

Modern Slavery

Preacher's Toolkit



Summary

Slavery is not a crime confined to the past, but a modern-day reality. It is often hidden in plain sight, but it happens across the world and in every community, including in the UK. It is a violation of human dignity, and represents the opposite of the human flourishing God intends for us.

A Clash of Worldviews

A better story

The Bible tells us that every person is made in the image of God, and therefore has great worth and dignity. Every person should be treated with equal value, and nobody should be used, exploited, or treated as property. As Christians we have a duty to provide a voice for the voiceless and to protect the vulnerable. As Jesus came to set the captive free, so Christians follow his example in putting an end to modern slavery.

Points of difference

Nobody other than the perpetrators of modern slavery would argue that slavery is a good thing. But Christians should be more vocal and more passionate than the world around us at exposing slavery where it exists and doing whatever we can to put an end to the practice, because:

Modern slavery is an assault against human dignity. Since, as Christians, we believe that everyone is created “in the image of God”, every person is fundamentally of equal value. Nobody should be kept

in forced employment, be denied a decent wage, or made to work inhuman hours, and no one should be owned by another person.

Christians are called to provide a voice for the voiceless and the vulnerable. There are very few in our society who have less of a voice than those trapped in modern slavery. They normally will not be able to leave due to threats, violence, coercion, deception, abuse of power or other forms of exploitation. Some will fear the authorities, or will be unable to communicate due to language barriers. Many will need long-term support to recover from their trauma. They need us to advocate on their behalf and to speak up for the needs of the vulnerable and oppressed.

God's desire is for people to be free. Although the Bible did not explicitly ban all forms of slavery, God heavily regulated it, forbidding Israelites from enslaving one another, and through the gospel, sowing the seeds which undermined it. Christians were to see one another primarily as brothers and sisters. Following Jesus, Christians are called to set the captives free (Isaiah 58:6), and through the likes of William Wilberforce, have led the way in the abolition of slavery.

Politics

Parliament abolished the slave trade in 1807, and passed laws banning slavery itself in 1833. But modern slavery is a much more sophisticated crime than the slavery of old. To tackle modern slavery, you need modern laws. Modern slavery exists in various forms in the UK such as forced crime, sexual exploitation, domestic slavery, and forced labour. Children are found in all these contexts.

The Modern Slavery Act 2015 was a highpoint for the UK's anti-modern slavery laws, and the first major piece of anti-slavery legislation to be passed in almost 200 years. CARE played a leading role in support, and some of our recommen-

dations were taken up.

- The legislation consolidated previous offences relating to human trafficking.
- The new role of the independent anti-slavery commissioner was created.
- Provisions were made for new mechanisms which would allow the assets of traffickers to be seized.
- A new statutory defence was created for slavery victims who had been compelled to commit crimes.
- Advocates specifically for children who had been trafficked were also introduced.

Since the passing of the Modern Slavery Act, bills such as the Illegal Migration Act 2023 have reduced access to victim support, and disincentivised victims from coming forward. The rise in small boats crossing the channel has led to an unhelpful conflation being made between illegal immigrants and people who have been trafficked.

The Walk Free global slavery index ranks each country in the world according to 141 different categories on how they fight modern slavery at the government level. The UK is still ranked highest, closely followed by Australia, the Netherlands, Portugal and the USA. However, only Finland, Ireland, and Sweden have implemented all social protections considered to sufficiently address modern slavery.

Modern Slavery is not simply a problem in Britain. Although forced labour is most common in lower-income countries, that is connected to demand from higher-income countries, in production, manufacturing and transportation. It is worth thinking about how we can be ethical consumers, and research the brands we use regularly to see if there are concerns about modern slavery being used in their supply chains. G20 countries

rank among the largest importers (and exporters) in the world, and the UK ranks fourth in the global importing risk analysis. The Modern Slavery Act 2015 requires businesses with a turnover of more than £36 million to publicly report the steps they're taking to prevent modern slavery in their operations and supply chains.

The UK's battle against Modern Slavery relies on its citizens being vigilant and taking action around concerns. People should be alert to the signs of modern slavery, and report concerns to the Modern Slavery Hotline on 08000 121 700, or at modernslaveryhelpline.org. It is worth being aware of the following:

- Is someone fearful, avoiding eye contact, unable or unwilling to communicate?
- Do they have few/no personal possessions?
- Do they seem to have poor physical health, malnourishment, or signs of abuse?
- Do they work excessively long hours with few breaks?

Modern Slavery is over-represented in the care sector, in nail salons and at car washes. Many people trapped in modern slavery are hidden in plain sight.

Glossary

MODERN SLAVERY

The exploitation of people, for personal or commercial gain, by the use of force, fraud, coercion or deception. It is an umbrella term which covers forced crime, forced labour, debt bondage, sexual exploitation, forced marriage, slavery and more. It happens in rural areas as well as urban environments.

PEOPLE SMUGGLING

Assisting migrants to enter or stay in a country illegally, for financial or material gain. Note that people smuggling is in a separate category to human trafficking and modern slavery. It is a crime that only takes place across borders, and sometimes has no element of modern slavery involved. In the media and in Parliament, the two often get conflated, which is unhelpful because people's views about immigration can be strongly held, and can cloud their views on the fight against modern slavery. All Christians should agree that whatever someone's immigration status, to exploit an individual for profit through force, fraud, coercion or deception is a heinous crime.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING

The movement (recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt) of people for exploitation, by the use of force, fraud, coercion or deception. Human trafficking does not have to mean movement across borders; it can be within the same country, or even the same town.

FORCED CRIME

Where victims of modern slavery are forced into criminal activity, thereby making them more fearful about going to the authorities.

COUNTY LINES

An example of forced crime where young people and children are forced to traffic drugs around the country. It begins when criminals befriend children, either online or offline, and manipulate them into drug dealing. Children as young as six have been recruited and groomed.

CUCKOOING

A situation where vulnerable adults and drug users are coerced to have their accommodation used as an operating base by drug dealers. They are threatened with violence or offered 'free' drugs for their own use, which creates a debt that they then have to work off.

SEX EXPLOITATION

Traffickers can gain the trust of women by pretending to have a romantic interest in them, isolating them from their families, and then forcing them into prostitution.

NATIONAL REFERRAL MECHANISM (NRM)

The government's framework for referring and identifying potential victims of modern slavery, and ensuring they receive the appropriate support. A person cannot self-refer into the NRM; all referrals are made by first responders (e.g. police, local authorities, approved charities). Additionally, being identified as a victim of modern slavery does not guarantee the right to remain in the UK.

Key Bible Passages

GENESIS 1:27

"So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them."

EXODUS 1:11-14

"So they put slave masters over them to oppress them with forced labor, and they built Pithom and Rameses as store cities for Pharaoh. But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread; so the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites and worked them ruthlessly. They made their lives bitter with harsh labor in brick and mortar and with all kinds of work in the fields; in all their harsh labor the Egyptians worked them ruthlessly."

EXODUS 2:23-25

"During that long period, the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God. God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them."

EXODUS 21:2

"If you buy a Hebrew servant, he is to serve you for six years. But in the seventh year, he shall go free, without paying anything."

EXODUS 21:16

"Anyone who kidnaps someone is to be put to death, whether the victim has been sold or is still in the kidnapper's possession."

LEVITICUS 25:39-40

"If any of your fellow Israelites become poor and sell themselves to you, do not make them work as slaves. They are to be treated as hired workers or temporary residents among you; they are to work for you until the Year of Jubilee."

PSALM 10:17-18

"You, Lord, hear the desire of the afflicted; you encourage them, and you listen to their cry, defending the fatherless and the oppressed, so that mere earthly mortals will never again strike terror."

PROVERBS 31:8-9

"Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy."

ISAIAH 58:6

"Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?"

LUKE 4:16-19

"He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: 'The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.'"

JOHN 8:34-36

“Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”

GALATIANS 3:28

“There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

GALATIANS 5:1

“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.”

COLOSSIANS 4:1

“Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair, because you know that you also have a Master in heaven.”

1 TIMOTHY 1:9-10

“We also know that the law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, for the sexually immoral, for those practicing homosexuality, for slave traders and liars and perjurers—and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine.”

PHILEMON 1:15-16

“Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back forever— no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a fellow man and as a brother in the Lord.”

REVELATION 21:4

“He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

Quotes

“Having heard all of this you may choose to look the other way but you can never again say you did not know.”

WILLIAM WILBERFORCE, MP and abolitionist

“If slavery is not wrong, nothing is wrong.”

ABRAHAM LINCOLN, Former U.S. President

“Those who deny freedom to others deserve it not for themselves.”

ABRAHAM LINCOLN, Former U.S. President

“I am only one, but I am one. I cannot do everything, but I can do something. And I will not let what I cannot do interfere with what I can do.”

EDWARD EVERETT HALE, American minister and abolitionist

For Further Research

CARE’s Cause Page (care.org.uk/cause/human-trafficking)

The Clewer Initiative (theclewerinitiative.org)

Human Trafficking Foundation (humantraffickingfoundation.org)

UK Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner (antislaverycommissioner.co.uk)

International Justice Mission UK (ijmuk.org)

Walk Free Global Slavery Index (walkfree.org/global-slavery-index)

Ben Reaoch: What Christians Do About Modern-Day Slavery, 2013 (desiringgod.org/articles/what-christians-do-about-modern-day-slavery)

Raleigh Sadler: Finding Hope in the Fight Against Human Trafficking, 2016 (thegospelcoalition.org/article/finding-hope-in-the-fight-against-human-trafficking/)

God of Justice: The IJM Institute Global Church Curriculum, 2015

Home Office: Modern slavery awareness booklet, 2017 (gov.uk/government/publications/modern-slavery-awareness-booklet)

The Guardian: ‘Trafficked’ podcast, 2023

Zana Muhsen with Andrew Crofts: Sold: One woman’s true account of modern slavery, 1991

Stephen Tomkins: William Wilberforce: A Biography, 2007

Shayne Moore and Kimberly McOwen Yim: Refuse to Do Nothing: Finding Your Power to Abolish Modern-Day Slavery, 2012

Baroness Cox: This immoral trade, 2013

Stephanie Hepburn and Rita J Simon: Human Trafficking Around the World: Hidden in Plain Sight, 2013

Raleigh Sadler: Vulnerable: Rethinking Human Trafficking, 2019

Joanne Phillips with Shannon Kyle: A girl worth more, 2022

Shayne Moore, Sandra Morgan, and Kimberly McOwen Yim: Ending Human Trafficking: A Handbook of Strategies for the Church Today, 2022

“Truly He taught us to love one another; His law is love and His Gospel is Peace; Chains shall He break, for the slave is our brother; And in His name, all oppression shall cease.”

JOHN SULLIVAN DWIGHT, American music critic and writer of the English words to ‘O Holy Night’

“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”

MARTIN LUTHER KING JR., American civil rights leader

“It ought to concern every person, because it is a debasement of our common humanity. It ought to concern every community, because it tears at our social fabric. It ought to concern every business, because it distorts markets. It ought to concern every nation, because it endangers public health and fuels violence and organized crime. I’m talking about the injustice, the outrage, of human trafficking, which must be called by its true name - modern slavery.”

BARACK OBAMA, Former U.S. President

“Defeating human trafficking is a great moral calling of our time.”

CONDOLEEZA RICE, Former U.S. Secretary of State

“Remember that every person on the streets, in a club, on the internet, in a hotel room, WHEREVER they may be, have families and loved ones and hearts just as you do, and that they are worthy and enough. When you see us, could you just offer a small smile? Extend a small bit of compassion even though you may not personally understand? Small, simple actions have the potential to make a large impact, and now is the time more than ever before.”

MELISSA DIEHL, Survivor of human trafficking

“The more people who know about modern slavery, the better. The best investigations we run have started as a result of people reporting concerns.”

MARTYN LINTON, Detective Sergeant, Surrey Police

“Human trafficking is a multi-billion dollar growth industry because, unlike drugs, which are gone as soon as they are used, humans can be recycled. Because they can continue to be exploited, they’re a better investment for traffickers.”

TERRY COONAN, Human Rights Professor

“Unfortunately, what is thrown away is not only food and dispensable objects, but often human beings themselves, who are discarded as ‘unnecessary.’ For example, it is frightful even to think there are children, victims of abortion, who will never see the light of day; children being used as soldiers, abused and killed in armed conflicts; and children being bought and sold in that terrible form of modern slavery which is human trafficking, which is a crime against humanity.”

POPE FRANCIS

“Human trafficking is an open wound on the body of contemporary society, a scourge upon the body of Christ. It is a crime against humanity.”

POPE FRANCIS

“In reality, the human trafficker is a slave as well. The predators are slaves to lust, power, money, and all kinds of perversion. The pimps, the predators, the pedophiles, the traffickers, the enslavers are shackled with bonds of a different kind. So, as Christians, we ought to pray for them.”

BEN REAOCH, Pastor

“[T]he Scriptures testify that if we desire to find where God is at work, one need only to identify those who are most vulnerable to exploitation. In essence, the believer does not have to bring the God of Justice to those who are hurting because he has already arrived and is inviting us to participate.”

RALEIGH SADLER, Christian writer and activist

Key Stats

In the UK

- In 2025, 23,411 potential victims of modern slavery were referred via the National Referral Mechanism (NRM), including 7,028 children.
- The UK Government estimates that there are approximately 130,000 victims of modern slavery currently living in the UK.
- The most common forms of slavery (as referred to the NRM) for males are criminal (34%) and labour exploitation (33%). The most common form for females is sexual exploitation (36%)
- The most common nationality of those referred in 2025 was British (22%), closely followed by Eritrean (13%), and then Vietnamese (9%). The majority of UK nationals referred were children (75%), whereas the majority of Eritreans and Vietnamese were adults (89% and 83%).
- Modern Slavery remains a low-risk, high-profit crime for traffickers. The proportion of prosecutions to NRM referrals is just 1.8%.
- Human trafficking and immigration have become closely linked in recent years. In the year to June 2024, 10% of those crossing the channel in small boats are referred to the

NRM on arrival, and 65% of those who have been detained for return were referred to the NRM. (In 2019, just 6% of people who were detained for return were referred.)

- There has been a large expansion in modern slavery cases within the care sector since care workers were included on the Shortage Occupation List: the charity Unseen, which runs an anti-slavery helpline, reported a 606% increase from 2021 to 2022, with 712 potential victims.

Worldwide

- An estimated 50 million people are living in modern slavery on any given day, an increase of 10 million people since 2016. 28 million of these are estimated to be in forced labour. 22 million are estimated to be in forced marriages. More than 6 million are in forced sexual exploitation.
- Globally, it is estimated that around 1 in 4 victims of modern slavery are children.
- Women and girls constitute 99% of those in the commercial sex industry, and 58% of all those in slavery.
- 11 million people are estimated to be in slavery in India, the most of any country. Around 6 million in China are believed to be enslaved, 2.6 million in North Korea, and 2.3 million in Pakistan. North Korea has the highest proportion of people in modern slavery of any country (10.5%), followed by Eritrea (9.0%) and Mauritania (3.2%). The lowest prevalence of modern slavery is in Switzerland (0.5%) and Norway (0.5%). The prevalence of modern slavery is sometimes linked to other global problems, such as conflict, droughts and famine, and climate change.
- 137 countries have criminalised human trafficking. 87 have criminalised forced labour and just 50 have criminalised forced marriage.
- Estimates suggest that the UK imports around £20 billion of goods that are at risk of having been made using forced labour. Electronic goods and clothing make up the vast majority of this.

Stories

Mo Farah was born in Somalia as Hussein Abdi Kahin. When he was four, his father was killed in the Somaliland War of Independence. At 8, he was sent to live in Djibouti with his uncle, but shortly afterwards, he was trafficked to the UK, having been brought across by a woman he did not know and told to use the name Mohamed Farah. In London, he was forced to work for the woman and her family, by doing housework and providing childcare “if I wanted food in my mouth”. He was threatened: “If you ever want to see your family again, don’t say anything”. He was finally allowed to start school aged 12, although he hardly had any English. He discovered he had a talent for athletics, and eventually confided in his PE teacher, Alan Watkinson, about his identity and forced servitude. The teacher contacted social services, and helped Farah to be fostered by another family. Farah became one of Britain’s greatest athletes, and has won four Olympic gold medals.

Analiza Guevarra was first caught in modern slavery when she moved to Qatar as a domestic worker, caring for a family with 8 children. Her employer would scream at her for not working hard enough, and encourage the children to abuse her as well. Things got worse when she travelled to the UK with her employer. Her passport was taken, and she was paid £340 a month, to work 18 hours a day, 7 days each week. She wasn’t given food, and so had to steal and scavenge. She was beaten and abused. She was made to sleep on the floor of the children’s nursery. She didn’t know that she had rights, or that she could get help. She eventually escaped, and was able to attend a church, which was home to an organisation raising awareness about the exploitation of domestic workers. They said to her, “You are in good hands. You are no longer a slave.” Now Analiza works to free others from modern slavery.

Gemma was just a teenager when she got caught up in county lines. Her mum had a new boyfriend who she hated, and the leader of a gang showered her with attention, calling her his new girlfriend, so she started hanging out with his gang. Everyone else took drugs, and she didn't want to stand out, so she began taking them too. One day, once she was addicted, he said to her: 'I can't give them to you for free no more. You've got to work for them.' Her job was to take the heroin to the person who ordered it and bring back the cash. Sometimes she even had to carry the drugs inside her own body. She felt trapped, with no way out. Eventually, Gemma was spotted by the police. They reached out and rescued her, taking her to a safe house. Gemma says, "Trying to rebuild my life is hard. Getting off drugs is hard. I don't think I'll ever trust anyone again. And I'm still scared."

Viktor was trafficked from the Czech Republic to the UK on the promise of a well-paid job and accommodation, and his travel paid for. When he arrived in the UK, Viktor was handed over to a trafficker who took his ID documents away from him. He was taken to a house where he lived with ten other people, forced to sleep on the floor, without even a mattress, just a yoga mat and blanket. Viktor worked long hours, with his movements controlled and beaten if he refused to do what he was told. He was held in forced labour and domestic servitude for four years until one night he found courage and escaped through a window.

Sanu came to the UK to study and worked at a cash and carry to earn some money. A friendly customer offered to look after him, but he provided accommodation with no heating or hot water. He took Sanu's passport and valuables, and started to physically abuse him. He made Sanu work in his shop, but didn't allow him to talk to customers and other staff. Sanu was continually monitored with CCTV cameras. He work between 60 and 100 hours a week without breaks. One day a customer saw that he was in trouble. He gave him a present of a Christmas jumper, in which he hid a mobile phone, from which he called 999. The police told Sanu that this was slavery, found him safe accommodation, and arrested his employer.

James was in temporary accommodation when both his parents died. While he was grieving, he was befriended by a man called Tom who lived nearby and helped arrange his parent's funeral. Soon Tom was staying at James' flat and dealing drugs from there. At first he gave James free drugs, but one day that stopped and Tom said that James owed him and needed to work to pay off the debt. Tom moved two other people into the flat and before long drug deals and sex work were happening in the one-bedroom accommodation. James was often locked into his bedroom and followed by someone at all other times. James could see the police station from the flat but could not make contact. Eventually the police raided the flat and recognised James as a victim of cuckooing, finding a safe place for him to live.

Pastoral Issues

Someone concerned about a potential victim of modern slavery

- If you think someone might be in slavery, do not confront them or their exploiters. This can potentially put you, and the enslaved person, in danger.
- Do not ignore your concerns, however. Law enforcement in the UK heavily rely on information from members of the public. You do not need to be certain that someone is in slavery to report it. If your instinct is that something is 'off' then say something.
- If someone is in immediate danger, call the Police on 999. Otherwise, call the Modern Slavery Hotline on 08000 121 700, or report it online at modernslaveryhelpline.org
- You can also talk to the police for advice by calling 101, or you can contact Crimestoppers anonymously on 0800 555 111

Someone struggling with what the Bible says about slavery

- Many Christians struggle with the presence of, slavery in the Bible. For example, Leviticus 25:44-46 allows for the purchase of slaves, lifelong enslavement, and the passing of slaves on to your children when you die. This can also be a barrier in evangelism, with people citing the Bible's position on slavery as a reason to dismiss it.
- The Old Testament neither institutes slavery nor ends it, but regulates it. Old Testament law was different in that it gave rights to slaves, and protected slaves from mistreatment at the hands of their masters. It demanded that masters did not use slaves for commitment-free sexual gratification, but entered into marriage (Deuteronomy 21:10-14). It made provision for the release of slaves, including providing them with material possessions (Deuteronomy 15:13-14). It provided for the release of all slaves at the Year of Jubilee (Leviticus 25:47), and earlier if the redemption price was paid.
- In the New Testament, Jesus did not demand the emancipation of all slaves. Instead, he sowed the seeds that would undermine slavery, by affirming the brother and sisterhood of believers, and by affirming the equality of all through his death for all, slave and free.
- The early church saw their identity as God's family, and one another as brothers and sisters. As slaves became Christians, so their status became family rather than property. Paul returns the runaway slave Onesimus to his master Philemon with the clear implication that he is to view the former slave as a brother instead (Philemon 16)
- Since, from the earliest days of the church, slaves were treated as equals, and many Christians campaigned for the abolition of slavery. That it took 1800 years for slavery to be abolished in the western world speaks to the engrained nature of slavery, but also the hard work of Christians, culminating with William Wilberforce.

Those who are worried about 'supply chain slavery'

- It is possible to be inadvertently funding modern slavery through the things that we buy or consume.
- While we cannot know everything about where our food, clothing, or other items come from, we can be diligent in doing what we can to examine the ethical side of our purchases.
- Fairtrade, Rainforest Alliance, and other similar certification schemes can ensure that items like tea, coffee, and sugar are free from exploitation.
- Big companies now need to provide a modern slavery statement giving evidence of ethical practices, and many smaller companies also do this voluntarily. Reading their information, which should be freely available on their website, can help you in choosing a retailer.
- We cannot fix the whole problem of modern slavery with our purchasing, but we can be faithful in doing what we can.
- Since the problem seems so huge, churches might want to provide ethical suggestions for some choices, or provide a way for members to purchase fairtrade goods.