

Let us help children to be children again – Fiona Lisandra



Throughout the Bible we see scripture after scripture revealing God's heart towards children and how He values the little ones, describing them as crowns, rewards, a heritage, a joy, blessings, the greatest, and so on. We are instructed and taught how to raise them, how to teach them, how to discipline them, how to love them and that for their protection and well-being, as the following scriptures reflect. With Child Protection Week (May 29 to June 5 2018) upon us, let's view some of those verses.

Psalm 127:3 – Children are a heritage from the LORD, offspring a reward from him.

Matthew 18:1-6 – At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. And he said: "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me. If anyone causes one of these little ones to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea."

Mark 10:13-15 – People were bringing little children to Jesus

for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it."

Psalm 82:3-4 – Give justice to the weak and the fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked.

Sadly, the news, research and social media tell a different story! We, as adults are instructed by Jesus to become as little children – spiritually speaking – but instead we see children – naturally speaking – being forced by adults into adulthood long before their time.

How could we possibly protect the children if we do not first preserve the intended and acceptable norms and values of childhood itself?



What is childhood?

What did Jesus mean when He said that we should become like children? A few words come to mind: innocent, pure, trusting, dependant, wide-eyed wonder, joyful, care-free, humble, simplistic, hopeful. Is this not how childhood should be? What a wonderful illustration of how we can and should live in

relation to our Heavenly Father!

But oh, what a ghastly reality many endure instead!

You may be asking at this point, "What does all of this have to do with Child Trafficking?"

Too often the ignorance and indifference of parents, families and communities, drastically increases the risk of defenceless children being trafficked. When they are trafficked, there is an instant shift from the care-free, wide-eyed wonder they may have once known, to a place where adult duties and behaviour are expected. Nothing could possibly prepare them to withstand the suffering without total devastation to their souls.

These are some of the realities that would be categorised as Child Trafficking: (by definition of the "Prevention and Combating of Trafficking in Persons" Act 7/2013.)

Child labour

Child labour is defined as work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and that is harmful to their physical and mental development.

According to ILO in 2016: 152 million children are trafficked for labour alone! Half of these victims are African, half are aged between 5 and 11 years and half are used for hazardous labour. The sad reality is that they don't usually live longer than 5 or 6 years once trafficked, due to physical and sexual abuse as punishment for non-performance, malnutrition, unhygienic living conditions and poisoning from pesticides in the case of agricultural labour. The chocolate, coffee and tobacco industries are the worst culprits responsible for these alarming numbers. 70% of the entire world's cocoa comes from Africa and is harvested by these children. Children are also used in mining, construction and sweatshops, to name a few, performing duties that are dangerous, dirty and difficult, and with very little or no compensation.



Child marriage

Several cultures around the world promote and practice child marriage, and South Africans are no exception. The perverted practice of Ukuthwala is the abduction and forced marriage of girls, some as young as 8 years old. These little ones are forced to perform duties of sexual and domestic servitude to a husband who may be four or five times her age.

Prostitution, pornography and other forms of sexual exploitation

When I see what I see both on the streets and online – on social media and all over the internet – I can only conclude that children and parents are really ignorant of the beastly nature of traffickers and sexual predators. It is not my intention to create fear or paranoia but I honestly cannot stress enough, the need for parental monitoring of their children's online activity.

Too often, predators befriend young girls on Facebook and other social media platforms, often by creating false profiles of a girl of similar age for example, and then lure them with trickery, in order to meet them face-to-face. If they succeed, you will likely never see that child again. In some cases, a child may not even leave the house, causing parents to believe that their children are safe, but what is not known is that there are millions of children who have been coerced or

threatened or in some way convinced to cooperate with the demands of sexual predators who claim to be a friend on social media platforms. The children are convinced that their webcam communications are private and there is only one person on the "other side of the world" watching her, but the truth is that all activity is usually recorded and then posted on other sites for hundreds of thousands of men to see. This then increases risk of abduction too. In most cases, these predators are well connected to cyber-criminals who are capable of easily hacking computers and smartphones, in order to find precise locations of these children.

Another very disturbing phenomenon that seems to have escalated extensively is the "Blessers"/ "Slay-Queen" craze. This may not resemble the typical trafficking scenario in all cases but many times it has turned into a violent nightmare for Slay-Queens, who cannot find an exit when they realise the dangers they face. They often end up being controlled, much like other trafficking victims and are sold or murdered when their Blessers have lost interest in them. The Blessers will offer girls a high life in exchange for sexual servitude, entirely on their terms. They may buy flashy jewellery, perfume, clothes and shoes, but the higher the offer, the higher the demand. The Slay-Queens in some cases may have been driven by poverty initially, but I strongly believe that the problem runs much deeper than the need to survive. Many children are currently growing up strongly influenced by the "Material Cult" known as Izikhothane, or Skhotane in black communities, with variants of other material pursuits just as prevalent in white communities. This in itself has nothing to do with Human Trafficking but it does create conditioning that increases vulnerability and temptation to pursue wealth above rational. This is what makes children easy targets!



Providers, protectors and defenders of a child's wellbeing

Parents, teachers and leaders, looking back at the Scriptures above, I appeal to you to return to Godly coaching, where children are not compelled by financial responsibilities or desires, to sell their innocence for any price. Let us foster an environment wherein our children view us as their providers, protectors and defenders of their wellbeing, dependant and carefree, as they should be. Let us raise our children in the knowledge that they are our joy, that they are precious to us and that the Kingdom of God belongs to them. Let us create such an environment of trust and refuge for them, that they would freely disclose to us, any potential enticements or encounters with strangers either online or in person.

For those children who are not within our reach, as well as our own, I ask that we would intercede on their behalves, that our Father for Whom nothing is impossible, would reach into the dark places, deliver them from slavery and encounter them with His love!

Let us allow our children to be children once again!

Compelled to oppose the cruel world of sex slavery – Fiona Lisandra



Colossians 3:12 Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

I heard the screams of a girl coming from a car that passed by and rounded the bend too quickly for me to see it, but still I stood there, staring down the street, hoping and praying with words that had not yet been formed. It was just a moment later and there she was! She came marching back up passed me and into the darkness of her world that most would never know. No older than 15, I guessed, and with too little fabric to cover her tiny frame and keep her warm in the coolness of the night. The little bump in her belly was naked but that was most likely the least of her troubles.

I followed her, having to run a little to catch up but I called out to her and she stopped. She turned towards me but immediately hung her head to hide her face behind the matted mess of her unkempt wig. I asked her to look up and look at me, desperately hoping that somehow I could reach into her soul, to show compassion and give her at least one moment to feel human, loved and valued. Her pitch-black eyes told the truth of the fear and affliction of a sex-slave but her words were the rehearsed scraps of someone else's tale. These words are all she is permitted to speak – conditioned by means of repeated violent rape and abuse, compelling her to protect her

oppressors.

Nothing is quite as it seems!



My usual 20-minute drive home that night was stretched to close to an hour, even though there is typically no traffic in the wee hours of the morning. My heart and thoughts were in another world – far, far away – no, not in Taiwan or India or Indonesia or Russia, but with the child I had just met, right here in Port Elizabeth. Yes, human trafficking is very much a reality in PE! This “far, far away” world is not geographically distant, as some might suppose, but is often far from consideration, only for lack of exposure to the truths that hide within this heinous crime. It is my hope that we can change that in the months and years to come.

Many misconceptions

The misconceptions around all forms of modern-day slavery are

many and I will write more about these in future articles, but sex-slavery is one that is close to my heart and it certainly deserves attention and understanding.

All too often civil society will look down on sex-workers with disgust, condemning their “career choice”, but what if there was no choice? Though not lacking compassion for these too, I am not referring to the minority of sex-workers who may see no alternative “choice” but to sell their bodies for survival. Instead I would like to draw the readers’ attention to another category of sex-workers who really do not have any choice. Would we still hold in contempt a 12-year-old child who was abducted, beaten, drugged and gang-raped for several months and then forced into prostitution for someone else’s monetary gain? Surely not!

As she ages within the industry – if she even survives past 15 years of age – starting to look a little more like an adult, do we suppose that an “adult” choice was made? What about when she turns 18? Is she suddenly no longer that victim, but now a criminal? Does she suddenly deserve to be arrested or scorned for “her” crime? There is no birthday gift but instead her basic human right (freely available to everyone else) to report sexual violation, or physical assault by a client evading payment, is further destroyed by her fear of arrest. (Please note that according to South African law, every sex-worker under the age of 18 is automatically regarded as a victim, irrespective of circumstances. This includes all forms of sex work: street prostitution, brothel prostitution, escort services, massage parlour-related prostitution, pornography, exotic dancing, nude modelling, sexting, peepshows, child-brides or sexual servitude, etc.)

I do not mean to imply that all who have been trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation, would have started out as young girls, but in truth, if not by similar means, equally compelling forces are commonly applied with many adult women, as well as young boys, men, transgenders and transsexuals. The

statistics for each may vary in certain parts of the world, due to factors that increase vulnerability, as well as preference (demand) and availability (supply), but truly, nobody is disqualified in the eye of these opportunistic perpetrators.

This brings me to my next question, with deliberate reproach ... is there really much difference between one who sells another human being for personal benefit and one who buys a human being for personal benefit? Why is she, the metaphorical "merchandise", so often rebuked and/or arrested but not the seller, nor the buyer? If there was no demand from clients, there would be no need to supply and no business for traffickers!

I thank God for the opportunity to write on the subject of human trafficking. I pray that through this column, awareness, understanding and compassion would be stirred in the hearts of people, to stand together against the world's greatest injustice.

How I joined the war against human trafficking – Lisha Venter



It all started after I watched the movie *Taken*. If you haven't

seen this movie, it is about a young girl that takes an opportunity to travel with her friend.

In short, these two friends get trafficked and forced to take drugs. Once they are addicted, the traffickers sell them as sex slaves. Luckily for this girl, her father rescued her with some pretty impressive moves but sadly, this only happens in the movies.

This is not the case for true life trafficking cases. I was told by a friend that this is really happening in the world today.

I could not believe it. My heart was so moved and broken by this reality and I was felt so angry with this great injustice.

I was young, naïve and uncertain how to get involved. I slowly pushed it aside and focussed on just living my life and working to pay my bills.



PHOTOS: By [Milada Vigerova](#) and [Rodion Kutsaev](#) on [Unsplash](#)

A number of years later, I heard that it was becoming an issue in our country, so I looked around to see what organisations were fighting against human trafficking but I couldn't find any.

Once again, I shelved this passion and was soon back to just working to pay my bills.

I started praying

My passion started to grow increasingly around three years ago when I heard of human trafficking occurring not too far from where I lived. I was outraged but I didn't know where to get involved so I started praying.

Within that year I became passionate about starting my own business. I had no experience or resources available but I became obsessed with working it all out.

While I was focussing on this, I felt God saying to me to get involved with something bigger than myself. I was reminded of my passion for fighting human trafficking.

It was around this time that I came across an organisation that reached out to women in the sex industry. This was close enough to the work I was interested in, so I volunteered every now and then, although, I wasn't convinced that this was where I would be long-term.

While I was volunteering, I came across another organisation that was more directly involved with human trafficking. I was immediately drawn to their work and knew that this is where I wanted to get involved.

This organisation fights human trafficking through prevention – suspected victims are stopped on their way to being trafficked.

Changing course of someone's life

I loved this idea of stopping people from being exploited. Changing the course of someone's life from one of the world's greatest injustices and giving them another opportunity of freedom in life.

Imagine that was you? What an amazing relief that would be.

I applied for a role that involved monitoring to prevent potential victims from trafficking. I was accepted for the position and I worked in this role for three months, but unfortunately the hours weren't compatible with my family life.

They then offered me an office job to oversee the operations, which I happily accepted. This was one of the best decisions of my life.

Have I got my business up and running yet? No, not at all but I am sure that I will one day soon. I believe that as you seek God and His will, that "all these things shall be added unto you".

People are being exploited daily and dehumanised into mere objects. It is therefore my utmost passion to play a small part in this work, ensuring that this evil steadily decreases.

To date, our organisation has stopped over 250 women, men and children from being trafficked and this is only the tip of the iceberg.

The total number of people prevented from being trafficked is increasing all the time, which we give God all the glory for.

God loves all people and hates injustice. Choose to be part of His story because it is what we are here on earth for, to be His hands and His feet.

Seek and find what passion He has placed in you and live in His will for your life because it is so worth it. As you nourish others, He will nourish you.

Proverbs 11:25 – Whoever brings blessing will be enriched, and one who waters will himself be watered.