

Not for Sale – Bible Study & Journal Companion **Week Five**

First Encounter: Day 1 Reflections

Please begin this week's study by reading Chapter Four of *Not For Sale: The Return of the Global Slave Trade – And How We Can Fight It*.

“Sex trafficking simultaneously exploits both the best and the worst aspects of globalization. The champions of globalization tout the growing ease of conducting business across national borders....Virtual enterprises can operate everywhere and nowhere, making themselves known only when and where they choose” (p. 171).

Yes, globalization has allowed for easy access to exploit sex. But is globalization the great evil, or are the roots a little closer to home? What if the attitudes that allow sex trafficking to thrive begins at a very early age? Think of children spending countless hours of unsupervised time watching television and browsing the Internet. Professors of mass communication note the education children receive is indelibly etched in their minds and absorbed into their hearts. Even elementary school-aged children know how to express themselves sexually, boys and girls alike. Many believe sex is power, and they equate it with love.

Sex trafficking is heart-breaking because it takes sex, a beautiful gift of God, and turns it into a self-serving instrument of bondage and torture.

Day 1: Focus on the Biblical Text: Zechariah 9:14-17

¹⁴Then the Lord will appear over them; his arrow will flash like lightning. The Sovereign LORD will sound the trumpet; he will march in the storms of the south, ¹⁵and the LORD Almighty will shield them. They will destroy and overcome with slingstones. They will drink and roar as with wine; they will be full like a bowl used for sprinkling the corners of the altar. ¹⁶The LORD their God will save them on that day as the flock of his people. They will sparkle in his land like jewels in a crown. ¹⁷How attractive and beautiful they will be! Grain will make the young men thrive, and new wine the young women. [NIV]

Day 1: Thoughts into Action **What Makes Sex Beautiful?**

How can we stop this cycle of sexual exploitation? Where in the cycle can we begin to intervene?

We must not simply seek to wipe out that which abuses and misuses sex; we must also seek to promote beauty and a healthy sexuality. We must look to the One who is the giver

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of our beauty and our sexuality. We can experience freedom in God's embrace, not shame under God's glare. A beautiful, sexual person is truly free to move and dance within the safety of their Maker's arms.

Activity: What does the word "beauty" conjure up in your mind? Write a definition. How do you feel about the concept of 'beauty'?

What about sexuality? Write a definition in your own words for this term. What does pure, God-honoring sexuality look like -- if you're single versus if you're married?

No matter if you are married or single, the truth is you are a sexual being. Please focus on this: Being a "sexual being" is not synonymous with "sexy," nor does it connote that one is "having sex." Rather, you are either a masculine being or a feminine being; therefore, you are sexual. (You are not asexual and, thus, are sexual.) What we do with our sexuality is where the "rub" comes.

If your response is negative to this claim, why is it? Grapple with the difference between true beauty and sexuality and the tainted version that commercial interests attempt to portray.

Present this debate in your thoughts to the God of the Universe who created each one of us in a fearful and wonderful way. Read Psalm 139:14 and let the Spirit of God minister to your body and soul until you begin to glimpse the beauty that God sees in you! "I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well" (NIV).

Day 1: Prayer of Response

Lord, You are beautiful, and Your creation sings of Your glory! Yet, in the dark corners where evil runs wild like a lion crouching at my doorstep, I falter and fail to act on Your behalf. You have created me as beautiful and free, able to worship and serve You in love and obedience. I know that sometimes this requires bold action. I pray for courage and inspiration as I also pray for the beautiful victims who are caught in sexual slavery. Shield them and reveal their beauty. My prayer is that all humanity will see that they sparkle as a jewel in a crown. Amen.

Second Encounter: Day 2 Reflections

Nadia had no idea that her childhood friend would deceive her. “Nadia rolled down her window and waved her arms to get Katrina’s attention. Having failed at that, she yelled out her friend’s name. Katrina did not flinch, keeping her gaze dead ahead. A minute later the caravan was driving across the border into Romania” (p. 166).

Can you just imagine what Nadia was feeling at that moment? Unable to comprehend the ruse that she was party to, the evil she was heading straight into?

It’s not just one person engaging in trafficking rings. As in the case of Nadia from Moldova (and tens of thousands of other young women from all over the former Soviet Union), there were a great many people and a great many societal factors that contributed to the rampant spread of human trafficking. With the fall of Communism brought increased poverty, unemployment, and the rise of organized crime.

Day 2: Focus on the Biblical Text: Psalm 70

¹Hasten, O God, to save me; O LORD, come quickly to help me. ²May those who seek my life be put to shame and confusion; may all who desire to ruin be turned back in disgrace. ³May those who say to me, “Aha! Aha!” turn back because of their shame. ⁴But may all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you; may those who love your salvation always say, “Let God be exalted!” ⁵Yet I am poor and needy; come quickly to me, O God. You are my help and my deliverer; O LORD, do not delay. [NIV]

Day 2: Thoughts into Action

The Hand of Deliverance

Imagine that a sexual slave wrote this psalm. With that frame in mind, re-read the line:

“Yet I am poor and needy; come quickly to me, O God. You are my help my deliverer; O LORD, do not delay” (Ps. 70:5).

There is a sense of urgency connected to these words, an urgency that we can be sure a young woman would be feeling if she were trapped in a brothel.

Activity: Choose a European country or region to focus your prayers today and throughout the week. Start by praying through this Psalm on behalf of the voiceless and invisible slaves in that country/region. Draw close to the One who sees where they are. Pray that God will not delay in their rescue. Write what you know of the country and what your prayers are for the people.

You may feel that your prayers are futile, that they are a “cop-out” for real action. God may be calling you to further action but never disregard the very real impact that praying has. We can know that our prayers are real action!

Day 2: Digging Deeper

Let’s consider the societal causes that affected both Katrina and Nadia.

Katrina:

- What would drive one woman to look at another and sell her into sexual slavery?
- Can you try to imagine what it would be like to be Katrina, knowingly sending your friend into sexual slavery? What do you think she would be feeling as she heard and ignored Nadia calling out?

Now Nadia:

- What would motivate a mother to leave her son to “make a living?”
- What was she expecting Katrina to do when she was frantically trying to get her attention?

There are infinitely more questions to ponder. One of the key questions is this one: Why doesn’t God do something about these atrocities?

Do we know and trust God’s character?

What attributes of God do you know to be true? *Mercy*: “But in your great mercy you did not put an end to them or abandon them, for you are a gracious and merciful God (Nehemiah 9:31, NIV)”. *Love*: “And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him (1 John 4:16, NIV).” *Goodness*: “Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good. His love endures forever (Psalm 136:1, NIV).” God is patient, gentle, and kind. He is all powerful, all knowing, and all present.

Which of those attributes cause you to wonder why the Maker of the universe does not act?

What sort of miracles might we expect from the Lord? Have you seen miracles in your own life? Do you believe the Lord is your help and deliverer? “But you, O LORD, be not far off; O my strength, come quickly to help me” (Psalm 22:19, NIV).”

Finally, do you believe that God can use you for His purposes, to be a help and deliverer for those living in captivity?

Day 2: Prayer of Response

Lord, it is so hard to continue to read these stories of desperation, abduction, rape, deception, and utter darkness. It is so easy for my soul to grow weary and want to stop. I want to stop reading, to stop the growing awareness that is happening even now, to stop thinking that I might be called to do something risky and unconventional to be part of Your deliverance. I know it may be easier to just stop, but I know that those enslaved cry out for rescue. In your words, Lord, as You spoke in the Garden, I pray that not my will but Your will be done. Amen.

Third Encounter: Day 3 Reflections

“I am praying for a new generation of abolitionists who will open up their hearts,” said Padre Cesare. “Traffickers get away with murder because good people won’t answer the calls of these young women calling out for help” (p. 162).

Responses to the connection between trafficking and prostitution can sound like this: “But if they don’t know any better, what are they supposed to do? Won’t they just go right back into it? What’s the point of rescuing them if they won’t change?”

Imagine someone posing a similar question to Jesus at some point in his life. “But, Jesus, why bother with humanity? If You die for them to bring them freedom and salvation, they’ll just go back to living the old way. What if they don’t ever really change? Why should You die if they will just keep on sinning? Why would You go through hell if they will still create it on earth?”

What do you think His answer would be?

Remember the Israelites, wandering in the wilderness, having just been freed from slavery, complaining that they would rather be back in the hands of their oppressors?

God has already answered this question for us.

Day 3: Focus on the Biblical Text: Psalms 5:1-2; 4-8

¹Give ear to my words, O LORD; give heed to my groaning. ²Hearken to the sound of my cry, my King and my God, for to thee I pray...⁴For thou are not a God who delights in wickedness; evil may not sojourn with thee. ⁵The boastful may not stand before thy eyes; thou hatest all evildoers. ⁶Thou destroyest those who speak lies; the LORD abhors bloodthirsty and deceitful men. ⁷But I through the abundance of thy steadfast love will enter thy house; I will worship toward thy holy temple in the fear of thee. ⁸Lead me, O LORD, in thy righteousness because of my enemies; make thy way straight before me. (RSV)

Day 3: Thoughts into Action Listening for God’s Call

The work of Padre Cesare is critical, but he is just one man. Many more like him are needed to rise up, answer the call, and take the risk to rescue.

Is this work that only the clergy are called to do? Imagine an entire community of people – abolitionists – working to provide freedom and sanctuary, hope and restoration for slaves in Eastern Europe. Imagine, just for a minute, what it would be like if you and 10 people/couples/families you know moved to, say, Moldova, lived together, and focused your lives around meeting the needs of the slaves there. Imagine what could happen!

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Let your imagination take you on a ride, free from the practical concerns and potential fears you might have. Just envision, for a moment, if you could do anything to help. Now think closer to home. Imagine what it would be like if you and 10 people/couples/families you know mobilized in your church, neighborhood, city, or state and together focused around meeting the needs of the slaves in your backyards. Envision those results.

Activity: On a sheet of paper write, illustrate, or create a representation of your imaginative flight to Moldova. (You might visit http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/country_profiles/3038982.stm for information from the BBC on Moldova to assist with your flight.) Get creative with materials!

Is there something keeping you from letting your imagination go? Is there something keeping you from answering a call God has been trying to give you?

Take your concerns, any obstacles (no matter how big or small) you are facing to the “Sanctuary” right now. Pray to hear God’s call for how He would invite you to be an answer to Padre Cesare’s prayer.

Day 3: Digging Deeper

David wrote Psalm 10 during a time of great distress. His enemies were rebels against the Lord. Deception and evil were rampant. David prayed and meditated upon God’s nature. He was no stranger to mornings with God – a place he, perhaps, learned about why God loves and what God hates. From the beginning of the fall of humankind, there has been a battle between good and evil, light and darkness, love and hate, and justice and injustice. The battle continues. David’s battle has become our battle. Devout hearts are conscious of sin. Inward communion with God leads to outward action for others.

How is your inward time with God leading you to outward actions for the vulnerable and enslaved? Reflect on Psalm 17:1: “Hear, O LORD, my righteous plea; listen to my cry. Give ear to my prayer – it does not rise from deceitful lips” (NIV). Have you made the battle over injustices your battle? If so, in what ways are your prayers leading you to action? If not, what is holding you back?

Day 3: Prayer of Response

Lord, You hear the cries of the oppressed, and You long to answer their cries with a triumphant procession! I am Your child, and I may be called to be a part of that procession. Open my ears to Your call and to the cries of my enslaved brothers and sisters. Stir up a deep love in my heart for them, as though for my own family members and friends. Give me a free imagination that will lead me into a beautiful and free future for all the enslaved. I am Your laborer. I give You my life. Amen.

Fourth Encounter: Day 4 Reflections

Many in the West celebrated the collapse of the Soviet Union, but the collapse was not all good news. A vacuum was created when Communism fell. For some it did mean newfound freedom, and we celebrate this! But for others it meant destruction and a depression on many levels. Jobs were lost. Social services were lost. Families were torn apart. These and other factors created a major power vacuum for criminals to move in and take control. And that is just what they did. And as is often the case, the women and children were hardest hit, leaving them extremely vulnerable for exploitation and trafficking.

The Russian Mafia's reach spans across time and space in the "world" of sexual slavery, affecting numerous European countries, Southeast Asia, Canada, and even the United States. The Mafia is notorious for its ability to strike fear in the hearts of men and with its ability to create such profitable alliances across the board. "They become a daunting foe for abolitionists in eastern Europe" (p. 177).

The motion picture "Trade," starring Kevin Kline, is a fictional representation of a trafficking ring run by Russian Mafia working out of Mexico, serving "johns" in the United States. One of the characters is a young woman brought over from Eastern Europe under false pretenses, and her story will break your heart. She puts a "face" to Nadia.

Day 4: Focus on the Biblical Text: James 5:1-5 (excerpts)

¹Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming upon you. ²Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. ³Your gold and silver are corroded.... You have hoarded wealth in the last days. ⁴Look! The wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you....⁵You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence.... [NIV]

Day 4: Thoughts into Action

Focus on the Trade

If you had the opportunity to watch the move "Trade," surely you grieved at the thought of what these young girls, young women, and even boys endured. Just reading Nadia's story makes one grieve.

Use today's passage at two levels: First, allow this to be like a mirror for your own soul. How do we live the "rich life?" Are we in any way partners in the oppression of the poor, of the enslaved? If so, present this to God and invite God's cleansing, transforming power to live in a whole new way.

Second, allow this passage to minister to your soul as you consider the oppressors and see how the God of justice will deal with them.

Activity: Take the word “Mafia” and come up with five adjectives that describe your thoughts regarding organized crime. Do you think of those in the Mafia as living in “luxury and self-indulgence” as today’s Biblical text describes? What does God promise us will be the result of this lifestyle? Write your responses under your list of adjectives. Conclude by writing five adjectives that describe God’s justice.

Day 4: Digging Deeper

Consider an Old Testament situation, when the Lord wanted to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah? Read Genesis 18:16-35. Abraham pleaded with him: “Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?” (Gen. 18:25, NIV). What should we make of this? Whose heart really changed in this dialogue?

How could our pleading on behalf of the unrighteous affect the plight of the trafficking victims?

In the final scene of the movie “Trade,” we see the trafficker playing at his home with his preschool-aged child. He looks and acts like a fun, doting father. His child is delighted in him. What tension does this picture raise in your heart and mind?

How hard is it to think of a member of the Russian Mafia as a father or a mother? What does it take for a man to sell another person’s child into sexual slavery at one moment, then come home and play with his own child?

Is there any area in our own lives where we have the ability to disconnect from how our actions affect others? Do we suffer from the malady of treating our “own” differently than “others”? Others may be in our community or entire cultures around the world.

Day 4: Prayer of Response

O Lord! Help me remember who the real enemy is. Lord, I am reminded that You have already won the victory! Thank You for the victory. I pray today, Lord, for transformation. I pray that the father-heart/mother-heart in each of the traffickers would grow and that they would begin to see the victims they abuse as if they were their own children. Come to them in dreams and reveal this when their guard is down. May they no longer be able to disassociate from the humanity in those they exploit. Lord, how I groan for Your victory to be seen in this and for my enslaved brothers and sisters to be free! Amen.

Fifth Encounter: Day 5 Reflections

Padre Cesare Lo Deserto does not live a simple life. Compassion of this depth is never simple. There is never a dull moment. Love like this will sweep you away and take you with it on a beautiful ride. Hopefully his story inspires you to live your own life out of such compassion. It was that way for Enzo; his life was inalterably changed after his late-night shore encounter with Padre Cesare to rescue the Iraqi refugees.

Day 5: Focus on the Biblical Text: James 5:7-11 (excerpts)

⁷Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming.... ⁸You, too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near.... ¹⁰Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. ¹¹As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.

Day 5: Thoughts into Action A Heart Full of Compassion

Jesus taught us to pray, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven (Matthew 6:10, NIV)." Often when a passage like James 5 is read, the phrase "until the Lord's coming" is understood as waiting for the second coming of Christ. Let's ponder the possibility that it could also be talking about God's Kingdom coming through God's people who trust God and obey God's invitation to stand firm against the oppressors.

Consider again the issue of suffering in conjunction with the compassion of the Lord. What does a compassionate hand mean to one who is suffering or has suffered? What does a compassionate hand mean to one who has never suffered anything of depth?

Spend some time with James 5 passage, allowing the Spirit of the Living God to touch the areas in your life that bring you pain and suffering, where you are being called to persevere. Ask God to increase in you a heart that is full of compassion and mercy for others who suffer.

Activity: Think of a truly compassionate person you have met. What is it that makes him/her compassionate? Describe the person's qualities.

Define compassion. How are compassion and pity different? What makes compassion so infectious?

What is the connection between compassion and action? Describe a time when you have been consumed with the compassion of Jesus. What did it lead you to do?

Day 5: Digging Deeper

Take a moment to observe and meditate upon the compassion of Christ. Read the Biblical stories listed below. Ask the Lord to touch your heart with compassion and inspire you to action.

- The Beattitudes (Matthew 5:3-10)
- Do Not Judge (Matthew 7:1-5)
- Jesus Heals a Paralytic (Matthew 9:1-2)
- Jesus is Moved with Compassion for the Harassed and Helpless (Matthew 9:35-38)
- Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand (Matthew 14:13-21)

Day 5: Prayer of Response

Lord, open me to Your compassion. If I try to take on the evil in this world on my own, my heart can so easily be consumed by vengeance and/or self-righteousness. Keep me deeply rooted in Your heart and Your compassion. True compassion is contagious, infectious, and merciful. Lord, I wish to infect this whole planet with Your healing compassion. I long to see the day that Your kingdom comes and Your will is done, where evil is wiped out and in its place is Your compassion. Let me join in Your work! Amen.

Sixth Encounter: Day 6 Reflections

The Russian woman's "compassion" is an ironic contradiction to that of Padre Cesare's. Padre Cesare's compassion is totally focused on the heart of another person and not his own. The Russian woman is truly a deceiver, leading the girls into hell with an olive branch.

The girls themselves refer to it as hell, as one writes to Padre Cesare, "Padre! I am one of four girls stuck in this pit of hell. We plan to escape soon. I hope you will take us in" (p. 162).

"You show men good time, or I cut throat," he threatened. Shaking with fear, the girls went into separate bedrooms, where the portly men raped them. Over the next month, this script was played out countless times. Four simple words – "You go work now" – transported Nadia into a living hell" (p. 176).

Day 6: Focus on the Biblical Text: Psalm 140

- 1 Rescue me, O LORD, from evil men;
protect me from men of violence,
- 2 who devise evil plans in their hearts
and stir up war every day.
- 3 They make their tongues as sharp as a serpent's;
the poison of vipers is on their lips.
Selah
- 4 Keep me, O LORD, from the hands of the wicked;
protect me from men of violence
who plan to trip my feet.
- 5 Proud men have hidden a snare for me;
they have spread out the cords of their net
and have set traps for me along my path.
Selah
- 6 O LORD, I say to you, "You are my God."
Hear, O LORD, my cry for mercy.
- 7 O Sovereign LORD, my strong deliverer,
who shields my head in the day of battle –
- 8 do not grant the wicked their desires, O LORD;
do not let their plans succeed,

or they will become proud.
Selah

9 Let the heads of those who surround me
be covered with the trouble their lips have caused.

10 Let burning coals fall upon them;
may they be thrown into the fire,
into miry pits, never to rise.

11 Let slanderers not be established in the land;
may disaster hunt down men of violence.

12 I know that the LORD secures justice for the poor
and upholds the cause of the needy.

13 Surely the righteous will praise your name
and the upright will live before you. [NIV]

Day 6: Thoughts into Action

The Extent of God's Mercy

Meditate on Psalm 140. Allow the Spirit of God to lead you as you pray today. Maybe you will be drawn to pray for the victims or maybe for the oppressors. Focus on your map as you have done all week. As you read, remember Nadia, Katrina, the rapists, and the traffickers.

(The activity portion of this day's encounter is in the next section rather than this one. After taking time to meditate and pray, please turn in your Bible to Joshua 2:1-16).

Day 6: Digging Deeper

A prostitute is named in the genealogy of our own Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Her name is Rahab. Though not a victim of sex trafficking, as far as we know, Rahab's life represents a beautiful story of redemption. Here's a quick summary of her story, although you can find the full account in the Joshua passage.

The Israelites had crossed the Jordan after their years of wandering in the desert. Two spies were sent to check out Jericho. The spies stayed with Rahab, and she offered her support. She chose to align herself with their cause because she recognized "the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below." The citizens of Jericho had heard of how the Israelites had defeated other kingdoms and they were afraid. She wanted to live under the protection of this God who led the people of Israel.

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She is labeled “Rahab the Prostitute” in the text, but God showed her mercy and did not treat her according to that label. Because of her faith, she not only saved her own family, but she helped an entire nation – and from her descendants the whole world experienced Jesus! That’s redemption.

While preparing to write this encounter, authors Rayburn and Paxton heard a sermon on Rahab. What followed the sermon was probably one of the most powerful proclamations of God’s power to transform lives.

Cardboard Testimonies: Sometimes we think that testimonies have to be long and detailed to express God’s power. You will soon see that this is not true. The pastor who preached that day found this video on YouTube called “Cardboard Testimonies” and chose to have these stories of redemption told at his church.

(To capture the essence of what this was like, watch this video from YouTube:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RvDDc5RB6FQ>)

Here are just a few of the stories shared at the church:

Side 1: DIAGNOSED WITH TUMOR OR STROKE

Side 2: Two days ago all gone

Side 1: ADDICTED PARENTS FELT ABANDONED

Side 2: God was always with me

Side 1: INCONSOLABLE DEPRESSION

Side2: Inexpressible joy

Side 1: CONTROLLED BY FEAR

Side 2: Treasured and restored

Side 1: YEARS OF INFERTILITY, SEPARATION, AND MS

Side 2: Blessed renewed marriage, 2 beautiful daughters, still standing

Side 1: (husband & wife together) ... ADULTEROUS WIFE....Passive husband...

Side 2: God’s grace restored our marriage

Activity: Now it’s your turn to write your own redemption story. Find a piece of cardboard and write in just a few words your own story of sin/suffering. On the other side, write how God has redeemed you. Bring the cardboard to tomorrow’s “Community Gathering” to share with your group and allow time to just praise God for what God has done.

Remember that this same God who has the power to lift us out of our stories of sin and suffering, the God who is able to take our labels away and give us a new name, this is the same God who is able to respond to the cries of the trafficking victim. Let us cry out

along with them, inviting God's will to be done. God's will is for freedom for the captive!

Day 6: Prayer of Response

O God, I grieve to know that there are brothers and sisters daily living in hell on earth. It is almost too much for my weary soul to bear. I offer my heart to You, knowing that You are the God of transformation and resurrection. Take my burdened heart and transform it into a mighty heart of compassion, strength, wisdom, and action in Your name. As I pour out my heart to You, Lord, I ask You take it and make it new. Do not erase the sorrow, good Lord, but transform it into something beautiful and new that I might work to see Your kingdom here on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.

Seventh Encounter: Community Gathering

“Your dignity is in your hands. Take care of it!” Regina Pacis declares this across Moldova on billboards. But Padre Cesare’s organization knows it is not the only stand it must take. The fight is long and hard, a dark road with no easy way out.

Poverty. Demand. Traffickers. Being involved in the modern abolitionist movement could be compared to attempts to purify a muddy, stagnant pool. It takes patience, perseverance, and a willingness to get dirty. But there are people who are willing to dig in and get dirty. There is a growing wave of interest and many modern-day abolitionists are joining in all over the world. Padre Cesare’s prayers are being answered. These abolitionists are people who long to see the dignity of all humans reclaimed – people who cry out on behalf of the voiceless and who intercede on behalf of the victims. So many are picking up their crosses and following Christ, finding freedom in Him and working to see captives set free.

Nadia found new life for herself and her son. Let us join together and work to create a new life for all the enslaved. Moving upstream is not easy, but the God of All Creation whom we love and worship has already gone ahead of us, and God’s victory is so sweet for all who dare to taste it.

During today’s community gathering we are going to explore the meaning of personal redemption.

Activity: Break into small groups (3-4 individuals each).

Start by reading Eph 1:7:

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and spiritual understanding. [NIV]

When Paul wrote this letter to the Ephesians he did so knowing that the citizens of Ephesus and the surrounding areas were accustomed with the practice of freeing slaves by way of payment: the practice of redemption. Drawing parallel with the law of the day, Paul paints a picture that the Ephesians would be able to plainly understand. Christ paid for our freedom through His blood given for us on the cross.

- Is there a moment in your life when someone afforded you redemption?
- What was your response?
- Have you offered redemption to someone in your life?

» Before moving out of your small groups, pick one verse from this week’s study that particularly moved your group.

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Group Encounter: Let's go around the room to allow each small group to read the Bible verse they chose. Spend a few minutes with each verse answering these questions:

- What does this verse teach you about God?
- What does this verse teach you about yourself?
- What does this verse teach you about others?

We are all in different places when it comes to writing our redemption testimonies. Some of us may not be ready to write on side one. Others of us may be currently working in companionship with God so that someday we may be able to write on side two. All of us have different paths to walk with God. That is the beauty of our faith; in Christ we know we are on a pathway and not wondering in the darkness.

The same occurred for Nadia when she wandered into a bakery in search of food. She had no plan. She had no known pathway upon which to move forward. But as the sun shed light onto the wall of the bakery that day in San Foca, she found a firm foothold on a new journey toward freedom and redemption.

We may be in the darkness with our personal redemption with ourselves in God but do not despair! Continue the journey and, in time, God will light the way.

Now let's revisit Day 6 by rereading Joshua 2:1-16. Also, reread the Digging Deeper section about Rahab. Focus on how God showed Rehab mercy despite of her numerous flaws.

If you have access to the appropriate technology we suggest that you re-watch the YouTube video "Cardboard Testimonies" by projecting the video onto the wall so all can watch the video together: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RvDDc5RB6FQ>.

- Was there a testimony that touched you? (If you don't have access to the internet to watch the video please refer to those selected on page 14.)

- Was there a testimony that pricked your conscience?

Activity: Break into small groups (3-4 individuals each).

Now it's your turn to write your own redemption story. Use a piece of cardboard (or paper) and write, in just a few words, your own story of sin/suffering. On the other side, write how God has redeemed you. Share with your group and allow time to just praise God for what He has done.

Remember that this same God who has the power to lift us out of our stories of sin and suffering, the God who is able to take our labels away and give us a new name, this is the same God who is able to respond to the cries of the trafficking victim. Let us cry out along with them, inviting God's will to be done. God's will is for freedom for the captive!

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Final Group Encounter: If your large group chooses to do so, share your “cardboard testimonies” with the entire group.

End today’s session in prayer. Pray for one another as we all walk a path of redemption with God. Pray for the women and girls enslaved in sexual bondage seeking their redemption. Pray that they might feel the warming embrace of the sun shedding light upon the pathway to freedom.

Engagement Opportunities:

(1) Check out Not For Sale when they come to town.

Not For Sale is constantly traveling the US and the world to get people active to combat modern-day slavery. Stay up-to-date with Not For Sale Campaign events:

<<http://www.notforsalecampaign.org/events>>

(2) Get plugged in locally with your Not For Sale Regional Director.

If you want to volunteer, work on Not For Sale projects, or simply learn more about what Not For Sale is doing locally connect with your Regional Director.

<<http://www.notforsalecampaign.org/state-directors>>

If you don’t find a director in your area contact info@notforsalecampaign.org.

(3) Research the issue.

The U.S. Department of State offers an annual Trafficking in Persons Report that details the current state of human trafficking in countries around the world. Check out the Trafficking in Persons website for resources and information: <http://www.state.gov/g/tip/>. World Vision is also an organization working to eradicate the sex trafficking in Eastern Europe. Read its testimony before Congress on the issue in 2004:

<http://www.worldvision.org/content.nsf/learn/globalissues-criticalissues-trafficking>.

(4) Contact Regina Pacis and let the survivors know you are praying for them.

Go to www.reginapacis.org/en and click on “Contact Us” to write a note of encouragement and support.

Celebrate Your Completion of Series 5:

Design a time of worship with your group. This could include music, songs that declare the attributes of God, pieces of art from the group, or pull together art supplies to draw/paint during the celebration. Break bread together, express your creativity, and celebrate the awesomeness of God.