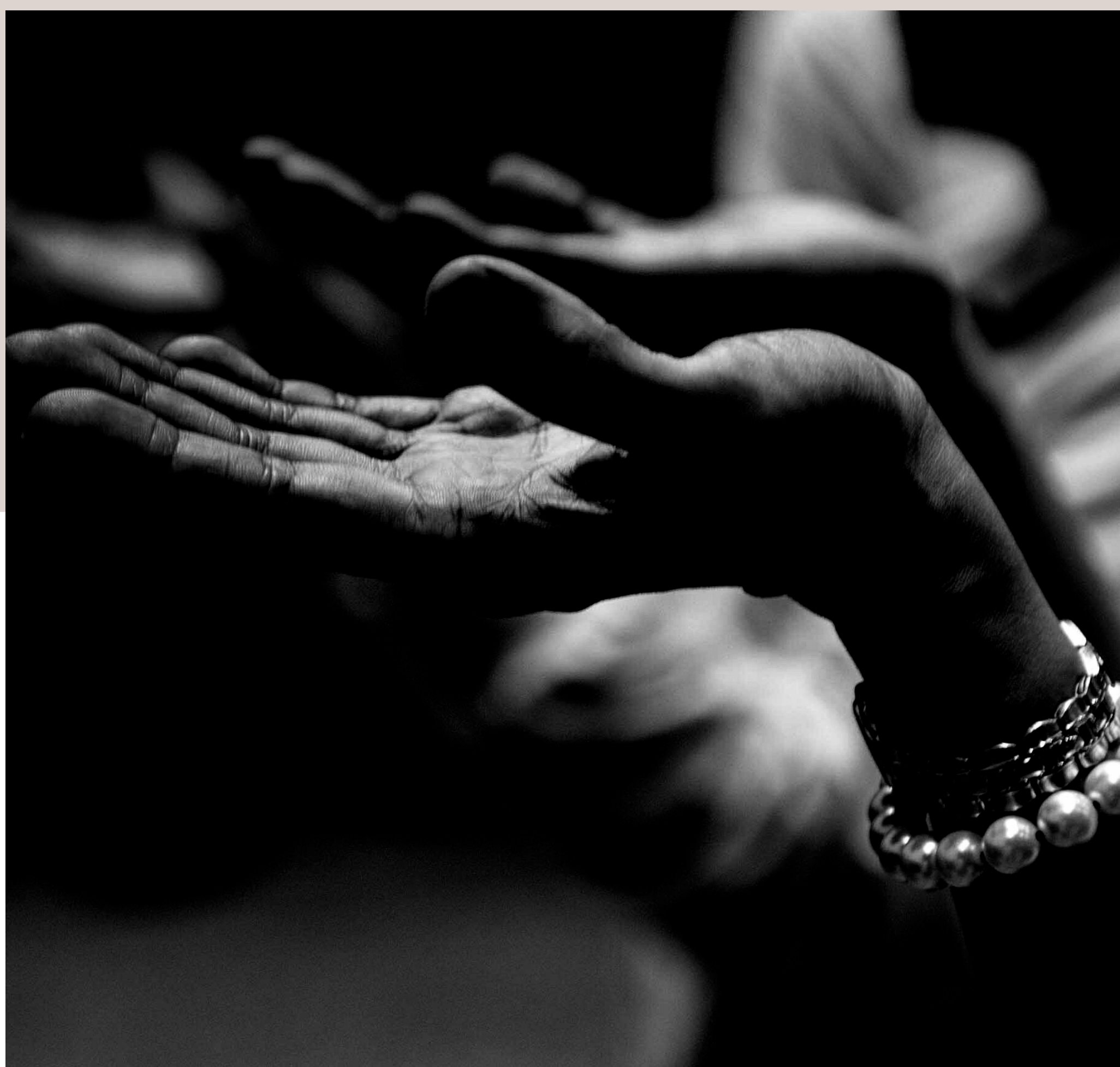


FREE



LENTEN DEVOTIONAL

Six weeks of reflections written by people engaged in the work of anti-sex trafficking. We encourage and challenge you to join us as we pray, learn, give, and act together so that all may be FREE.



SUNDAY 1 | Psalm 32

WORDS BY
HB

MINISTRY
Serve Globally Personnel

HB has worked with Serve Globally since 2009. She currently serves in the Middle East North Africa region. Her sending churches are Grace Covenant Church in Chicago and Excelsior Covenant Church in Excelsior, Minnesota.

Sabrina suffered under the pressures of working on the streets every night. Despite her initial coercion into the sex industry, she felt a greater sense of bondage in her choice to continue as a sex worker when the opportunity finally came to leave. She viewed her work as the best option for supporting her family. This highlights the complex system of trafficking and sexual exploitation in which young women may bear the weight of breadwinner in societies with limited professional options.

When I invited Sabrina to seek the Lord about this, she wept, saying that she could not stand in God's presence because of her choice of lifestyle.

In reality, "choices" in these situations are rarely straightforward, and regardless of decisions we have made, we are all invited to come with confidence to God's throne of grace (Hebrews 4:16).

You, Sabrina, and I have surely experienced what the psalmist describes in Psalm 32 as "sapped strength and groaning under the weight of unconfessed sin." Yet, the psalmist calls us to turn to the Lord with the humility of repentance. In the blessed experience of forgiveness, we find we are surrounded by the Lord's unwavering deliverance, shelter, love, and kindness.



SUNDAY 2 | Psalm 121

WORDS BY **MINISTRY**
Meritha Capelle Covenant Youth of Alaska

Meritha Misrak Capelle grew up in a big family in Kiana, Alaska. Along with her work with Covenant Youth of Alaska, Meritha serves as project coordinator of domestic violence/sexual assault/human trafficking for the Alaska Native Justice Center. Her heart is to share the lessons of her life with others so that they may also know how deep the Father's love is for them.

Historically, people of color have been severely affected by marginalization. Vulnerability for the Indigenous people in the U.S. stems from initial contact with settlers who committed genocide of about twenty million peoples. Their livestock and tools were taken, traditional ceremonies were prohibited, and Native women were sexually violated. The U.S. mission was "Kill the Indian, save the man."

According to a recent study*, Native American children suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder at the same rate of veterans returning from war and triple that of the general population. No wonder identity has

been shattered and what's left are generations of complex trauma and vulnerability to trafficking. What can be done?

In Psalm 121, the Jews were vulnerable to danger during their pilgrimages to Jerusalem. Even so, they sang with confidence that when they looked up, it wasn't idols or popular beliefs that would protect them. It was the Lord.

As we work and pray for solutions to end sex trafficking, may we continually look up to Him who will not slumber through this issue.

*by the U.S. Attorney General's Advisory Committee



SUNDAY 3 | Psalm 96

WORDS BY
Tierney Ducharme

MINISTRY
International Justice Mission

Tierney Ducharme has worked with International Justice Mission (IJM) for over a decade. In that time, she has witnessed how God uses transformed people to bring about transformation in his kingdom. Tierney lives in Williamsburg, Virginia with her husband and two young children. The Ducharme family attends Church of the Incarnation.

I have been exposed to the dark realities of human trafficking through my work at International Justice Mission. Through this same work, I have discovered the strength of the human spirit and unmistakable power of the Holy Spirit.

Charito* is a social worker in the Philippines. She also volunteers at a shelter for survivors of sex trafficking, a place where she herself once lived. Charito was 14 years old when she was trafficked and sold for sex at a bar where she and the other girls were “treated like animals.” Once free, Charito overcame fear and shame to

find faith again--in herself, and in God. She says it was God's strength that helped her find both.

No matter our story or struggle, all of us need God to find God.

Consider a struggle you are going through now. With this in mind, read Psalm 96 aloud. Will you trust that the same God who restored faith in Charito and the same Risen Christ we will celebrate at Easter is able to strengthen you today?

*Charito is a pseudonym.



SUNDAY 4 | Psalm 23

WORDS BY **MINISTRY**
Gwen Adams Priceless

Gwen Adams is founder and executive director of Priceless, an organization actively engaged in the rescue and restoration of sex trafficked victims in Alaska. Gwen lives in Alaska with her husband and four children. Her passion is leveraging the community to engage in social justice issues and make a difference for the marginalized.

I am a sheep. My role in my relationship to the Shepherd is to lie down in green pastures and be led by quiet waters. For a sheep to lie down in a green pasture means that the sheep is completely satisfied and full. To be led by quiet waters is to trust the Shepherd to lead me to places where my thirst is quenched. Yes, my sole role is to eat, drink and follow.

The Shepherd's role is to refresh my soul, guide me down right paths, protect me from evil, discipline me, comfort me, and lavish his goodness upon me, even in the face of

adversity. And, lastly, the Shepherd anoints my head with oil which signifies both healing and being set apart as royalty.

God, give me grace to be a sheep. Let me find deep satisfaction as I hunger for you. Let the thirst of my soul be quenched as I stay close to you. Forgive me for the times I try to shepherd myself and control my own life. Forgive me for attempting to manage all the circumstances that were never mine to manage.

I will be your sheep.



SUNDAY 5 | Psalm 116

WORDS BY

Jyotirmaya Deep

MINISTRY

Covenant Social Service

Rev. Jyotirmaya Deep served as a Pastor of Hindustani Covenant Church in Mumbai, India for eight years. He has been serving with Covenant Social Service, the Social Development wing of Hindustani Covenant Church, for 13 years. Rev. Deep lives in Pune with his wife and daughters.

Sunita embodies resilience and hope amid life's bitter struggles. At 12 she was forced to marry an older man. She was sold to a red-light district in India a year later. She spent months in a pitch-dark bunker until she consented to prostitution. While in the district, Sunita contracted HIV and developed an addiction to alcohol to cope, which perpetuated her depression.

Social workers from Covenant Social Service (CSS) met Sunita and began to walk with her toward healing. During a worship service, Sunita asked if she could partake in

communion despite the brokenness she had experienced. Through her questions, Sunita's understanding of herself began to transform and heal as she learned that she was created with dignity in the image of God.

For the last ten years, Sunita has been working alongside CSS to care for others who have been marginalized. She lives and makes communion wafers at the Home of Hope, a center for those coming out of trafficking. Her story bears testimony to verse 9 of today's devotional, "I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living."



SUNDAY 6 | Psalm 118

WORDS BY
Deborah Masten

MINISTRY
Serve Globally

Deborah Masten worked as the Clinical Program Director for REST (Real Escape from the Sex Trade) in 2015. In this role, she provided support to the residential program, the 24-hour hotline, the outreach program and the prevention program and case management team. Deb currently serves as Director of Global Personnel for Serve Globally.

As a clinical program director for an agency working with sex trafficked women, I had many fears. Did I have the courage required of the outreach team? Would I be safe meeting with women working the streets in the middle of the night?

I knew their demanding and easily agitated pimp would be watching us nearby, and that potentially dangerous customers would be slowly passing by in cars. The goal was to check in on the women who were known to the agency and to meet those who were new. We would offer them a small bag of toi-

letries with the 24-hour hotline card hidden inside.

After much prayer and with my heart racing, I stepped out of the car with a petite team member. After that, what could only be described as sacred encounters happened. Smiles of recognition, light conversations, encouraging words, medical and family updates, and nervous laughter. Confirmations of precious women feeling seen and cared for with no strings attached. The peace that surrounded the encounter truly surpassed understanding.



GOOD FRIDAY | Psalm 22

WORDS BY

Ramelia Williams

MINISTRY

Love Mercy Do Justice

Ramelia serves as Director of Ministry Initiatives for Love Mercy Do Justice (LMDJ). She is passionate about creating environments that stimulate inner healing through the church. Her prior work as a hospital chaplain prepared her to focus on inner healing for women who have survived physical, sexual, and emotional abuse.

The Message Bible version of verses 14-15 reads, “I’m a bucket kicked over and spilled, every joint in my body has been pulled apart. My heart is a blob of melted wax in my gut. I’m dry as a bone, my tongue black and swollen. They have laid me out for burial in the dirt.”

These words could have been penned by a sex trafficking victim--one whose very life is vulnerable and subject to some of the worst evils of human depravity; one whose humanity is not seen behind the blinders of economic gain and hyper desire for sexual pleasure--desire that is actually the cry of an

empty soul longing to be sensationalized by God's touch.

The vulnerable one surrenders to imminent death and lies in the truth of her reality just as Jesus did... “they have laid me out for burial.” Who will see her there, barely alive in the birth canal of death? Who will lament her condition? Who will stand with her and name the truth of her despair?

God, embolden us to see, hear, lament, and groan with the suffering victims and survivors of sex trafficking. Amen.



EASTER SUNDAY | Psalm 18:1-2

WORDS BY

Al Tizon

MINISTRY

Serve Globally

Dr. Al Tizon is the Executive Minister of Serve Globally and affiliate professor of missional and global leadership at North Park Theological Seminary. He has engaged in community development, church leadership, advocacy, and urban ministry in the United States and in the Philippines. Al is a father to four, a grandfather to five, and lives in Chicago with his wife.

In Christ, those who have been victimized, dehumanized, sold, bought, and raped still have hope--because the ridiculed, victimized, beaten, crucified Jesus is risen and alive. Jesus defied death; yes, his physical death on the cross, but also the many kids of death he encountered in his earthly life. Unrighteousness, cruelty, injustice, oppression, sickness, and demons(!) all trembled and fled in his presence.

These words from David sang about hope when he too found himself in a life-threatening crisis. It is a song one can sing, not just on the other side of crisis, but also in the midst of it. The faithful know that death of any kind

does not have the final say, because Jesus is risen!

O Rock of our salvation, we plead on behalf of trafficked victims around the world that you intervene and put an end to their suffering. You know each name and you love them. Give them the capacity to hope in the midst of unimaginable indignities, because you are their refuge and strength. As you delivered David from powerful King Saul, we pray that you deliver "the little ones" from a seemingly invincible spirit whose name is Brothel. Do not delay, we pray. In the name of the Crucified and Risen One. Amen.

Globally 5 million people are caught in sex trafficking today. Approximately 250,000-350,000 American children and youth are at risk of sex trafficking each year. People who have been marginalized are deemed disposable and thus usable for the demoralizing purposes of those with power and privilege. The injustice of sex trafficking continues to rob people and communities of their dignity, marring the image of God in them.

The Evangelical Covenant Church seeks to respond to the call in Isaiah 1:17, "To learn to do good, seek justice and encourage the oppressed."

FREE, a collaborative women's initiative of Serve Globally and Love Mercy Do Justice (LMDJ), seeks to act on the issue of sex trafficking by resourcing congregations through partnerships locally and globally.

As the Church, we believe that our liberation is tied to the liberation of others. So, we Pray, Learn, Give and Act together so all may be FREE.

FREE is framed by four action verbs:

Pray for God to transform our unjust and violent world.

Learn the causes of trafficking and what we can do to prevent it.

Give to invest in the care and rehabilitation of trafficked children and adults for a brighter future.

Act through advocacy, with the victimized, to pursue God's shalom for our communities.

We pray, learn, give, and act together so all may be FREE.

[Covchurch.org/free](https://covchurch.org/free)