• The Evangelical Govenant Church

RREE

WEEK OF PRAYER

Isaiah 61 promised that God's people were free to rejoice, heal, rebuild, proclaim, release, comfort, and restore, despite the period of oppression they had just endured.

In fact, because they were rising from the ashes, they were especially suited to be an example of the Lord's righteousness and resurrection power. The people of God were transformed, not only for their own good, but also for the good of the devastated life and community surrounding them that they would restore.

Survivor leaders, who are formerly sex-trafficked women, share personal stories of what they are free to do. They have not used their freedom to wallow in shame, but each one has been healed and transformed in a holistic way that calls her to a life of service. These transformed souls are the featured voices who are free to speak through this Week of Prayer resource. Each day we invite you to meditate on a portion of the Isaiah 61 text. Each woman's story will resonate with the portion of Scripture for the day. As you enter into prayer, please choose one of our FREE partners (listed on the last page) to include in your prayer. As you pray, we invite you to reflect on the life of the woman whose story you have read.

Learn more at covchurch.org/free.

RAMELIA WILLIAMS
DIRECTOR OF MINISTRY INITIATIVES
LOVE MERCY DO JUSTICE

Dear Covenant Friends,

In this Week of Prayer guide, women who have been freed from sex trafficking inspire us to freshly encounter God and experience the freedom of his love and power. May these daily prayers remind us that we can never fully plumb the riches of our freedom in Christ!

I also encourage you not to miss Prajakta David's concluding letter about the FREE initiative, a new joint ministry of the Covenant's Love Mercy Do Justice and Serve Globally mission priorities. FREE partners with agencies worldwide to provide liberation from human trafficking, healing for trauma suffered, and encouragement to live freely as God's beloved children.

For more than 60 years, the Evangelical Covenant Church has provided materials for a week of prayer during the month of January. Whether you choose to use this resource at the beginning of the year or later, we pray that it will both challenge and equip disciples of Jesus to live a life of prayer and continually seek new ways to develop this lifegiving practice.

The Week of Prayer can be used by individuals or groups during one single week or over the course of seven weeks. Feel free to customize the resource for your purposes, adding your own prompts.

This resource is available for purchase with a color cover and black-and-white interior pages at <u>covbooks.com</u>. For full color, download the pdf at <u>covchurch.org/2022prayer</u> to print your own. Guides are available in English and Spanish.

You can also sign up for daily Week of Prayer emails in English at form.123formbuilder.com/6026581 and in Spanish at form.123formbuilder.com/6026720.

If you have questions, please feel free to contact us at mdd@covchurch.org.

Making Disciples Together,

MICHELLE SANCHEZ

EXECUTIVE MINISTER OF MAKE AND DEEPEN DISCIPLES



BY CLAUDIA

In 2017, after earthquakes hit southern Mexico, I felt the strong need to hug all those who were impacted and tell them that they were not alone. One night in the middle of my prayers, I cried out to God saying, "Here I am, send me!"

I talked to my family. Then I quit my job and traveled for ten days visiting churches in Oaxaca. One day during a service at La Hermosa Covenant Church, Pastor Adrián prayed for me and said, "When you return, your prayer time will multiply by two hundred percent!" At that moment, his words sounded like an invitation. I had no idea that four years later, his prayer would become my reality.

For more than two decades, I have accompanied girls, adolescents, and women in situations of violence, having lived my own experiences of abuse and exploitation. After visiting the churches in Oaxaca, I received a message that I had been accepted to collaborate in the Safe House of El Pozo de Vida, a non-government organization that fights against human trafficking.

The stories I have heard are heartbreaking. Living each day in the midst of the pain and despair that survivors experience can prompt feelings of hopelessness. Witnessing their tormented spirits, wiping their tears as they fall asleep from the exhaustion of crying, listening to the sobs drowned in the pillow or the sleepy screams as they realize a memory that still hurts and manifests itself during their dreams, seeing the look of terror on a girl's face

during our first contact, sitting in court six feet away from an aggressor—all of this can be maddening, to say the least. In those moments, the words of Pastor Adrián have real meaning.

In the past four years, I have learned what a life of prayer is: strength, words, love, grace, and a hope that comes only from God. Today, every thought, every decision, every word of my daily life is the result of constant prayer. Only God can maintain our sanity in the midst of so much suffering.

So I pray without ceasing! That's where freedom begins; that's where freedom rests.

Prayer is more than a list of requests, complaints, or suggestions. Prayer can lead us to delight in God's unconditional love. We can experience his peace and grace even in the midst of pain and despair; we can feel his freedom. By his mercy, God constantly speaks to us, and prayer becomes an internal dialogue, a reciprocal communication. We ask and he answers. It becomes a state where we clearly hear his voice asking, "Whom shall I send, and who will go?" God is ready and waiting for our answer. He is awaiting our prayers.

PRAYER

Thank you, eternal Father, for the freedom I have experienced in you. Thank you for your embrace in every moment of pain. Thank you for every word of life that is spoken through your Spirit. Let my life be like a fragrant incense that reaches your throne just to adore you. Amen.





BY DORRIS

A fter a 26-year battle with addiction, abuse, and human trafficking, I found my way into a wonderful community of women who were beginning to put their lives back together by the grace of the almighty God, just like I was. The vessel God sent to come and get me was Thistle Farms, a nonprofit social enterprise that helps women survivors recover and heal from prostitution, trafficking, and addiction by providing a safe place to live, a meaningful job, and a lifelong sisterhood of support.

Through treatment, therapy, and the Holy Spirit, I became whole again. I am forgiven of my sins, which were many. I got my life back! At the end of a two-year journey at Thistle Farms, it was time to begin my own newfound life through my love for my Savior.

My mom had prayed for me all those years, even as her life had come to an end while I was at Thistle Farms, and I could still feel the effects of those prayers. My heart felt heavy as I constantly tried to stand on new ground while finding my way without the use of addictive chemicals. But I remembered the relentless love of my mother.

When I speak of a new way of life, I'm talking about a change from my 26 long, miserable years of drug addiction. I am so glad that the prayers of my mother did not have an expiration date. I came out of the program full of joy while still mourning the life I had known as a child. My mom's house was a place of joy; I

vividly remember the weeping willows and the strong, tall oak trees in her yard that made me feel safe. As I graduated from the program and began searching for a place to live, I was thirsty for a place that felt like home.

My sister carried me to countless apartment complexes. After many disappointments, my sister said, "Dorris, I found the perfect place for you." I was not hopeful after so many letdowns.

She told me to close my eyes and not open them until she gave me permission. When she said, "Open your eyes!" she was beaming with excitement. I gasped as my soul leaped for joy. She had found a beautiful set of apartments, Whispering Oaks, filled with tall, strong oak trees as far as the eye could see!

Thank you, God, for answering my mother's prayers and mine. I am standing on new ground. I have found my home!

PRAYER

I thank you, Lord, for your forgiveness of our sins, which are many. You call us out of darkness into the marvelous light. Because of your goodness and your mercy, we stand on solid ground. We have joy unspeakable that no person can take away. Thank you for your restoration. Amen.



THEY SHALL BUILD UP THE ANCIENT RUINS,
THEY SHALL RAISE UP THE FORMER DEVASTATIONS;
THEY SHALL REPAIR THE RUINED CITIES,
THE DEVASTATIONS OF MANY GENERATIONS.

-ISAIAH 61:4

FREE TO Live



experienced pain and deceit as others took control of my God-given life, stealing my God-given dignity. I ran away from my husband after experiencing terrible abuse and found a woman who told me she could help me get a job in a new city. Little did I know, the life that I was hoping for would be filled with even more horror when she sold me to a brothel. I experienced unspeakable pain and trauma for many years.

When I finally got help to get out of the district, I found freedom from the daily violence and trauma and began a journey of healing. This journey brought me to know Jesus as the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6). I've come to know Jesus as the one who knows the pain of darkness and loneliness and has experienced the painful breaking of his body on the cross. Jesus understands the depths of my suffering, and I draw comfort in this truth of being seen fully and loved deeply by him. In the midst of the pain, God continues to reveal Godself as the way, truth, and life by inviting me in unselfish ways to experience love and healing. As I heal, I find more freedom to live life in its fullness and to help others do the same.

Through my healing, I bear witness to Jesus, the giver of life and healing, through our ministry of making communion wafers. Other women who have lived through similar experiences and I get to lead this ministry and experi-

ence economic freedom as we support ourselves and our children. Making the elements of the sacrament helps remind me that I am part of God's story, where the elements and my story hold the duality of pain and suffering along with God's faithfulness, freedom, healing, and transformation. Through my life and ministry, I bear witness to the Church of the power of hope in midst of pain and the promise of God's presence speaking truth and life into who I am as a beloved child of God.

PRAYER

God, you breathed life into me when you formed me. In midst of the evil that has tried to take away this breath and the truth that I matter, God, you continued to pursue me. You continued to remind me of this truth even when I found it hard to believe it myself. I am grateful, God, that you continue to reveal in your ways the truth of who you are, and we are invited to experience your way, truth, and life daily. I pray that today you may reveal yourself to any who struggle to believe that they matter. Continue to heal us. Amen.





BY SOPHIA

The Lord has given you this day for you to enjoy. You are incredibly loved and worthy of every second of it. Sometimes it is tempting to fall for the lies that say we are worthless and destined for defeat. I sometimes struggle to believe I am lovable due to abuse and other life experiences. Being free in Christ empowers us to live our lives in love and to lead by example in doing so. Our experiences alone do not define us, nor do they determine our life's purpose. Each of us was created for great things and is more precious and valuable than any gem.

When I first arrived at New Day for Children, I had significant injuries and medical issues. When I entered care, I received tools to help heal my body and mind. One caseworker kept telling me how loved I was. That statement was very confusing to me—I was in this situation because of the people who were supposed to love me.

But I began to see that I was loved by the people God had brought into my life and, most of all, by God. To counteract the lies that had been spoken over me, I regularly asked myself, "How does God see me?"

I now know that God sees me as precious, priceless, and worthy of love and care. I do not need to fear where I will end up or what will become of me because God has my back. I know this because God has led me to the path of freedom and redemption.

You are beautiful and precious to God. You are strong, and you wear that strength every day. In every step you take, know that you are "clothed in strength and dignity" (Proverbs 31:25) and God is with you. God is watching over you and is proud of you. There is nothing you can do to make God not want you. As a child of God, you are not forsaken. Each day, wear your armor of God, decorated in strength and dignity; let your light shine.

PRAYER

God, thank you for this new day. Help me to see opportunities for growth, compassion, and renewal. Help me to see you in this day and to see my worth in you today. Help me to shine in your light and love and to spread your light to those I cross paths with today. Rebuke any lies that may be spoken over me today by others or myself, and remind me of my true worth in you. In Jesus's name, amen.



SOPHIA MINISTERS WITH NEW DAY FOR CHILDREN, WHICH HELPS PARENTS OF COMMERCIALLY SEX TRAFFICKED GIRLS FROM CALIFORNIA AND THROUGHOUT THE U.S. PROVIDE A SAFE AND SECURE LIVING ENVIRONMENT FOR THEIR CHILDREN UNTIL THEY ARE HEALTHY AND PREPARED TO RESUME THEIR FAMILY LIFE.



BY MARY

In Isaiah 61, the people of Israel have just returned to Jerusalem from their nearly 50-year exile in Babylon. They are trying to rebuild the city, their economy, the temple, and their community back to what it was before they were taken away. But it turned out to be far more difficult than they expected. Israel was in shambles. The people were frustrated and embarrassed by their failure to rebuild and their inability to resolve the economic, political, and religious fractures in Israel. They were tired and losing hope. They were free to rebuild—but how?

To thrive in their freedom, they needed an identity shift. We can look around our world today and see destruction, ruin, and pain in individual lives and in entire communities and countries. Isaiah 61 offers the promise of hope out of the rubble, inviting us to trade our ashes for a garland, our despair for hope, and to adopt a love of justice that will bring freedom to others. We are more than the sum of our experiences—and with this hope, the Israelites can face the impossible task in front of them and rebuild.

When we come out on the other side of horrible experiences, it can be easy to let those experiences define us. We reduce ourselves to what happened or what we can no longer do. This makes the healing and rebuilding process challenging as we start to believe it's not possible, it's not

worth it, or more specifically, that we are not worth it. I have struggled with my identity for years, defining myself by what someone else did to me—free from abuse, but captive to my ruins. If we believe we are nothing more than the rubble around us, we miss all that Jesus has for us.

You, my friend, are more than the sum of your experiences. God defines you, not by what has happened to you but by who God created you to be—worthy, honored, cherished, valued, loved, and free. You are freed from your labels, freed from the captivity of your ruins, and with this hope, freed to rebuild.

God, I want to trade my ashes for garland, my labels for hope, my captivity for freedom. Help me to shift my perspective and to rebuild my identity in this hope.





BY MARYCLARE

come from Kenya, a country in East Africa that faces many sociopolitical problems due to unjust structures. As a result, women and girls fall victim to cyclical oppression. Forced into cheap labor and sex trafficking, women not only suffer but have also been used as means to sustain those systems. This is not only a Kenyan story. Many young girls and women all over the world are living under oppression, without freedom from various unjust systems.

Isaiah 61:1 foreshadows the words Jesus began his ministry with in Luke 4:16-20. Jesus returns from the wilderness to his home synagogue in Nazareth, opens the scroll, and reads from Isaiah. He focuses on this passage, not only to set forth his own purpose but also to reveal Christ in each of us. Jesus does not say he will open the prisons, but instead, he is here to preach that it already is so. By awakening individuals to Christ's power that dwells in them, Jesus brings freedom to all of God's creation.

It is good for us to recognize that we are here to be, to know, to teach, and to share. The truth of God's presence, love, and freedom already exists—we have only to claim it to bring it forth. As followers of Jesus, therefore, let us become a community of prayer in the vanguard of human dignity and protectors of the vulnerable daughters and sons of God. Let us follow Jesus's example and be faithful in prayer. May we love as God loves.

I am passionate about creating safe spaces where human trafficking survivors can share their stories with dignity through a curriculum I developed for women in prostitution and co-developed on Art + Healing. I also run a program in Western Kenya that uses expressive art to educate children and teenagers on the reality and inhumanity of sexual violence and human trafficking. My dream is to see a day when violence will be history, when girls will be protected with dignity, when all our wounds will be healed and the pain will be no more.

PRAYER

Divine Source of life, guide me in truth so that I may be a voice of freedom in places long devastated by injustice and oppression.

Amen.



MARY CLARE IS SERVING WITH FREELY IN HOPE IN ZAMBIA, AN ORGANIZATION THAT EQUIPS SURVIVORS AND ADVOCATES TO LEAD IN ENDING THE CYCLE OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE.



MY WHOLE BEING SHALL EXULT IN MY GOD;
FOR HE HAS CLOTHED ME WITH THE GARMENTS OF SALVATION,
HE HAS COVERED ME WITH THE ROBE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS,
AS A BRIDEGROOM DECKS HIMSELF WITH A GARLAND,
AND AS A BRIDE ADORNS HERSELF WITH HER JEWELS.
FOR AS THE EARTH BRINGS FORTH ITS SHOOTS,
AND AS A GARDEN CAUSES WHAT IS SOWN IN IT TO SPRING UP,
SO THE LORD GOD WILL CAUSE RIGHTEOUSNESS AND PRAISE
TO SPRING UP BEFORE ALL THE NATIONS.

-ISAIAH 61:10-11

was raised in the small community of Linda in Zambia, where women's voices are not valued and our bodies are not our own—which has led to a rise in rape cases. I have always felt called to help the next generation feel valued, with their bodies protected and their voices empowered. Despite my certainty around my calling, I initially was afraid of what would happen if I stood up, used my voice, and advocated for change. I had Jonah moments where I wanted to pretend I did not hear my calling. I also had my Moses moment, fearing my voice was not good enough.

The coronavirus pandemic and its aftermath have shown us how broken our world is. The poor do not have enough to get through the day. Some children only have access to food through school programs. And too many remain unaware of the children and women who are being trafficked every day.

How can we preach freedom in an unjust world when the hope of freedom feels so unrealistic for the poor and marginalized? Can our hearts handle the stories of pain and despair as we stand for justice? Are we even the right people to do this work? Can our mental health handle it?

Let us be reminded that God qualifies us to bind up the brokenhearted. God enables us to carry out the task of justice. We are called and anointed to bring good news of freedom for the oppressed.

Pursuing our call to justice looks different for each of us. Perhaps you're called to

speak up for marginalized communities that are being silenced by systems that perpetuate violence. Perhaps you are called to fight for justice even when others in your communities are indifferent toward it.

Remember that God is faithful to bring comfort to all who mourn under the weight of injustice. Let us remember that joy will come and that the work we do is not in vain because we serve a living God who continues to fight for the oppressed.

Whether you are working with people who are suffering, nations in despair, families in poverty, or children facing abuse, know that the Lord will continue to guide you and empower you.

PRAYER

Dear God, my heart cries out for those who are suffering. I know I am called to this work of justice, but sometimes I question my ability to a point that it paralyzes me. I surrender my mind to you to bring care and comfort. I surrender my hands to you to anoint and show me how to use them. I surrender my voice to you to speak through me. I surrender my heart to you as you stir my calling toward justice. Amen.





Globally, an estimated 4.7 million persons are caught in sex trafficking today. Approximately 250,000–350,000 American children and youth are at risk for sex trafficking each year.

People who have been marginalized are often deemed disposable and thus usable for the demoralizing purposes of those with power and privilege. The exploitation of those targeted through sex trafficking continues to attack the imago Dei, marring and harming trafficking victims, the traffickers, and the communities where economies of sexual exploitation flourish.

The Evangelical Covenant Church is committed to collectively opposing the violence against people vulnerable to sex trafficking and joining the transformative work of our partners in loving and serving alongside vulnerable people to reflect God's kingdom. We share a commitment to complement the work of our partners as co-workers entrusted with the mission of God. Together we seek to oppose the evil of sex trafficking and effectively serve those impacted by the perils of sex trafficking, abuse of power, poverty, and injustice around the world.

Through the FREE initiative, we invite you to partner with us in breaking the cycle of sex trafficking to create safer, holistic communities domestically and globally through the framework of pray, learn, give and act. We seek to raise awareness and support for the work of anti-sex trafficking, so that together we might see a collective movement toward opposing this evil as we partner with relentless hope to pursue God's shalom for our world. Learn more at covchurch.org/free.

PRAJAKTA DAVID

DIRECTOR OF GLOBAL ADVANCEMENT AND MOBILIZATION

Resources

The Covenant Church offers several resources for churches, small groups, and individuals to engage and join the movement to combat sex trafficking in our world.

PRAY

Join us as we pray with hope for God to transform our unjust and broken world.

FIND YOUR WAY: Twenty prayer practices created by thoughtful leaders, survivors, and advocates who seek to distill ancient truths into practical disciplines to transform and change out world.

GIVE

Partner with us in breaking the cycle of sex trafficking and creating safer, holistic communities locally and globally by making a financial gift. With your gift, you are joining with the transformative work of the Evangelical Covenant Church and our partners in loving and serving alongside vulnerable people.

- MAIL a check to:
 PO Box 773420
 Chicago, IL 60677-3420
- CALL (773) 784-3000
- GIVE online at giving.covchurch.org/free

LEARN

Learning is a crucial component in breaking the cycle of trafficking by addressing sexual violence. Our awareness moves us into action and helps us live out our Christian witness in our broken world.

SEXUAL VIOLENCE UNCOVERED: Foursession Bible study to help start or continue conver-sations about sexual abuse and its prevalence and reverberating effects in our society.

REQUEST A SPEAKER: Email free@covchurch.org to request a speaker.

ACT

Advocate alongside survivors to bring changes in systems that marginalize people and pursue God's shalom for our communities.

HOST A FREE SUNDAY. Email us at free@ covchurch.org.

ENGAGE TRAINING: A 1.5-day training event that equips church members to live missionally by engaging injustice, learning, and moving toward action.

ORDER COMMUNION WAFERS made lovingly by survivors to sustain themselves and gain economic freedom.



Our Partners

As the Covenant Church, we believe we can create a greater impact and do more together than we can on our own. We join with the work of our global and domestic partners to address sex trafficking holistically through prevention, intervention, and rehabilitation.

DOMESTIC PARTNERS



AMIRAH, INC.
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS



NEW DAY FOR CHILDREN ALAMO, CALIFORNIA



PRICELESS ALASKA ANCHORAGE, ALASKA



THISTLE FARMS
NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE



RECLAIM13 CHICAGO, ILLINOIS



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