



# SERMON RESOURCES



**FREEDOM  
SUNDAY**

INTERNATIONAL JUSTICE MISSION

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## **HELLO! THANK YOU FOR KINDLY AND COURAGEOUSLY HOSTING AN IJM FREEDOM SUNDAY.**

What this means, not only to the staff of IJM but also the individuals we serve, can't be overstated. **Truly, thank you.**

To that end, we want to do all that we can to lighten the load of preparing a sermon. We know that delivering a message that focuses on the desperate realities of slavery, the hope found in God's truth, and the work of IJM, is inspiring—and challenging. We hope the resources provided in this document help with your preparation.



### **FROM A HIGH-LEVEL PERSPECTIVE, WHAT IS THE “WIN” OF A FREEDOM SUNDAY SERMON?**

- Expose people to the reality of slavery in our world.
- Connect them to God’s passion for justice, and the speaker’s passion on the issue.
- Invite people to take their first step in ending slavery by becoming a Freedom Partner (more on that later).

### **WHAT SHOULD BE INCLUDED WHEN PREACHING A SERMON FOCUSED ON ENDING SLAVERY?**

- **The use of story is really important!** Always include your own personal connection to the issue of justice/slavery, and to God’s passion for the issue.
- Sometimes it’s easy to forget that the word justice (or injustice) means a lot of things to a lot of people. And while their ideas may be valid, on this Sunday we want to make sure that we’re all on the same page about what “injustice” means as it pertains to the work of IJM. The stories, videos, and the example sermon found in this kit will drive home what we mean when we say “justice.”



- The beginning and end of the justice conversation is found in God's heart. If you teach clearly about God's passion for justice from the scriptures—you can't go wrong!
- **Give people very clear next steps.** Taking real action regarding what they have just heard is always helpful. Alternatively, not offering clear action steps can cause people to pack their emotions away and even shut down. The Freedom Partner ask is the perfect initial outlet for that pent-up energy.

### **THINGS TO BE MINDFUL OF WHEN PREACHING A SERMON FOCUSED ON ENDING SLAVERY.**

**There is no need to exaggerate the reality of the problem of slavery.**

It is grave enough. And while we must do our due diligence in explaining the problem of slavery, we must also remember that people can only take so much. It's a hard balance, for sure. We've found that relying on hope motivates people to take next steps more than anything else.

And with that, we leave you to write your sermon. We will be praying for you as you lead your church in this conversation. What you are embarking on matters more than you know!

If you have any questions, please email our team at this address:  
[freedomssunday@ijm.org](mailto:freedomssunday@ijm.org).

# FACTS AND FIGURES

This section contains some high-level statistics pertaining to the realities of slavery. These numbers are updated regularly and may be different than last year's Freedom Sunday. Please note, all of this information is declassified and available for you to use in your presentation, as you see fit.

## SLAVERY

Over 40 million people are held in slavery today.

*(Walk Free Foundation and International Labour Organization)*

1 in 4 slaves is a child.

*(Walk Free Foundation and International Labour Organization)*

## HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Human trafficking generates about \$150 billion a year—two-thirds from commercial sexual exploitation.

*(International Labour Organization)*

In 2016, a child went missing in India every 12 minutes. And 50% of missing children have not been found.

*(National Crime Records Bureau)*

# IJM FACTS

## **ANTI-SLAVERY**

IJM is the largest international anti-slavery organization in the world.

## **VISION**

Rescue millions, protect half a billion, and make justice for the poor unstoppable.

## **RESCUE**

More than 49,000 people rescued from oppression. We work where justice systems are unable to protect the oppressed from violence.

## **PROTECTION**

Today, we are helping local justice systems protect more than 150 million people from violence around the world.

## **WHERE WE WORK**

We work where justice systems are unable to protect the oppressed from violence. This includes in 19 communities around the world.

## **TRAINING**

More than 67,000 justice system officials trained to recognize and respond to violence since 2012.

## **CONVICTIONS**

More than 1,600 convictions against slave owners, rapists and other criminals.

A person with dark hair tied back, wearing a white patterned shirt, is seen from behind, holding up a large, flowing blue cloth high into the air. The background is a soft-focus outdoor scene with greenery and a bright sky, suggesting a field or park. The overall mood is one of hope and triumph.

# THE CALL FOR FREEDOM PARTNERS

A key component of the Freedom Sunday sermon is giving people the opportunity to become Freedom Partners. The subject matter of slavery can be a dark one, so that's why a key component of a Freedom Sunday sermon is to end with hope. God is already at work, and becoming a Freedom Partner allows your congregation to join with Him.

## **DEFINITION OF A FREEDOM PARTNER**

By giving \$24 or more to IJM each month, a Freedom Partner can send rescue to thousands of children and families trapped in slavery. The consistent and faithful giving of Freedom Partners allows us to be ready and able to send rescue whenever it is needed. In addition, Freedom Partners are called upon regularly to pray for urgent needs in the field, advocate for lifesaving legislation, and attend special IJM events. In short, Freedom Partners are the support system for the global work of IJM.



## HOW TO BECOME A FREEDOM PARTNER: ENVELOPE OR ONLINE

The primary way to become a Freedom Partner is via the **Freedom Partner envelope**. This envelope has been designed to give people an efficient way to respond to your invitation, while at the same time giving them the necessary information they'll need to learn more later.

**During your Freedom Sunday, we ask that you:**

- **Do all you can to get one envelope in the hands of every person.** Some churches have handed them out at the doors as people walk in; others have stuffed them in every bulletin. You know what works best for your church. All that we ask is that they get into everyone's hands at every service.
- **Provide 1-2 minutes in the service to actually open the envelope and sign-up to become a Freedom Partner.** Note: It's often helpful to provide a pen for people to take this step.
- **Provide a clear and easy way for people to return their Freedom Partner commitment to you.** Some churches have found success utilizing volunteers to collect the envelopes at doors on the way out; others collect the envelopes as they collect the tithe. Again, we fully trust that you'll know the very best way to accomplish this.

**Alternatively,** people can go to [IJM.org/FP](https://ijm.org/FP) and sign-up to become a Freedom Partner. This is a great option should you run out of envelopes.

Everyone who signs up will receive an official Freedom Partner welcome packet in the mail.

## **SAMPLE FREEDOM PARTNER SCRIPT FOR YOUR SERMON**

“While we sit here in church this Sunday and learn about the realities of slavery, there are thousands of traffickers using their power to keep people enslaved forever—all because slavery is profitable. They simply value money more than human life.

These slave owners are relentless, calculated, and tenacious—unafraid to use their power, money and influence to oppress others.

We, the Church, must act. Each one of us here needs to partner with IJM by becoming Freedom Partners today. Freedom Partners give \$24 or more to IJM each month. In addition, Freedom Partners are called upon regularly to pray for urgent needs in the field, advocate for lifesaving legislation, and attend special IJM events.

In short, IJM knows where people are enslaved and has a plan to rescue them. And because of Freedom Partners, IJM is seeing slaves set free and putting their owners behind bars.

Right now, even as I finish this sermon, would you open the Freedom Partner envelope that you were given as you walked in and sign up to give? Your recurring gift will save lives.”

# STORIES FROM THE FIELD

In this section, we have compiled stories from the field for use in your Freedom Sunday remarks. Telling the story of a single person is one of the most powerful tools we have in helping people understand the dire need and unimaginable hope of ending slavery.

The following stories span different aspects of slavery, as well as different locations. Feel free to use the story that best resonates with your church. With each story we've provided a detailed brief, as well as a story narrative that you can plug directly into your sermon (see Sample Sermon Script at the end of this document).

**Additionally**, there is a media kit with videos, pictures and a PowerPoint for the story and region you select. You can find it on the same resource page where you downloaded this document.

*Note: All of these stories are declassified and able to be shared/streamed freely. Names with an asterisk next to them are pseudonyms.*



## **SURVIVOR: GOWRI**

- When Gowri and her husband Kumar were expecting their second child, they needed money for her medical expenses.
- They became indebted to Kumar's boss, who demanded they work to pay it off.

## **REGION: INDIA**

- IJM has 5 field offices in India.
- IJM's office in Chennai, India has helped rescue 7,400+ people from slavery

## **CASEWORK: SLAVERY**

- There are an estimated 40.3 million people held in slavery today.
- 1 in 4 victims of modern day slavery is a child
- IJM has helped rescue more than 18,000 people from forced labor slavery.

### **GOWRI'S STORY – PART 1**

When Gowri and her husband Kumar were expecting their second child, they needed money for her medical expenses. He was working in a wood-cutting business and brick kiln, and he asked his boss to borrow 25,000 rupees (about \$370 USD) for Gowri's medical expenses. The owner refused to accept any repayment other than manual labor, so the young couple agreed to work at the business until they eliminated their debt.

That's when their nightmare in forced labor slavery began.

Their boss was cruel, verbally and physically abusing them. When Gowri tried speaking up for better conditions, she was tied up in a cow shed for an entire day and was forced to watch her husband be beaten raw.

Things came to a breaking point when her two-year-old daughter was beaten with a branch for playing with a water tap. Gowri screamed at the owner, who retaliated by kicking her down and stomping on her stomach. Because of her injuries, Gowri couldn't stand up for days. She was hopeless. "No one stood up for me," she cried. "And no one will."

### **GOWRI'S STORY – PART 2**

While Gowri was still recovering—and nearly 10 years after she and her family were first enslaved,

IJM made contact with the families in Gowri's facility while investigating allegations of slavery there, and then quickly mobilized after learning about her condition. We helped government officials and police rescue her and 22 others a few days later.

The laborers were relieved to be free from the owner, but they were still terrified to tell the officials about the abuse they suffered. Only Gowri spoke up. She encouraged them to tell the police everything the owner had done to them, saying, "We've waited enough. We've had enough. It's time to tell the truth."

Today, Gowri's energy is focused on her children's future. With IJM's help, they are each studying in school or in vocational training programs, enjoying their lives in freedom.

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### **SURVIVOR: SADHNA\***

- As a child, Sadhna was full of energy and adventure; she liked to fish and climb trees to pick ripe mangoes and coconuts.
- When Sadhna was just 11 years old, her father died suddenly, and she was expected to start contributing to the family's upkeep.
- After his death, her family moved to the massive city of Kolkata to look for work.

### **REGION: INDIA**

- IJM has 5 field offices in India.

### **CASEWORK: SEX TRAFFICKING**

- There are an estimated 40.3 million people held in slavery today.
- In 2016, 3.8 million adults were victims of forced sexual exploitation, and 1 million children were victims of commercial sexual exploitation.
- IJM has helped rescue more than 3,800 people from sex trafficking since 1998.

### **SADHNA'S STORY – PART 1**

At 14 years old, Sadhna was introduced to a woman in an ordinary neighborhood in Kolkata. She thought she would be helping out around the woman's house, but when she arrived, she was brought to a room full of strange men, beer bottles and crushed cigarette packets.

“The lady told me not to worry, as I would get a nice job where I would be able to earn a lot of money,” she remembers—though she knew something was off: “I didn’t like the atmosphere, and I asked them to let me leave. They told me to sit and have a glass of water...I don’t remember anything after drinking the water.”

She woke up hours later on the floor—disoriented, naked and afraid. Her clothes were strewn everywhere. In quick succession, she learned that she had been raped, that this apartment was operating as a private brothel, and that she was now their property. She began to cry.

For two months, Sadhna and two or three other girls would be sold for sex several times a day in three tiny rooms—hidden from anyone passing by the house.

She remembers, “I had lost all hope of getting out. I felt as if I had no hope left in life and had become a worthless human being.”

### SADHNA’S STORY – PART 2

In January of 2013, Sadhna was with a customer in one of the tiny rooms when officers arrived at the house. Police and IJM staff had been working for weeks to investigate the brothel and they were there to rescue Sadhna.

Today she is confident and vibrant, living in an aftercare home with a community of friends and a chance to chase her dreams. She has even spoken at trafficking awareness programs in communities across India. When she talks about the future, her resolve is serious: *“My dream is to complete my education and get a job as a social worker, to hear the stories of other girls and help them.”*

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### SURVIVOR: MAARKO\*

- Maarko is a bright-eyed young boy with boundless energy, a giggle always a moment away. His favorite games are freeze tag, volleyball, duck-duck-goose.
- We first saw Maarko when his photo was uncovered by investigators searching through evidence collected from a computer that had been seized from a predator. Maarko is a survivor of cybersex trafficking.

### REGION: PHILIPPINES

- The Philippines receives thousands of reports of online child exploitation every month.



- The Philippines is a hotspot for cybersex trafficking because internet access is growing rapidly and English is widely spoken— making it easy for predators to set up sex shows online.

### CASEWORK: CYBERSEX TRAFFICKING

- In 2016, 1 million children were victims of sex trafficking.
- The average age of the children rescued in IJM's cybersex trafficking cases is 12 years old. The average age of commercial sex trafficking victims from IJM's work in the Philippines was 16-17 years old.
- Human trafficking generates about \$150 billion a year. Two thirds of that comes from commercial sexual exploitation.
- With the rise of internet access, pedophiles anywhere in the world can direct live sexual abuse of boys and girls hidden in private homes or internet cafes.

#### MAARKO'S STORY – PART 1

Maarko attended school, but he was otherwise not supposed to leave the family's compound. Their small, crowded neighborhood became a hotspot for a cybersex trafficking network producing shows for pedophiles and predators across the world.

In Maarko's case, his mother was the facilitator on the ground. She set up a webcam and computer in her closet, and earned money by offering Maarko, his 2-year-old sister and their young cousins for online sexual exploitation.

The children were sexually exploited in images and video broadcast online to customers in over 19 countries, including the UK, the U.S. and Canada. The worst of the world was coming into Maarko's tiny home, and yet he was all alone, totally unprotected.

#### MAARKO'S STORY – PART 2

In February 2015, Philippine authorities got a tip from the British National Crime Agency. They had uncovered 4,000 images on a 73-year-old Irishman's computer and traced the origins back to the Philippines. He had been sexually abusing and exploiting children via his webcam in London, under the assumption that he was safely hidden behind the screen of his computer.

For six months, IJM assisted the Philippine National Bureau of Investigation as they tracked leads and narrowed in on Maarko's neighborhood. On a rainy morning in August 2015, authorities entered three homes simultaneously, making arrests, collecting evidence, and rescuing the children identified long ago in the grainy images.

Today, Maarko and his sister are healing. Today they are free.

## **SURVIVOR: CASSIE\***

- Cassie is the youngest of twelve siblings. She grew up in a rural part of the Philippines. She refers to her home as “the mountain.”
- She grew up very poor and moved to a city when she was about 10 years old. This is where she met A.J.\*, who promised to give her a better future if she went with him to Manila.

## **REGION: PHILIPPINES**

- The Philippines receives thousands of reports of online child exploitation every month.
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## **CASEWORK: CYBERSEX TRAFFICKING**

- In 2016, 1 million children were victims of sex trafficking.
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- Human trafficking generates about \$150 billion a year. Two thirds of that comes from commercial sexual exploitation.
- With the rise of internet access, pedophiles anywhere in the world can direct live sexual abuse of boys and girls hidden in private homes or internet cafes.

## **CASSIE'S STORY – PART 1**

Cassie's family was very poor, and when A.J. offered to take her in and send her to school in Manila, they agreed. “I remember my first time in Manila. It was very happy because there's lots of buildings. People are very free,” Cassie says.

A.J. was running a cybersex trafficking operation out of his home. And Cassie was not his only victim. He preyed on the children of family friends and neighbors to create a fake family. “We are six victims inside of the house,” Cassie says. A.J. started grooming even younger children, includ-

ing a 5-year-old boy and 3-month-old baby girl.

He would rape the girls, film the abuse, and broadcast it online. He offered live cybersex shows and collected money from customers who tuned in from the United States, Australia, New Zealand and the Netherlands.

### CASSIE'S STORY – PART 2

One night, Cassie woke up to loud noises and police inside the three-story house where she had suffered for nearly five years.

“I was very scared. I was crying,” Cassie recalls. An IJM social worker named Karen was there that night, and she explained that Cassie and the younger children were not in trouble. They were being rescued.

“IJM rescued me and transferred me in my second home,” Cassie says with a smile, “What gives me hope is first God. Because he’s my father who is there for me always. And my family. My sisters in my second home. And the owner of this shelter. And all the people who are always there for us just to support us. They are all my strength,” Cassie says.

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### SURVIVOR: FOLI\*

- Foli grew up in a poor family. His mother was absent and his father died before he was born, so he grew up living with his grandparents.
- When his grandfather was injured in an accident, a relative offered to care for Foli until he healed. His grandparents accepted, but they had no idea what lay ahead for Foli.

### REGION: GHANA

- 25 million people live in Ghana, and more than 9% of the population lives on less than \$2 per day.
- Nearly 50,000 children work in Ghana's fishing industry, with tens of thousands working at Lake Volta alone.



## CASEWORK: FORCED LABOR SLAVERY

- There are an estimated 40.3 million people held in slavery today.
- 1 in 4 victims of modern slavery is a child.
- IJM has helped rescue more than 18,000 people from forced labor slavery.
- The youngest child rescued from Lake Volta was four years old.

### FOLI'S STORY – PART 1

Foli clearly remembers the moment his new boat master told him he would be going to work on the lake. He arrived at his new home on a remote island with no school or medical facilities. The next day he began fishing.

Nineteen-hour work days would become routine for Foli. Monday through Friday, his day started at 1 a.m. when he would row out in the dark of night to set the fishing nets. Foli would return at 6 a.m. to collect the fish and take them to market, where he would sell them until 1 or 2 in the afternoon. He would go to sleep about 8 p.m., only to start again in a few hours.

Despite not knowing how to swim when he arrived at the lake, he had the dangerous job of diving into the murky water to untangle nets when they caught on branches. He knew of other boys who dove to untangle a net and never came back to the surface.

"Sometimes when people go on the lake, and their boats capsize, those who can't swim die. I was sad whenever I saw this." - Foli

### FOLI'S STORY – PART 2

One day, a boat carrying members of Ghana's Anti-Human Trafficking Unit and an IJM team pulled alongside Foli's wooden boat and brought him to safety.

"At the beginning, I was afraid because I couldn't identify anybody in the boat. I didn't know what was happening," Foli said, reflecting on what was racing through his mind when the rescue team showed up. "After a little bit, I liked the people and was happy to be there."

He and the nine other boys rescued in the operation—IJM's first in Ghana—were immediately given food, clothing and medical attention. He stayed at a shelter for three months before going home to be with his grandparents. "That day, people were celebrating all over the community because Foli was lost but now was found," his grandmother said.

Today, Foli is able to enjoy simple pleasures again, like sleeping through the night, eating more than one meal a day, and playing soccer with his friends.

## **SURVIVOR: LIANA\***

- Liana's mother left when she was very young, but tried reconnecting when Liana turned 14. They had fun together, and Liana moved back in with her.
- Almost overnight, Liana's mother began selling her to men for sex.

## **REGION: LATIN AMERICA**

- Sex trafficking in the Dominican Republic is predominantly street-based. Customers can easily purchase girls and teens by working through buscones— young men who work as pimps and often drive taxis or motorbikes.
- 1 in 10 people engaged in commercial sexual exploitation in the DR are children.

## **CASEWORK: SEX TRAFFICKING**

- In IJM cases, sex trafficking survivors have described being beaten, drugged and kidnapped.
- Human trafficking generates about \$150 billion a year. Two thirds of that comes from commercial sexual exploitation.

### **LIANA'S STORY – PART 1**

As a child, Liana didn't know her mother very well. She was distant, often abusing drugs and alcohol, so Liana lived with her grandparents. When Liana turned 14, her mother tried reconnecting, and things seemed to be going well.

When she was invited to move back in with her mother, Liana agreed. Little did she know that her mother would soon exploit her and sell her for sex. Liana's stepfather was a truck driver and drove her across the Dominican Republic, selling her to men along the way.

One of these men was Tito\*, his boss. Tito smuggled Liana into his home as a child bride. But when his mother met Liana, she began asking questions. After learning what Liana had been through, she ordered him to return her to her grandparents.

After nearly five months of sexual and physical abuse, Liana was devastated. She told her grandparents everything.

## **LIANA'S STORY – PART 2**

Even when Liana's mother threatened to kill him, her grandfather was brave enough to report the crime to local authorities. Within weeks, officials arrested the woman and referred the case to IJM. IJM's legal team worked with local prosecutors to put her captors on trial.

IJM's investigators helped police search for the fugitive husband, who remained at large for more than a year before he was arrested.

Liana was brought to a safe house run by IJM partners. IJM's aftercare team provided Liana with counseling and trauma-focused therapy, beginning a long journey of healing that will continue for years. And after the longest two years of her life, Liana is able to dream again, in fact, she is dreaming about becoming a lawyer or a doctor.

"With therapy, I've been able to overcome what happened to me," Liana says confidently. "I think I have a big future ahead of me. Now, I can see myself caring for children, like a pediatrician."

# EXEGETICAL AND LECTIONARY RESOURCES

The following is a survey of some of the most commonly used passages of scripture in Freedom Sunday sermons. In addition, we've given some thought to what God is saying through those words and what it may mean for people who are learning about the work of IJM. In addition, for churches that are more liturgical, we've included a few helpful elements for you at the end of this section.

## LUKE 4

Jesus, in Luke 4:18-21, is announcing publicly the reason for his ministry. He is grabbing the microphone and stating, "This is who I am and what I am about!" Jesus declares himself the fulfillment of the OT promise found in Isaiah 61. The "Good News" that Jesus is here to proclaim includes:

- Freedom for prisoners
- Sight to the blind
- Set the oppressed free

Jesus' ministry of good news was not simply to tell people of the good news of salvation. But it encompassed justice and freedom for the oppressed. The fulfillment of the promise found in Luke 4 is one that includes God's deliverance of the oppressed. That's what Jesus' ministry was about!

Jesus is announcing the good news to the poor, which is usually understood to be the spiritually poor. However, throughout the book of Luke, we see Jesus drawing near to those who are actually economically poor (as well as spiritually and socially poor). Jesus' ministry was to the marginalized in society, those left most vulnerable to oppression and injustice.

Today, poverty leaves billions of people without basic protection from the law. Slavery and violence would not be so widespread if it were not for the poverty that plagues so many areas of the world. Jesus' declaration was that he had arrived. And his arrival ushered in a ministry that was focused to the marginalized and poor of society. And that any ministry to the poor must include addressing the issues of justice and freedom.

### **ISAIAH 58:1-14**

Isaiah 58 is a deeply convicting and deeply challenging passage in Scripture. It starts out by calling out the Israelites for their frustration and complaints. They are engaging in spiritual practices, but without the desired effect. However, God turns the tables on them to tell them what they are missing. They have been engaged with rituals of worship but have neglected some of the practices that are near to God's heart.

God redefines the fasting that the Israelites were doing. He challenges them to see that justice and mercy are essential for their spiritual devotion. In other words, one cannot simply focus on their own spiritual lives while neglecting the needs of others.

And the promise that he has for those that pay attention to justice and mercy in their devotion is that God will answer their calls and he will answer their cries. They will flourish in the land and find joy and triumph in their spiritual lives.



In other words, the very aspect of their spiritual devotions that left the Israelites feeling empty was the lack of devotion to justice and mercy for the oppressed. Once they pay attention to that type of fasting, they will enjoy the very thing that they sought after in the first place.

### **GOOD SAMARITAN – LUKE 10:25-37**

This parable highlights the commitment that a “neighbor” must have to help those in need. As the Samaritan encountered the man in need, he took pity on him, took care of his wounds, gave up his own donkey for him and set him up for long-term care, even at his own expense.

The man who was a victim of violence was noticed by all three men (Priest, Levite & Samaritan). However, only one of them was willing to intervene in the situation to bring about his full restoration. Perhaps that’s why the others were unwilling to stop. But the clear message is that in order to be a neighbor to those that we encounter who are victims of violence, we must be willing to emotionally engage with their situation (“took pity on him”), physically care for their needs (“bandaged his wounds”) and carry their care to the point of completion (“when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have”).

Jesus is challenging our understanding of mercy and justice for the oppressed. It is not simply awareness that matters, it must be a level of engagement that ultimately costs us something.

### **ADDITIONAL FREEDOM SUNDAY TEXTS**

[Micah 6:8](#)

[Isaiah 1:17](#)

[Matthew 23:23](#)

[Ecclesiastes 4:1](#)

[Habakkuk 1:3-4](#)

[Psalm 10:17-18](#)

[Psalm 35:10](#)

[Proverbs 14:31](#)

### **PRAYER FOR COLLECTION**

21. For Social Justice — Almighty God, who created us in your own image: Grant us grace fearlessly to contend against evil and to make no peace with oppression; and, that we may reverently use our freedom, help us to employ it in the maintenance of justice in our communities and among the nations, to the glory of your holy Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

### **SUGGESTED EUCHARISTIC PRAYER**

Holy Eucharist II, Eucharistic Prayer B

# SERMON SCRIPT

Now that you have all the pieces, here is a sample sermon outline and script written by members of our Church Mobilization team. Feel free to use it as much (or as little) as you'd like.

## I. OPENING

- This section accomplishes two main tasks: First, to set the scene that we find value and purpose in being part of a larger, longer story. Second, to introduce IJM and Freedom Sunday.
- The writer of this sermon used the “23 and Me” example to illustrate the point that examining our ancestors is something we’re interested in. But you could, of course, use any personal example from your life to illustrate a desire to know more about your history.

How many of you have taken one of those DNA tests to find out your ancestry? You know the ones, either by “23 and Me” or “Ancestry.com” – the ones where you have to spit in little tube (it’s gross), send it to a lab, and a few weeks later they’ll give you a pretty good guess of your ancestral roots. Well if you’ve done it, you know that it’s pretty fascinating to find out some information about yourself that you may not have known before.

Well I recently took one, and was both surprised and not surprised by the results. What was not surprising was that I’m basically 100% European, my dad is actually my dad, and my mom is actually my mom. However, some people find out the opposite and it’s shocking. But in addition (and what was surprising) is that I have over 800 4th, 5th and 6th cousins. Talk about a family reunion! And so I’m now on this journey to find out who all these cousins are and how we’re connected.

Have you looked into your ancestry? Well, a recent report out of MIT says<sup>1</sup> that at least 1 in 25 of you have used a major service to peer into your ancestry and health data. And every year, the number of people who submit their saliva for DNA testing doubles.

Now why is that? Why are we so interested in our family tree? What does it matter?

Throughout all of history, people have sought to understand their roots. Even in the life of Jesus we see that there is an extensive lineage in Luke 3<sup>2</sup> that takes us from God, to Adam, to Joseph, to Jesus himself. Now we know of course that the lineage didn't make Jesus – he would have been God's son despite his ancestors. But that lineage is included in scripture because there's something that establishes Jesus' humanity, and gives him even more credibility (If that's possible) just by knowing His history is not average and that he's the rightful heir to the throne of David.

Such is the case with us. We seek to know our history because it lends validity and clarity to our purpose in the present.

It's true. If we find out that, for example, our Great-Great-Great Aunt Lucy was the first ever female lawyer in our state – we carry it like a badge of honor. And in connecting ourselves to Aunt Lucy, we glean some of her prestige. But moreover, we feel as though we too are a person who shatters boundaries and fights for what's right – all because Lucy did. Her mission is passed down.

Furthermore, we do this as a church. Over and over again we share the story of our history. We talk about how and why this church was founded, and why those that planted this church sought to do so. And, we talk about our metrics of historical significance. For example, in 2017, we saw 15 people get baptized, 180

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.technologyreview.com/s/610233/2017-was-the-year-consumer-dna-testing-blew-up/>

<sup>2</sup> Luke 3:23-28

new people called this church their home, and 73 people graduated from our addiction recovery ministry. In 2018, we built the new sanctuary and opened our east-side campus. And in all these things we harken back to Hebrews 11 where we see that “by faith” God wrote our Church’s history.

Now does knowing our churches recent and distant history do anything for today? Not practically because it’s all in the past. But in our collective conscious, it gives us hope for what’s possible and it drives us into the future.

Our ancestry and our history as a body of believers is what we’re talking about today. Because today is Freedom Sunday. And Freedom Sunday is, in its own right, a historical day in our church and in *the* church.

Freedom Sunday is a day where our congregation, and over 18,000 congregations all over the world, learns about slavery and partners with International Justice Mission – IJM – to end it.

IJM is a global organization with a plan to eliminate the slave trade everywhere. You see, every day, people are sold into slavery and slave owners profit from their misery. According to the Walk Free foundation and the International Labour Organization, there are over 40 million people in the world who live as slaves. That’s 40 million little girls and boys, men and women, whole families, all of whom are not free.

IJM consists of more than 900 Christian lawyers, criminal investigators, trauma social workers, pastors, graphic designers, and really every job you can think of. They work in 19 communities throughout Africa, Latin America, South and Southeast Asia.

And the work God is doing through IJM is changing the story of individuals – as well as whole communities.



For example, IJM did a project in the city of Cebu in the Philippines to combat sex trafficking of minors. After five years of comprehensively working with all stakeholders in the public justice system, independent auditors confirmed a 79% reduction in the number of minors in the sex industry.

This changes history!

The Philippine government then decided to scale this strategy to several other major metropolitan areas. By the grace of God, in the span of just a decade or two, we may see the near eradication of sex trafficking of minors in the Philippines.

And in Cambodia, a country that used to be considered “ground zero” for pedophiles and sex tourists, 15 years of collaboration between the church, Cambodian leaders, police, courts, social services and the NGO community has made a dramatic change for Cambodia’s children.

A 2015 study conducted by IJM found that the prevalence of minors fifteen and under in the largest commercial sex markets in the country—once estimated to be at least 15%—has been virtually eradicated... to one-tenth of one percent.

And while there are certainly other challenges to face in Cambodia and the Philippines, let’s pause for a moment and acknowledge that there are thousands of girls and women who will now never be abused in the first place.

That’s why our church partners with IJM, and that’s why we’re a part of this Freedom Sunday movement. Because today there are 40 million people in the world who need rescue. And while we don’t know their names – God does. And God uses you, me, our church, and the people of IJM to find and rescue His children. Children like (insert name from the story you’ve chosen to tell).

## II. STORY – PART I

- Now that we’ve set up the “history” narrative as well as introduced people to IJM, we’re going to zoom in even more and tell the beginning story of one person.

- The stories that have been specially selected for this year's Freedom Sunday are in the [Stories From the Field](#) section of this document.
- This part of the story will end on a somber note, as it has not been revealed that the person is free.

### III. BIBLICAL EXPLORATION

- In this section, we are going to explore the church's role, throughout history, as purveyors of justice.
- The conclusion of this section leads us back into the single story that we've been telling, which is filled with hope and the provision that God promises in these scriptures.

How can this story be true? And how can evil like this exist in the world?

The Bible tells us that the fall unleashed sin into the world, and emerging from the chaos of sin is a specific penchant that humans seem to have to perpetrate violence on each other. Cain kills Abel, and on and on until by the time of Noah, God says he's going to end the whole human story with a flood because humans have "filled the earth with violence." (*Gen. 3:16*)

But ultimately, God decides not to end the human race. Instead, He begins working His long-term plan to redeem all of creation through the reign of His Son King Jesus who will personally establish a new heaven and a new earth where every tear is wiped away and there is no more death or mourning or crying or pain. (*Rev. 21:4*)

But in the meantime, this sin of violence constantly threatens to get out of control.

This is why when the scriptures speak of governing authorities—especially "just" rulers, they do so from the perspective that one of the core responsibilities of governing powers is to protect the vulnerable from the strong."

This idea of the ruler as protector is celebrated over and over again in the Bible. For example:

- “Endow the king with justice, O God ... May he defend the cause of the poor, give deliverance to the needy and restrain the oppressor.” *Ps. 72*
- And the Apostle Paul says, “There is no governing authority except from God, for the ruler bears the sword to punish those who do evil.” *Rom. 13*

Later, great theologians like Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, Wesley, and Bonhoeffer would disagree on lots of things; but they all agreed on the most basic purpose of rulers is to restrain violence against the weak.

But what if the rulers are failing to do their God-appointed job of restraining violence against the vulnerable? Or worse, what if the rulers are committing the violence? God’s solution for this problem is to raise up a “Prophet” – a spokesperson who will remind the ruler that he is accountable to God and will call the ruler to account. And in the case of Egypt, God raises up the Prophet Moses to confront Pharaoh.

So when the ruler fails to do his job, God raises up a prophet to protect the vulnerable – and the Israelites are rescued from the violence of slavery. Of course we know that the Israelites’ problems didn’t end there. In their desire to be a strong nation, led by a king, but God warns them (through the prophet Samuel) that putting a human on a throne will present serious problems, primarily, idolatry and injustice—along with all the havoc those twin evils can wreak.

And so the Biblical story for the next 700 years is tragic. If you step back and look at it, it’s the story of hundreds of years of mostly bad *kings* who lead in idolatry and injustice and don’t restrain violence against the weak – and the *prophets* who call them back to their godly purpose.

Even with King David, things start out pretty good – but even he has to be

confronted by the prophet Nathan for abusing his power to commit adultery/rape and murder. Then King David is also condemned for failing to punish Amnon for the rape of Tamar.

- And then things get even worse. The Book of 1st and 2nd Kings is about Solomon and 40 other kings of Israel and Judah who lead in Idolatry and Injustice (namely slavery, murder, theft and child sacrifice) – and the hundreds of Prophets who confront the rulers for “shedding innocent blood.” (*2 Kings 24:4*)

This continues to be the basic story line throughout the rest of the Bible – prophets confronting the rulers for their failure to do their God-given job of stopping violence. By way of example:

- Isaiah confronts the kings of Israel because “[their] hands are stained with blood.” *Is. 59:3*
- Jeremiah confronts the kings of Israel and Babylon because their “clothes are soaked with the life-blood of the innocent poor” and “they do not seek justice or defend the cause of the poor.” *Jer. 2:34, 5:28*
- Ezekiel cries out against “the rulers of Jerusalem who are like wolves tearing their prey; they kill people to make unjust gain.” *Ez. 22:27-29*
- The prophet Hosea calls King Jeroboam to account because, under his rule, “there is only lying, murder, stealing and adultery – and bloodshed follows bloodshed.” *Hosea 4:2*
- The prophet Amos call the kings of Judah to account for “debt slavery,” for “trampling the needy” and for “taking bribes and depriving the poor of justice in the courts.” *Amos 8:4,2:6, 5:12*
- The prophet Obadiah confronts the rulers of Edom for complicity in “slaughter,” “violence” and “slavery.” *Ob 1:10*
- Micah calls out the rulers of Judah because “their rich people are violent” and their “judges ask for a bribe and pervert justice.” *Micah 6:12,7:3*
- The prophet Nahum pronounces God’s judgment on the Assyrian king for

running “a city of bloodshed and endless cruelty.” *Nahum 3:1,19*

- Nehemiah raises his prophetic voice to stop the Jewish nobles and officials who are allowing the rape and enslavement of the weak in their own community. *Neh. 5:5*
- Zephaniah pronounces God’s judgment on the kings of Judah who “fill their homes with the evil gain of violence and fraud.” *Zeph. 1:9*
- Zechariah tells the deputies of the king who want to talk about religious fasting that what really matter is whether they “administer justice.” “Do not oppress the widow or orphan, the foreigner or the poor.” *Zech. 7:9-10*

And that’s just a few examples from the Old Testament, this prophetic ministry to rulers continues right into the New Testament with John the Baptist who calls all the people to repentance but names three: the tax collectors who are robbing the people, the soldiers who are extorting money from the people, and King Herod who is stealing another man’s wife. All of them are rulers abusing the power God has allowed them to have.

And of course, the climatic story of the New Testament is crucifixion of Jesus “under Pontius Pilot.”

Indeed, the center-piece of history is the sin of violence and the complicity of government rulers in that violence.

Which brings us back to us – this congregation.

Friends, God has spoken throughout the entirety of the scriptures awakening his people to the injustices of the world. From Genesis to Revelation God is call us – his children, the church, Christians – to rise up against those who would dare to perpetuate violence.

You are the direct heir to prophets in scripture. Your ancestors, all those men and women who went before you, and boldly proclaimed that God’s justice would be for all people – they are the ancestry of this church. And now you sit as a direct



descendent of the Biblical profits with a question: Will you stand for the 40 million people who need an advocate? Will you use your power on behalf of the vulnerable? Because here's what it can look like when we, the church, embody our prophetic call on behalf of people like (insert name of the person who's story you are using)?

#### IV. STORY – PART II

- The stories that have been specially selected for this year's Freedom Sunday are in the [Stories from The Field](#) section of this document.
- You can use either the video or the narrative (Part II), or some combination of both, for this section.

Church, what IJM is doing is lifesaving, and that is why our partnership with them is so important to this church. Because at IJM, they've developed a unique model that, at its simplest, continues the biblical narrative of standing up to the powerful for the sake of the vulnerable. But they can only do their work if the church leans into its history, its influence, and its power – which is what Freedom Sunday is all about.

Every day, we move closer to seeing the end of slavery in our lifetime. From the perspective of our prophetic ancestors, this is precisely what happens when the Church stands up for the oppressed.

#### V. THE CALL FOR FREEDOM PARTNERS AND CLOSE

- Now, it's time to invite people to partner with IJM in the work we're all called to do – end slavery. The first way we ask people to do this is by becoming a Freedom Partner.
- It is important to explain why becoming a Freedom Partner is more than just an ask for money.
- Additional logistics and language for this can be found in [The Call for Freedom Partners](#) section of this document.

I want to issue a very specific challenge this morning. A challenge to make history. I want to challenge us as a church to stand up to the powerful of the world who prey on the innocent—and specifically to join with IJM in the fight against injustice—until all are free. Free from slavery, from oppression, from violence. Free to be the children, men and women that God created us all to be.

We can be a part of the solution, we can be a part of this miraculous transformation, we can be witnesses to the Kingdom of God as it shatters the darkness! However, we must be bold” enough to do something that seems small, knowing that God does miracles with normal people like us.

To that end, I want to invite each and every one of us to join a global community of believers seeking to end slavery by becoming Freedom Partners.

While we sit here in church this Sunday and learn about the realities of slavery, there are thousands of traffickers using their power to keep people enslaved forever—all because slavery is profitable. They simply value money more than human life.

These slave owners are relentless, calculated, and tenacious—unafraid to use their power, money and influence to oppress others.

We, the church, must act. Each one of us here needs to partner with IJM by becoming a Freedom Partner today. Freedom Partners give \$24 or more to IJM each month. In addition, Freedom Partners are called upon regularly to pray for urgent needs in the field, advocate for life-saving legislation, and attend special IJM events.

In short, IJM knows where enslaved people are and has a plan to rescue them. And with the support of Freedom Partners, IJM is seeing slaves set free and putting slave owners behind bars.

Right now, even as I finish this sermon, would you open the Freedom Partner envelope you received as you walked in and sign up to give? Your \$24 or more a month will save lives.

As you are signing up, I want to tell you that the story we just heard is the story of one person. But more people than ever, in all of human history, remain in slavery. Many of them are young children who want to study, want their parents, and just want to play. But they can't. They can't because they are owned by another human being.

They live without hope.

What they don't know, though, is that today is the day that someone on the other side of the world will do something that will ultimately be part of bringing rescue to them.

You see, if you are a slave and you have never imagined a life beyond the life you've known, you cannot imagine that other side of the world there are people who live in freedom and possess immense power and resources.

And if they knew that such a person existed, and that such power and resources were in that person's possession, and that that person was a disciple of Jesus—the one who used all of his or her power and resources to set others free—then they would have a reason to hope.

So this is my prayer for us today. In a world that's yearning to know the goodness of our God, may we remember where we came from, remember the prophets in our ancestry, and may we use our power stand up to powers of violence and slavery!

One day, as our grandchildren will piece together their own ancestry, they'll ask about you. And what they'll find out is that you led the generation that brought slavery to an end—for good.



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**INTERNATIONAL JUSTICE MISSION** is a global organization that protects the poor from violence throughout the developing world. IJM partners with local authorities to rescue victims of violence, bring criminals to justice, restore survivors, and strengthen justice systems.

Highlighted as one of 10 non-profits “making a difference” by *U.S. News and World Report*, IJM’s effective model has been recognized by the U.S. State Department, the World Economic Forum and leaders around the globe, as well as featured by *Foreign Affairs*, *Forbes*, *The Guardian*, *The New York Times*, *The Times of India*, *The Phnom Penh Post*, National Public Radio, and CNN, among many other outlets.

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