, Christ-shaped, Spirit-filled Christians, following Christ and shaping our world, is to announce redemption to a world that has discovered its fallenness, to announce healing to a world that has discovered its brokenness, to proclaim love and trust to a world that knows only exploitation, fear, and suspicion.

N. T. WRIGHT, *THE CHALLENGE OF JESUS*

A STORY FROM DR. SANDIE MORGAN

It was just before lunch when the Department of Justice official who was moderating a conference for human trafficking task force leaders announced it was time to do a table exercise. The topic: discuss one of your biggest task force challenges.

A Texas police sergeant at my table leaned his chair back and laughed. “Easy! The wacko church people.”

My colleagues at the table turned to look at me.

As the administrator of the Orange County Human Trafficking Task Force and as an ordained minister, admittedly, I had experienced my own share of well-intentioned yet problematic church people. But this stung.

Our task force co-chair gestured toward me. “Hey, she’s one of them.”

Trying to defuse the situation, I quipped, “Yes, I can marry you and bury you.”

Everyone laughed and the awkward moment passed, but the point was made: in the public square, when it comes to issues of human trafficking, churches and people of faith are often viewed as a problem.

In my own community there are a number of churches that are active in the fight against modern slavery, and not always in good ways. One example is a pastor who led rescue investigations in our community independent of law enforcement, which—needless to say—is incredibly dangerous and irresponsible. He even invited local news media to a rescue. The church members who joined the pastor in those efforts were not police officers or working with law enforcement and therefore could not make an arrest, so the perpetrator got away. Because this pastor had called in the media, the victim's face was now all over the news. These well-intentioned Christians made a bad situation worse. Instead of building trust with their community, they put a victim at risk, compromised and disrupted a large joint law enforcement investigation, and wasted tax dollars.

Another example of misguided yet well-intentioned Christian involvement is the disproportionate focus on sex trafficking over labor trafficking. I know of a group of wealthy white Christian men who, broken-hearted over the sex trafficking situation in Cambodia, traveled to brothels in that country and attempted to rescue girls independent of any government, nonprofit, or church authority. This is the height of savior mentality. At best it is inappropriate and at worst it is nefarious. Sex trafficking of minors is real and horrific and must be stopped. Yet any response to modern slavery must be well-informed, transparent, and carried out in cooperation with all sectors of society.

Another reason Christians are often seen as a problem is their lack of understanding of what is actually involved in fighting human trafficking and modern slavery. One well-intentioned woman who was upset by this evil in her community called me on multiple occasions to tell me about a house that had been left to her by an aunt. She had an elaborate plan to create a restoration home for women rescued from human trafficking, and she planned to staff it with volunteers from her church. Each time she called, I explained that the Orange County Human Trafficking Task Force could not send victims to her home because her facility did not meet state and county requirements. This frustrated her. But instead of being open to learning the proper processes, laws, and guidelines set by state and local

authorities, she accused me of religious persecution. Opening rescue homes without proper training and licensing is high risk in our litigious society, and there are ethical concerns around victim dignity and care.

As a Christian leader, minister, and federal task force administrator, I am grieved by the missteps of some of my fellow Christians with savior complexes. I believe strongly that we must be salt and light in the world. But it is essential that we evaluate what this looks like when we are engaging in the fight against modern slavery. As Christians and churches of any size, we cannot go it alone. These convictions have prompted me to reach out and find like-minded Christians, such as my coauthors Shayne Moore and Kimberly Yim, who understand collaboration, who understand how to work across sectors of society, and who are committed to building trust within their communities.

The sergeant's opinion of "wacko church people" who interfere and are problematic is one we have heard repeatedly in our various roles. It grieves us that well-intentioned individuals are harming our Christian reputation as a whole. It is our hope that this book will inform a collaborative and cohesive biblical response in our churches, nonprofit organizations, and ministry efforts. Ending human trafficking will require intentional strategies that equip Christian leaders to respond well to this overwhelming evil.

BUILD A SAFETY FENCE

Imagine a steep and deadly cliff. Today, most churches and nonprofit organizations working in anti-human-trafficking efforts are focused solely on the victims who have already fallen or been thrown off the cliff of modern slavery. The primary focus is on rescue, on scraping up the victims at the bottom. While this is, of course, important, we will never end human trafficking and modern slavery with this as our only strategy. Together, we must erect an impervious fence so that women, men, and children never fall off the cliff in the first place.

If you are someone who wants to help build this fence, this book will educate and assist you and your leadership in discerning what part of it you can build collaboratively with your greater community. What might be your fenceposts? What structural elements can you add? And how can you link

your segment to those of others who are also building this protective fence? The following chapters will help you focus your response and resources in wise ways that create sustainable change. Perhaps your community will focus on only one fencepost, such as afterschool care for children in your neighborhood, preventing them from being easy targets for exploitation. Perhaps your church or organization will focus on cybersafety and education, going into schools to do peer-to-peer training.

The safety-fence model is one way the church can be collaborative, partnering with law enforcement and other agencies that fight human trafficking to effectively prevent it from ever happening in the first place. These types of ministries and activities may not be as attention-grabbing or sensational as rescue missions and building expensive aftercare homes, yet it is the only way to end this evil in our time. We must build the protective fence together against modern slavery, creating a force field for the vulnerable individuals who are near the cliff's edge.

It is essential that the church and its leaders study the language and issues surrounding human trafficking and be able to engage in the public square—that they become “human-trafficking literate.” Christian communities can build their own fenceposts and ministries to fight human trafficking, but they must be aware, educated, and intelligent about what local law enforcement and social services are doing. For instance, it is necessary to know the laws in our own countries and in nations where we may support nonprofits in this work. Human trafficking is flourishing in our generation, and our safety fence must be strong and strategic.

THE SIX PS

This book is built around the Ps universally used in fighting human trafficking. In 2000 the United States passed the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) and the United Nations passed the Palermo Protocol, which generated new global awareness of human trafficking and the need for a common language and education.¹ Both focused on the same three Ps: *prevention*, *protection*, and *prosecution*. These guidelines later expanded to include *partnership*, then *policy*. As Christians, we add *prayer*. Using this globally accepted framework, we can build a comprehensive strategy for the church in our efforts to ending human trafficking.

To ensure the safety and well-being of volunteers as well as victims, we must make sure our efforts are sustainable and follow best-practice models. The TVPA authorized the annual global *Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report*, which offers guidance for community engagement in anti-trafficking work. This model identifies professional and community roles for an effective response to human trafficking. Every church and nonprofit should make a careful assessment of its expertise and resources to provide a sustainable, consistent, and compassionate response that respects the intersection of public and private roles. When churches engage in the community to work with law enforcement agencies and other secular organizations, they are following a biblical pattern of being salt and light. They are also making wise use of limited resources. One organization or one church may not have the means to set up a residential care facility, but it can provide volunteers and even pro bono professional services, such as counseling or language instruction for international victims.

VICTIM-CENTERED TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACH



Figure 1. Enhanced collaborative model for human trafficking task forces

Key to collaboration is respect for various partners' expertise and resources. No one can do it all. Prevention requires a comprehensive community engagement plan. Protection entails long-term commitment of significant resources from multiple stakeholders. Prosecution starts when law enforcement recovers a victim and requires coordination with victim service providers. Partnership involves the whole community, which must study the issues, be a voice, and come together to discover appropriate roles. Policy respects wider community guidelines and ensures that trust is maintained. Prayer unites the body of Christ: to one another, to those caught in the evil of modern slavery, and to our God.

THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH: UNIQUELY POSITIONED FOR PREVENTION

Proverbs 31:8 reminds us of our requirement as people of faith to advocate for the marginalized and take action to make things right: "Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves; ensure justice for those being crushed" (NLT). The theology of *imago Dei* speaks to this mandate. We are all made in the image of God. "So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:27 NRSV).

Human trafficking and modern slavery are pervasive in our world today. The practice of tricking, coercing, or forcing another human being into slavery steals freedom and joy and robs the individual of his or her identity as an image bearer of God. The church, Christian leaders, and stakeholders with a vision to end human trafficking must be of the mindset to do more than rescue and rehabilitate. While this work is, of course, important and essential, we must also ensure justice for those at risk of being crushed.

We believe the body of Christ is uniquely positioned for the essential work of prevention. When Christians focus on those dangerously close to falling off the cliff, a sense of urgency will rise to catch victims before they are crushed. The very nature of the church as an institution and its placement within communities uniquely enable the church to prevent human trafficking.

Biblically, we see the earliest recorded story of prevention of human trafficking in 2 Kings 4. This story, of a widow at risk of losing her sons to

enslavement, contains many factors present in modern slavery, including poverty and the low status of women. We can also connect elements of this story to a sociological theory called “asset-based community development,” which strives to build on the skills and resources found within a community and mobilize individuals, networks, and institutions to come together to utilize those strengths.² All of these elements are present in our case study from 2 Kings:

The wife of a man from the company of the prophets cried out to Elisha, “Your servant my husband is dead, and you know that he revered the LORD. But now his creditor is coming to take my two boys as his slaves.”

Elisha replied to her, “How can I help you? Tell me, what do you have in your house?”

“Your servant has nothing there at all,” she said, “except a small jar of olive oil.”

Elisha said, “Go around and ask all your neighbors for empty jars. Don’t ask for just a few. Then go inside and shut the door behind you and your sons. Pour oil into all the jars, and as each is filled, put it to one side.”

She left him and afterward shut the door behind her and her sons. They brought the jars to her and she kept pouring. When all the jars were full, she said to her son, “Bring me another one.”

But he replied, “There is not a jar left.” Then the oil stopped flowing.

She went and told the man of God, and he said, “Go, sell the oil and pay your debts. You and your sons can live on what is left.” (2 Kings 4:1-7)

By studying this Scripture verse by verse we see a powerful story of prevention unfold. In Old Testament culture, a widow would not have had access to land or other resources that many married women enjoyed. Unfortunately, this is still the reality for widows in many parts of the world today. We know widows and orphans are at higher risk of being trafficked and exploited.

In this story the woman’s creditors demand to take her sons as slaves as payment for her debts. This is also a common narrative in human trafficking around the world—an individual owes a debt and must work for others to pay it off. We see it in scams where a smuggler brings someone into the United States from Latin America and now that family or individual owes the smuggler a great debt. Many of the girls rescued in our own communities

could tell similar stories of indebtedness leading to their own enslavement. As churches and Christians who wish to help end human trafficking, we begin by asking how it happens in the first place. Exploitation of the marginalized in society is nothing new. It is as old as the Bible.

In 2 Kings 4, two little boys are at risk because their mother is a widow. Likewise in our modern societies, any mother trying to raise children on her own is an at-risk individual. A single mother does not have the same resources as someone in a two-parent home. Her challenges are greater, her vulnerabilities are greater, and the vulnerabilities of her children are greater.

In the biblical story, a religious leader—a “pastor”—gets involved. It is important to look at what Elisha does in this mother’s difficult and potentially disastrous situation and compare it to what the modern church might do in a similar situation. A church today might make a video to highlight the horror of human trafficking. Perhaps it would even bring in a victim to tell her story and break our hearts, then collect an offering. In fact, many churches have a benevolence fund for these types of situations.

Maybe Elisha had a fund such as this. He could have said, “How much to pay the debt? Let me write a check.” But that is not what Elisha does.

Instead he asks, “What do you have?” He starts with an asset-based approach rather than a needs-based approach. He doesn’t base his response solely on what the woman lacks.

The widow answers, “Nothing. Olive oil. A little flask of olive oil.”

At this time in history, a little flask of olive oil was just enough to put in her lamp at night to get home safely. It was the equivalent of an AA battery. It was not enough to cook with or to heat her home. Her tiny flask of oil counted as nothing to her, yet it did not matter to Elisha how small it was. She had one resource, and that’s what mattered.

When engaging issues of human trafficking and interacting with victims of this horrific evil in our modern context, it is important to learn about vulnerable populations and their communities. We must ask questions to discover what and where the assets are in a given situation. These questions could include: Is she skilled at something? Does she have any vocational skills? Did she go to nursing school? Does she live in an area where she can

go to community college? Elisha shows us it is essential to start with what someone has.

After assessing the mother's assets, Elisha makes a strange request. He instructs the woman to go out into her community and borrow empty vessels, empty jars. The ancient prophet not only involves the mother and her sons in the solution but brilliantly pulls in the community as well. This is the second step in ensuring justice for these little boys who are at risk of being sold as slaves. It is essential for the family *and* the community be involved.

Today, we typically think about community involvement as asking for donations and raising funds. If we are going door to door or issuing a call from the pulpit, we ask for checks and cash, not empty jars. If we were in this story, we might have asked the community to give money from their abundance for the boys' deliverance. But that is not what Elisha asks. He instructs the mother to borrow empty jars from family and friends, and in so doing, he engages the entire community.

The next part of the story should fill us with wonder and awe. The desperate woman has been obedient and collected the jars. Now Elisha tells her to shut the door and start pouring from the little flask. In faith, she follows through and offers her small thing—and God shows up. Every single jar is filled. There is not one overlooked jar in the house.

Note that the Bible does not tell us much about the two young boys. We know they are old enough to bring their mother a jar, but we do not know their names. It is interesting to reflect on the idea that perhaps today we sometimes focus too much on the faces and the names of vulnerable children in poverty. While they are indeed suffering, the real story for prevention and change is the parents' story.

Once all the jars are full, Elisha instructs our young mother to take the olive oil and sell it to pay her debts. She does what Elisha instructs, and it's important to note that she is selling something everyone in her community needs—she is not selling a luxury item. This mother contributes to her community as an olive oil entrepreneur, and in her new role she can provide for her sons with dignity.

After this story in 2 Kings we never hear another word about this woman, her sons, or her debts. She has been established as a businesswoman, which has empowered her to care for herself and her children. This outcome illustrates why asset-based development must be a priority in our responses, rather than a focus on needs.

There are many parallels in today's world with this story in 2 Kings. A challenge for leaders and communities who wish to end human trafficking is to look to this story and use it as a biblical model, a prevention strategy to be implemented in our own churches and neighborhoods. Elisha was not simply a social worker who used an ancient version of asset-based community development; Elisha was a man of God filled with the prophetic and empathetic love of God. He did not see this woman as someone to be dismissed because of her lower standing in society, although he could have done so without judgment at that time in history. Instead, he acknowledged the *imago Dei* in her and in her sons.

A long-term sustainable strategy is embedded in this biblical story, one that can be used as a model for partnerships and collaborations in all aspects of combating modern human trafficking. In this story the mother turns to a pastor for help, and he creates a strategy that empowers her. How do we begin to multiply a similar strategy in our churches and organizations to create space for God to work?

Today the church is uniquely positioned to prevent modern slavery because we are trusted in our communities, we have a history of relationship with our communities, and we often have existing facilities, networks, and infrastructure that can be used as assets (for example, buildings can be used for trainings, staging arenas for disasters, and so on). All these things make the church a valuable partner in local and community efforts. It is important to understand what the church brings to the table, and any effective community assessment will include faith leaders.

Prevention is ensuring that exploitation never happens in the first place. Let's go back to our illustration of the safety fence. Elisha's response of empowering the mother, mobilizing the community, and then God showing up are all fenceposts that prevent the two boys from falling over the cliff of

slavery. We have learned that stopping the bad guys is not enough. Rescue and rehabilitation are not enough. We must put people before programs. A biblical model of prevention that empowers a mother to take care of her children, one that empowers vulnerable populations at risk of exploitation, is the best way to avoid modern slavery.

BUY THE BOOK!

ivpress.com/ending-human-trafficking