

CARING



SPIRITUALITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

A SCRIPTURE STUDY FROM *CARING*

BY MAJOR KEILAH TOY





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INTRODUCTION

It's the season of giving and good cheer, but for so many around the world, the need for basic human rights persists. This month, we're exploring four biblical stories and what we can learn beyond the surface—about human needs and what can be done—all leading up to the Christmas story.

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PART 1: THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION



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BEHIND THE SCENES:

Read what Scripture says in Daniel 1 and Daniel 2:48.

BEYOND THE SURFACE:

Daniel was only a 17-year-old teenager when he experienced firsthand the attack of the Babylonians on his hometown, Jerusalem. Imagine his fear as he watched his city crumble and finally surrender to the enemy! He then finds himself, along with his friends, among the first deportation of Jews to Babylon, which was the prophecy fulfillment of the nation Israel's many years of sin against God.

The Babylonian King, Nebuchadnezzar, wanted to bring some of the men of Judah into his palace. Among the qualifications were that the young men should be from important families, should have nothing wrong with them, were handsome, well-educated and capable of learning and understanding in order to be able to serve in his palace. They were taught the language and writings of the Babylonians and were truly the “cream of the crop,” chosen to serve in Babylon.

When the King tested Daniel and his three friends, he found the young men not only knowledgeable in every subject matter, but 10 times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom (Dan. 1:20). God gave them learning and skill in all literature and wisdom, and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams (Dan. 1:17).

Consequently, the king gave Daniel high honors and many great gifts and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon and chief prefect over all the wise men of Babylon (Dan. 2:48). King Nebuchadnezzar trusted that Daniel was qualified and highly educated to run the nation.

Through the years there were additional events that tested Daniel's wisdom and faith:

- Daniel's request not to eat the King's food—Daniel 1:8-16

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- Daniel and the interpretation of dreams—Daniel 2:24-49
- Daniel in the lion's den—Daniel 6

Daniel's faith and success came not only from his education, but from the wisdom he chose from his relationship with God. Daniel wisely used his education, together with wisdom, to choose to honor his God.

BETWEEN THE LINES:

Every person growing up in the United States can recount some memories from their school days: favorite subjects, teachers, fun stories and so on. Those living in first-world countries can take for granted that “everyone has the right to education,” as stated in Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, proclaimed at the United Nations General Assembly in Paris on Dec. 10, 1948.

Yet, there are still countries, many in South Asia, West Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, where education is not a luxury, a right or a dream. Of all the illiterate adults in the world, nearly two-thirds are female—making them vulnerable to additional abuse of human rights and dignity. There are many reasons for this lack of education:

- Parents who also have little schooling
- Lack of resources (finances, books, support)
- Difficult living conditions, including poverty and war

All of these factors contribute to the never-ending legacy of illiteracy and, ultimately, poverty.

With this global crisis, how can we make a difference for those who do not enjoy this basic human right to be educated that we take for granted?

One California Salvation Army corps has chosen to make a difference for two young lives across the world in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. The Salvation Army runs a home for “unwanted girls” in the city center there. These young girls were previously trafficked either by being kidnapped or sold into sex trafficking by their parents, and who were now no longer wanted, had no home to go back to, nor had a home. Two of the girls, Debbie and

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Farida (names changed), aged out of the home and were “adopted” by the church, who sponsored their continuing education at another Salvation Army-run secondary boarding school. These two shy young women, who no longer had a family or home, expressed extreme appreciation to their sponsors for the luxury of receiving an education. When asked to share anything else they needed or desired, they hesitantly and humbly requested textbooks to share together. Because of the scarcity of textbooks, one textbook would be shared by 30 other classmates.

Nelson Mandela has said, “Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.” That, coupled with faith in Christ, will pull one out of any vulnerable struggle or situation and give hope to a lost world.

PEACE ON EARTH, GOODWILL TO MEN:

Consider in this busy season of gift-giving, the many around the world who do not have access to the basic right of education. From our overflow of abundance, there are multiple opportunities to share goodwill to the many women and children whose lack of education will relegate them to lives of familial poverty and vulnerability for abuse and exploitation.

Some suggestions:

Shelf of Books for Rural Children’s Libraries – Indonesia \$30

Preschool Scholarship for Rural Children – Rwanda \$25

Literacy Materials – Kenya WORTH Women’s Program \$20

PART 2:

JOSEPH—HUMAN TRAFFICKING SURVIVOR



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BEHIND THE SCENES:

Read what Scripture says in Genesis 37.

BEYOND THE SURFACE:

Imagine Joseph's life when he was young: rich, favored by his father with preferential treatment and obviously gifted with dreams foretelling the future. In his immaturity, Joseph lacked discretion when sharing about his dreams, which led to brewing hatred and bitterness from his siblings. Little surprise that when Joseph was away from the protection of his father, the boiling jealousy in his brothers spurred them to seize the opportunity to exact revenge.

The abuse began by throwing their young brother into a cistern, with the intent on murdering him. "Reason" took over Judah by suggesting they sell Joseph to a passing Midianite trader caravan. He rationalized slavery was preferable to their hands being bloodied by murder.

Joseph was eventually sold to Potiphar, captain of the palace guard. He received considerable favor and increased prosperity while there yet was vulnerable to the constant sexual advances of Potiphar's wife. While he resisted, he eventually found himself falsely accused and thrown into prison (Genesis 39).

Through continued mistreatment, persecution and being forgotten, Joseph never lost his faith in God, and when reunited with his persecutors, he expressed the ultimate forgiveness repeatedly to his brothers (Gen. 45:5-7; 50:19-21).

BETWEEN THE LINES:

Joseph's story is one of a human trafficking survivor, as described in today's terms. While his story, thousands of years old, describes a land where people were freely and openly sold and bought, the same is occurring today right in our own communities and neighborhoods. Today,

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people are still selling family members, kidnapping victims and children for human trafficking. The foster care system and baby “factories” are also fertile breeding grounds for trafficking.

Human trafficking is described as organized criminal activity in which human beings are treated as possessions to be controlled and exploited (as by being forced into prostitution or involuntary labor). Through media exposure, we sometimes envision victims of human trafficking as being kidnapped and held in bondage in chains against their will. While this is true in some cases, there are also millions who are held prisoner by mental and emotional chains, defrauded and coerced into labor or sexual exploitation.

Human trafficking is the fastest-growing criminal enterprise today with an estimated 40.3 million victims a year globally in a \$150 billion industry. Second only to drug trafficking, the difference between the two is that drugs can be sold and consumed only once. However, a human can be sold, resold and used for years. One trafficker said, “I sell crack, it’s gone. I sell a girl, she’s still there.”

Human Rights Day has been observed every December 10 since 1948, when the United Nations General Assembly in Paris proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Article 4 states: “No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms.”

PEACE ON EARTH, GOODWILL TO MEN:

God describes his model for man in Genesis 1:26-27: God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them. Every human being was designed in the image of God and meant to be respected, honored and loved.

Yet, from the days of Joseph thousands of years ago until this present time, the evil of human trafficking prevails. During this week’s observance of Human Rights Day on Dec. 10, what can you and your church do in the Fight for Freedom against human trafficking?

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Some suggestions:

- **Invest** in prevention: Invest time and resources in character-building programs for children, especially those in foster programs.
- **Fight** the demand: Churches need to address the connection between pornography and sex trafficking. Aggressively create awareness of the dangers of pornography and utilize resources to those in church who may be struggling with sexual addiction.
- **Pray** faithfully: Regularly pray for victims of human trafficking, for open eyes to recognize signs of trafficking and for wisdom on what resources God has provided for you to assist survivors of human trafficking.

PEACE ON EARTH, AND GOODWILL TO MEN:

Start with opening our eyes to recognize our neighbors in bondage and reaching out a helping hand in God's name.

1. Spend a few minutes now to pray for wisdom to discern what God wants you to learn.
2. How is God moving you to action against human trafficking in your neighborhood?
3. What is Christ calling you to do today?

Find 10 practical ways you can fight Human Trafficking from Caring Magazine here.

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PART 2:

JOSEPH—HUMAN TRAFFICKING SURVIVOR



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BEHIND THE SCENES:

Read what Scripture says in Matthew 20:1-16.

BEYOND THE SURFACE:

Maybe you've been up early enough to see it in the city where you live. You drive by the local big-box home renovation, do-it-yourself giant store, and you see a crowd of men, many who are nationals, standing in the parking lots and public spaces, waiting. They are day-laborers who are available to work on projects, mostly requiring physical labor.

Jesus tells a parable of such a scenario where a rich man rose extremely early in the morning to hire extra workers to help at his vineyard. He offered one denarius to each man for the day's labor, which was the generous equivalent of a Roman soldier's pay for the day. The workers happily agreed. Around 9 a.m., the rich man was in the marketplace and saw others needing a job. So, he also sent them to his vineyard, saying he'll pay them whatever is right. This scene was repeated at noon, at 3 p.m., and finally again at 5 p.m., right before the closing of the day at 6 p.m.

The workers hired last were paid first and were paid one denarius. You can imagine the excitement and anticipation of those who were hired early in the morning and who had worked all day in the scorching sun, how much more would they be paid. However, when a single denarius was placed in each of their hands, their incredulous expressions broke into angry accusations of the owner's unfairness in paying them the same as the recent hires.

The owner replied, "Friends, didn't we agree that you would be paid one denarius for your work? You were satisfied with this agreement this morning. Isn't it my right to do what I want with my own money? Can't I be generous if I want to?"

At first glance, it may be difficult for us to not side with the workers hired in the early morning. It would seem rather unfair that the early workers

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labored longer and harder and yet received the same pay as the recently hired workers. However, they were paid what was agreed upon.

There are many lessons from this parable Jesus shared. First, it is up to the master to be generous and show mercy if he chooses to do so. One of the greatest examples of this is regardless of whether we have known and served Christ faithfully for many decades, compared to accepting him in the last moments of our lives like the two thieves beside Jesus on the cross, we will all receive eternal life. It is God's choice to be generous and merciful.

Another observation from this parable is that regardless of the amount of work done by the different laborers, they were all paid a fair, living wage. They were paid enough to survive. Today it might be easy to look down upon those without an obvious education or skill. Perhaps they are victims of a lack of opportunity, discrimination or prejudice. Even today, cashiers, fast-food workers, service industry workers and ironically, even employees who work inside the big-box companies will, even with an honest day's work, not earn a fair, living wage, relegating them to poverty level.

BETWEEN THE LINES:

If one of the richest countries in the world struggles to pay its employees a living wage, how much more will other countries struggle? Populations suffering from poverty around the world are more vulnerable to crime, abuse and trafficking.

The United Nations Declaration of Human Rights Article 23 states that every human being has the right to work, choose their work, to work in good conditions and to earn a fair living wage.

PEACE ON EARTH, AND GOODWILL TO MEN:

In this Christmas season, there are multiple ways to contribute dignity, independence and hope to those at home and around the world.

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Some suggestions:

1. **Buy** fair-trade products from your supermarkets and local stores and encourage your family, friends and colleagues to do the same.
2. **Learn** about the stores you shop at and write to them about your concern to get the fair-trade ball rolling.
3. **Give** gifts that support fair-trade initiatives this Christmas season, like those at trade4hope.com, beautiful handmade products by artisans and producers from Bangladesh, Kenya, Pakistan and Moldova. In addition to learning a trade, producers are paid a fair, living wage for the goods they produce.

The story about the vineyard workers is about mercy, generosity and a fair, living wage. As we celebrate the birth of our Savior this Christmas season, consider the mercy God has shown you by salvation through his son, and choose to share from the generosity he continues to lavish upon your life.

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PART 4:

MARY, JOSEPH AND JESUS—A REFUGEE STORY



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BEHIND THE SCENES:

Read what Scripture says in Matthew 1.

BEYOND THE SURFACE:

Any parent who has just experienced the birth of their first newborn can attest to the overpowering emotions of awe and elation at the surreal miracle they have just witnessed. No doubt, Joseph and Mary felt the same way. They had just finished a long journey to Bethlehem, their search for a place to stay resulted in a corner of a stable, they witnessed God's miraculous fulfillment of the birth of Jesus, as foretold, and shepherds and wise men visited to honor and celebrate their son's birth.

As the wise men departed, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and warned him to immediately flee to Egypt with Mary and their son, Jesus. Imagine Joseph's fear when he learned that the King was searching for Jesus in order to kill him.

Joseph, Mary and Jesus left immediately for Egypt and did not return until the Lord sent an angel to Joseph in a dream to say it was finally safe to go back to Israel. King Herod had passed away. When returning to Israel, though, they feared the district where King Herod's son was in power, so Joseph chose to settle in a little town called Nazareth in the region of Galilee.

This little family fled their own country, escaping danger and persecution. After the death of the key player in their persecution, they returned to their home country, and chose to settle in a region they deemed safe.

BETWEEN THE LINES:

These days, one cannot listen to the news without hearing stories of the refugee crisis around the world. Escalating violence in Burkina Faso results in hundreds of thousands fleeing, recent Turkish offensives forces tens of thousands to flee their homes in Syria, and the ongoing violence, kidnapping and murder in South America causes a steady stream, num-

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bering hundreds of thousands, many of them children and women, to pour into the Mexico-U.S. borders.

In our own bubble of busyness and comfort at home, many times it is not easy to take compassion nor action while 65 million individuals are forcibly displaced around the world because of violation of human rights.

There are many reasons for inaction: One is fear of how an influx of refugees will affect our lives, and frankly, the second reason is not wanting the inconvenience it may cause.

The United Nations Declaration of Human Rights Article 13 states that everyone has the right to freedom of movement, both internally and externally of one's country, and that everyone has the right to seek and enjoy asylum from persecution.

The story of Jesus, Joseph and Mary is a story of a refugee family. Their early years living in Egypt was not one of choice, but an escape into the night from persecution and imminent murder. When the time seemed safe from danger, they chose to return to their country and were allowed to choose their ultimate home in Nazareth. Without these basic human rights of freedom of movement, both internally and externally from their country, there may not have been a Christmas Story as we know it.

Yet today, there are millions who do not enjoy the privilege of freedom of movement and residence within their own country, nor the right to leave and return, nor the right to seek and enjoy asylum, even from danger or persecution.

PEACE ON EARTH, AND GOODWILL TO MEN:

This is the season of Christ's birth, for remembering and celebrating the joy and life that Jesus' birth gives us. In what ways can we share the freedom in Christ that we experience with those who are being denied basic human rights today?

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Some suggestions:

1. **Pray** for wisdom and a heart of compassion for the refugee crisis around the world and for eyes to recognize the challenges and needs in your own neighborhood.
2. **Volunteer** to share your skills and talents to help refugees in your area resettle into your community. There are multiple opportunities to help, ranging from helping refugees practice English to getting acquainted with American culture and community, from helping kids with their homework to hosting refugees, and much more.
3. **Donate** food or toiletries—or organize a drive to collect even more. Imagine escaping to another country with virtually nothing except the clothes on your back. There are basic necessities that a family needs from toiletries to bedding, from school supplies to furniture.

Somewhere in your daily life, you cross paths regularly with an immigrant and/or refugee who may not have made a choice to leave their country. But because of escape from poverty, violence or persecution, they are now seeking to make a better life for their family in a new country. In addition to your regular gift list, choose to do something for this family, extending the hand of God's love, peace and goodwill to all mankind in this season of Jesus Christ's birth.

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