Human Trafficking

Part 2 of 2: The Healing Process for Trafficking Victims
with Darrell L. Bock, Darlene Line, and Mike Bartel
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Dr. Darrell Bock  So, we've got find. We've got rescue. Let's talk about embrace. What does embrace involve, Mike?

Mike Bartel  Embrace is another great place that the faith community can be involved. When we're talking about embrace, in many ways it's misplaced in our acronym. It almost needs to come right after the find. For us, rescue is holistic. The psalmist says he brought us out of the miry clay but he also set our feet on a rock to stay. We could go and find and identify and see a million people extracted from this. But then there's the so what of it all.

Every time, those who come out of this life relapse time and time again. In fact, different numbers say seven or eight times that a girl, person goes back to this life before we can really get them out. Again, it ties to a lot of psychological purposes that that rescue piece is meant to put in place.

But under embrace what we're finding is, whether it's a labor trafficked family that we've been working with, whether it's a girl that's been in prostitution or a boy or even some transgender people were being exploited in that way, when we work with law enforcement to get them out they have nothing, nothing. It's almost like disaster relief time because they don't have a place to stay. They don't feel safe or secure. They don't have clothes. They don't have personal items if they're a girl. They have zero.

So, we've seen a lot of great partnerships and lasting relationships happen between the faith community and law enforcement because the faith community can come in with their gift cards and with being able to house and a motel for a few nights, cover the expenses, until law enforcement, social services or a group like ours can decide where the best place to put the girl is. To use frequent flyer miles to transport somebody, we've done that before, from Florida to Arkansas or whatever it might be because that's where their exploitation happened to begin with. It's where their family is, where their support base is.

For us, embrace really deals with being able to love on that person in a tangible way that provides for their immediate needs right after they've come out of this very scary situation.

Dr. Darrell Bock  The last one is empower, Darlene. What does empower involve?
Empower is giving these victims the tools and the love that surrounds them that they too can now be restored and go out, empowering them, to just be all that they were created to be. Because they come in one way and especially with us being faith-based, they are a new creation in Messiah. It's, again, a collaboration with the faith groups who has the people who are able to come and do the nurturing, who can make these women feel pretty and come and adorn them and give them back the worth, that they would be the apple of the Lord's eye and really know how much they are loved and to provide them ways of furthering their education.

The one person that we're going to maybe briefly talk about, that real life situation through this last Super Bowl, is one, again, that's in this process. They see themselves as without worth. They don't even realize that they see themselves so worthless, so to speak. When we can come around and provide them education, love, the Body, just disciple them so that they now can go out. We have success stories where people are actually on F.R.E.E. going out and sharing their testimonies.

I thought that what we would do, since we've worked through now the find, rescue, embrace and empower, that we might talk about some scenarios that come up that are a part of this. So that people, again, can connect the dots. Let's talk first, you mentioned the Super Bowl a lot. I thought the Super Bowl was about a football game. So, let's talk about that. It's obviously a big, cultural, social event drawing a lot of people. There's a lot that goes on, on the side when a Super Bowl happens. Why is the Super Bowl such a signature event, if I can say it that way, for this kind of an issue, Darlene?

It attracts a multitude of people. You'll have guys coming in and maybe they may or may not be meeting with their families on the Super Bowl day but the week prior to that, it's very active. You have men coming out. They're partying and the opportunity. It's the old adage there where it's the supply and demand. They're going to make these girls – it's very lucrative for the trafficker to bring it because you have so many people and so much is going on. Law enforcement has a lot of antennas out for the safety of things. It's become very prevalent and something that is supposed to be a nice thing, a sports events, you pick two teams, maybe you go in a Super Bowl pool or whatever has now become very tainted with underpinnings of the activity that goes on.
The work for Super Bowl for people begins right after. When one Super Bowl ends, the research and intel begins right afterwards for the next location. Mike and other teams and law enforcement are working very hard on intel regarding Phoenix, etc.

So, when you say you've been working Super Bowl sites for the last seven years, Mike, what exactly does that involve? What do you all do at a Super Bowl?

Yeah, again, I'd like to point out, this very collaborative endeavor that we do. In fact, that's why we focus on the Super Bowl in many ways, at least, why F.R.E.E. first started being a part of this coalition that was started actually by an organization called Class Kids, a Florida coalition against human trafficking. They started this outreach recognizing that pimps are opportunistic. I won't even just say commercial sex but labor side of trafficking goes up quite a bit too around Super Bowl because you're really dealing with an opportunistic environment to cash in on a whole lot of money.

Anytime you've got a lot of disposable income that comes into any community. In fact, that's why Vegas, in large part, is such a hot bed for trafficking. Every weekend you've got huge amounts of money that come in for all that goes on in Vegas and the conferences that go on. Pimps aren't about sex. They're about making money. They're going to be wherever the most amount of disposable income is for them to be opportunistic to cash in on that.

What we tried to do when we jumped on early was to recognize big events like the Super Bowl. Already embedded in that concept had a great infrastructure in place. The lines of communication between motels and cab drivers and the subway out in New York City and public works departments and all that, they're heightened. It creates a great opportunity for a coalition of groups like what we have to come in and piggyback on that heightened communication.

We bring in the red flags of what human trafficking are to the cab drivers and the hotline number to call should they see something suspicious through the national hotline number. To mobilize, Class Kids, who started the Super Bowl outreach, is a very reputable national missing child organization, works with the national center of missing kids to be able to identify those who would be missing and vulnerable in the area.
We go into the business community to be able to put the likely faces of children that they will see who are in the area around the event of the Super Bowl. Last year, we had, I think, 68 missing children in a book that over 5,000 businesses got in the Metro area so that as they're doing their normal business or the doorman or the person parking the car is doing what they're doing, they have the ability to help us identify authentically missing children likely in the area for the Super Bowl.

We work directly with law enforcement. Brad Dennis, who runs the command center part of what we do, embeds directly with the FBI. As we gather information online and other places, we have a flow of communication directly to law enforcement that they can respond immediately to things that we are seeing on the street when that happens, almost in real time.

We're in the schools. We do school assemblies. Last year, we were in front of almost 40,000 students in the week leading up to the Super Bowl with the school assembly program. It's an all hands on deck week. It really works to help us identify the resources within that community that are available once the Super Bowl is long gone and piece together that collaborative relationship that's needed to address trafficking long after the Super Bowl is gone.

Dr. Darrell Bock

The hard part of this is that even when you get a rescue, we've talked about embrace and empower, but that process of really surrounding that person with the support that they need and the time they need just to psychologically recover from what they've been through is a long, long complex process, isn't it?

Mike Bartel

Absolutely and not one that the churches stay out of but one we have to be mindful of going in that this is a long, long process that requires people of much higher skillset than I have even in interacting with those psychological needs that the girl has. There are so many pieces to that they can be a part of. Again, colleges that can offer scholarships and can continue to tie that to our faith community network.

Right there in Texas we have a major partnership with an organization called Sabre, which actually is an international technology firm working in hospitality. So they house organizations like Travelocity and other groups like that that are working directly with F.R.E.E. International to provide work for those girls once they're ready to enter the workforce.
A big problem there, again, that the church can be a part of, in an advocacy sense, is many of these girls already have criminal records of no doing of their own. When they start to seek employment there's none to have because their resume goes to the very bottom of the list because of their criminal record.

So, great businesses like that and great universities that are starting to go, we recognize this for what it is now. We're going to create opportunity for those who have been exploited but have a hard time getting that leg up because of their criminal past.

*Dr. Darrell Bock*  
Let me go through a couple of scenarios here. It's interesting, in preparing for the podcast today, I was visiting with my personal assistant here, Anne. She was telling of a story of a close family friend that she had that was going through this situation. We'll keep everybody unidentified. But, basically, it's a situation of a teenage girl who, for one reason or another, left home, may even have been forced out of home because of her past behavior, that kind of thing, who's now ended up in Vegas, caught in a prostitution situation. The parents find themselves having discovered this asking now what do we do? We're just stuck. They have no clue what to do.

What advice would you give to a family that ends up being caught in this kind of situation? Their child has gone missing. They've been looking for them and low and behold they discover, they find them, but then they realize that their child is caught. What do you recommend? I'm asking this really two ways. One is just the mere discovery. But what if you add the additional feature of the parents may even be feeling a little bit responsible for what's happened because they forced the child out of the house.

*Mike Bartel*  
Having been a pastor and all that, relationships and families, in general, always tend to be complicated. In situations like this, one, you just can never lose hope. We deal with that a lot here in Vegas. Where we're based are a lot of families that just didn't know how to handle the scenario. Who would? Not knowing really what the dynamics are of the situations.

But now, knowing what's going on, again, that's where organizations like F.R.E.E., I think, become valuable. To be able to offer counseling and support to the family as we work with them but also be able to be on the ground and identify the help that's needed for the girl once we locate her and find her.
Oftentimes, if we're dealing with a teenager, like you said, or I'm going to assume that means she's still under 18.

Dr. Darrell Bock

She is.

Mike Bartel

If she is in prostitution, she's a traffick victim, straight up and down by definition. She is that. As we work to get help for her, even if the family wasn't in the situation where they kicked their daughter out or whatever the scenario is because they didn't know how to really offer her support, that's where these shelters become very important too. There are so few beds in this country for so big need. Because there is such a unique dynamic now, no matter what, they are not responsible; the parents aren't, for what she's going through now.

I don't know if you said this earlier or not but that whole issue of previous psychological needs, bipolar. I think these issues of psychological help and need are really a growing need within the faith community to know how to identify different psychological needs that are happening, bipolar. We've seen very recognized evangelical ministers have family members commit suicide and other things. That's another area that the church really needs to begin to get involved with and emphasize on how they can be better at really helping on the front side of this, again, with issues like that or be educated.

But, I think, first and foremost, family can't blame themselves for what's going on with their daughter right now. Secondly, as people of faith we think prayer does miraculous things. This is such warfare and such a dark area of ministry and need that prayer has to be foundational to everything that's going on. I'm hoping everyone that hears this podcast would immediately even in this situation begin in a preventative prayer sense to be praying for these families that are struggling with situations like this.

The fact that we can connect with this family, identify and find their daughter, be able to get them the counseling and help they need coming out of that is why groups like ours exist.
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Dr. Darrell Bock  The scenario really is that this family could theoretically contact you or an organization like yours to get the kind of help that they need and really to get the advice and counsel. You all have experience in dealing with this area. You know what the laws are and what the situation is. You have contacts with law enforcement that can put ears to the ground to help, etc. The answer is there's help that can be found for this family. Is that right?

Mike Bartel  That's exactly right and F.R.E.E. International has got a national network so we work everywhere but in this particular family's case we are based out of Vegas so we can help very directly in that situation.

Dr. Darrell Bock  Darlene, I'm going to ask you a law enforcement question because I think this sometimes comes up. We often hear that law enforcement tends to be slow to get involved in family scenarios, that kind of thing. But this is not that kind of a situation, is it? This is really a situation where if there's information, if the family, for example, I'll extend the scenario. If the family had information about where this girl was, is that something they could contact law enforcement to get help with in terms of trying to find her and locate her or are their hands tied?

Darlene Line  No, that is something, particularly, because she's a minor. Absolutely, they can and probably should. It's the collaboration of all the efforts though because she is a victim. So, by definition, as Mike had mentioned earlier, she falls under this human trafficking because she is a minor. So, absolutely, law enforcement should be involved with that.

Mike Bartel  If I can interject real quickly too. I don't know if this particular family has done this yet but filing a missing persons report goes a long way to having that person in the system. So if anything happens where she does get pulled aside on the street or whatever, it would be a way to immediately identify, if not her situation, that she is missing and then the story can be got after she gets extracted from the situation she's in.

Dr. Darrell Bock  So, the point is, if a missing persons report is filed then when they go to check, should she be stopped for anything, she should turn up, right?

Mike Bartel  She turns up in the system, correct.
Dr. Darrell Bock: Okay.

Mike Bartel: That's something we can do for here as if she's missing. The family files in the state or the city they're at and then they can contact us since she's likely in Vegas and we'll file that same missing persons report and connect it here in Las Vegas.

Dr. Darrell Bock: I think that most people would have literally no idea that all that kind of help even potentially exists. So, that's a helpful scenario to work through. Let's go through a second one. This is one that you mentioned, Darlene. You, apparently, have someone who was rescued out of the Super Bowl scenario and is now moving along in the process. Do you want to develop what this scenario is and what's happening and where the needs are?

Darlene Line: I was introduced to this young woman at this last Super Bowl in New Jersey. The history, actually, Mike can identify because it goes back two years prior at another Super Bowl. I came in mid-stream at this Super Bowl when she was actually saying, okay, I want help. They rescued her and she was staying with us during that outreach. But Mike was at, correct, two years ago where she was arrested and identified. This is just one of those examples how victims slip through the cracks. So, actually, Mike could fill the initial part of this better, the background.

Mike Bartel: The long story short of it was once we had gotten this girl out of her situation, we actually had to use our network to do it because she was not recovered in New Jersey. We were in New Jersey when a survivor that works with us and is part of our school assembly program team received a call from this girl saying she needed out. There are a lot of things tied to that but she was in Phoenix Arizona at the time.

Again, this is where the networked faith community help really happened or really was useful because she wasn't going to go to law enforcement. Law enforcement, in this situation, I'm not sure likely would be able to engage at different levels. So it was our network with the faith community that allowed us, she's over 18, to get her to New Jersey.
When she was spending the couple weeks with us in New Jersey that she did, the story that came out that two years previous at the Super Bowl, through the work our coalition was doing in Indianapolis, had identified what was going on and brought down that pimp's activity around the Super Bowl. The pimp had asked her to take the fall legally for what was going on. She ended up doing jail time because she wanted to stay in her pimp's good wishes, stay related to him.

So, she just connected the dots for us in New Jersey going I know who you guys are. She said you are the ones that got me arrested. When you get the story, she was, and this was a state that had done a lot of great work with human trafficking. They had passed the week of the Super Bowl with a significant lot of help. But even in there, it's such a complicated process that she ended up going to jail for her pimp. He asked her to do it and then when she was let loose, she went back to her pimp. Two years later, it became too much for her and she wanted out. So, it was just, I would say a God thing that our group was the one who got to not only get her out again but offer her the services that she needed. It's been a rough six months but she's turned a corner and doing wonderfully. She stays connected to the great people of faith we're working with.

Dr. Darrell Bock  

This is the illustration of how long this takes because, obviously, it took her a couple years from the situation she was initially discovered to the time when she said, yeah, I want out. I need help. Now, she's six months into it. I guess, almost nine months now, wouldn't it be, from the Super Bowl? Nine months out and she still has to swim her way out, if I can say it that way. There's still stuff ahead of her nine months in. What does she have ahead of her?

Mike Bartel  

There was so much that happened during that six months too, losing a family member and other things. Again, if it were just simple and this wouldn't be simple at all, as the only thing they had to deal with was their exploitation and the healing process, that would be hard enough as it is but there are so many other complicated issues. Even this scenario, with the bipolar and other things that have to be addressed, it becomes really a lifetime of healing because you're not always just dealing with one aspect.
In the reentry with family or whatever, you've got all those relationships that you've got to go back and address in a fresh way. The perceptions that you're dealing with there, it does seem like it's a deep pit you're coming out of. It just takes a long time to climb out of it and it takes a lot of support to get people there, doesn't it?

It does. I'll make this analogy real quick. One thing I've seen over, especially the last six years, we partner with an organization called Teen Challenge and it's a great organization. It's been around for a lot of years. Knowing the history of Teen Challenge, it was hard for them to make a go of it when they first started even because it was seen as social work, not gospel work. When we started to hear the story of people being healed and their addictions almost immediately done away with, that's what really allowed much of the church to be able to embrace Teen Challenge.

Here we are 50 years later and we're dealing with this issue of trafficking. I've been talking to churches and training churches in seminaries and other places and the interesting dynamic for me has been to see, I've yet to see a girl that we've worked with have any immediate level of healing holistically. There are aspects that God has really touched and made whole at that moment but this long process, what I've seen is God is using the story of these girls as much to transform the churches' understanding of what it means to love and even, in many ways, God's love towards the church that he remains faithful to us even while we are not faithful to him.

We've really seen in many churches that have gotten all in with this issue the dynamic change from this easy fix, hey, somebody's out, now they're in our church, everything's great to really what it takes long term to see that person heal. God has really deepened his relationship with those churches and an understanding of what this all takes and what it takes in love for them through patience to see this through to the end.

Darlene, you've mentioned that you've gotten involved basically in the last six, seven, eight years or so. What has this meant to you to be able to deal with this? One of the reasons we're having the podcast is because you shared with me that you were involved in this and it was a concern that you had. What has this meant to you as you think about your own Christian walk and Christian life?
To me personally, just seeing the brokenness. At the time that I was on a taskforce, I wasn't even aware that God was really pulling my heart to have a burden in this particular area. Being in law enforcement you pretty much are in the muck and mire 24/7. You see all kinds of crime. Sin is sin. When you start to meet someone or start to really see this, it just really touched my heart. This came in the latter part of my career. So, to be able to then transfer this being a believer in the government and then continue with it and seeing how even the government itself, and when you're working with law enforcement and victim witnesses and Homeland Security, how they so recognize how integral the church or the body of believers is.

To me, that is God doing, nothing is too difficult for you, oh Lord. I've seen it. The beauty is you work with many people in this particular thing. Faith-based doesn't necessarily mean the Christian as we all know and then we work with a lot of agnostics. But what I really like when we go out is, we might have people of different faiths coming and joining in law enforcement and then what do we, as believers, always do before we're going out on an outreach or we're coming back? We pray.

To me, just being part of that and sharing that – it was difficult for me when I had to hang up the gun and the badge and I see now the badge is in Lucite and I've got the retired on it. Coming into an NGO, I was very aware in the beginning, Mike, we can't be vigilantes. There was so much of me that wanted to just go in and like, oh, but before, I used to be able to do this and just to hold back. For me, it was, I'm really starting to learn, be still and know that I'm God. Let God just work everything as he does.

I just love working with, being part of F.R.E.E. because I think they're doing some grassroots things. I love the fact that Mike has just partnered up F.R.E.E. with the Miami law school. It seems that attorney generals throughout the United States are jumping on board. So, there's a part of my law enforcement career that is so tied with what's going on with F.R.E.E. in the NGO faith status that I feel like, okay, this is a new creation too. So, I'm blessed. We're blessed to be able to share all of this good stuff. God works all these things for his good. To him be all the glory.
Mike, let me ask you one final question. If you were to give advice to a pastoral staff, so you're able to address pastors about this area and they go I have no clue what my steps should be here. But I sense there's a potential for encouraging the church in this direction. What advice would you give to pastors?

I'd say get connected with a group like F.R.E.E. or a similar group. You might already have a great relationship in the community you're at. What we've always wanted to do with F.R.E.E. is to pool it, the faith community, again, at the center of this network, whatever it might look like local to where they're at. This is a very complicated issue.

We could talk weeks on each nuance of all that's going on with trafficking and the good stuff that's going on, partnerships with major corporations and law schools and the National Association of Attorneys General that F.R.E.E. International has but we have it because government and law enforcement, as Darlene was saying, is recognizing, not in a theological sense but in a pragmatic sense, that the local church is key to addressing this.

So, if I was giving advice to a pastor, which I do often, it's, one, recognizing that there's a leadership role to play for that local church in this field of trafficking. But not trying to own it but become a part of that network and relationship in an effective way. To lead without trying to own is really what we've seen great momentum on. Leading where we need to lead, serve where we need to serve, recognizing the resources our churches have. Again, I'm a pastor by DNA. I know churches want to get involved with trafficking but they're also involved with 400 other things. You can't, whatever all in means, you can't go all in because there are not enough resources to address this.

One of the other things I'd like for pastors are, there is a lot of hurt going on in our very churches. We've worked with a lot of women who were broken and sitting in churches just like the ones we sit in. They were molested. Their boyfriend was abusing them. Oftentimes, it gets really, an issue like trafficking, we all want to jump in on and help with but we're missing helping some real sexually brokenness in our churches, whether that's pornography, whether it's all these different things that really add to this problem.
In fact, real quick, I just saw a research recently by a secular organization, Think Tank, out of NYU, New York University. They were doing the best way to prevent human trafficking; they were trying to find the best way to do that. This group, again, no spiritual, moral connection to this issue, just pure data on what would take the money out of human trafficking so that it would no longer exist. In the end, they said that they believe what would do that, economically speaking because these were economists, was building stronger marriages. The stronger the marriage is the less likely these people are purchasing sex or looking at porn or whatever these things that drive human trafficking are.

So, I think a lot of the times, not only do we want to paint the picture with pastors and churches that this real exploitation is happening on our doorstep but there's also real things we can solidify in our church that we're already talking about that are going to diminish the demand and see this end in those communities as well. So, involvement is a lot easier than people realize but also there are a lot of great partnerships they can have to maximize their effectiveness in this.

**Dr. Darrell Bock**

Mike and Darlene, I want to thank you for giving us the time to introduce this topic. As you said, we've only scratched the surface. This is the second or third podcast we've done on this topic. As we often do, we will take a look at this, listen to it and rotate back and think about what we should take a tighter look at to help people get a better grasp about what's possible in terms of ministry.

I think the encouraging thing that I've heard today is there are resources and connections that can be made. There are places where people can get help. There are ways to get informed about what can be done. This topic doesn't need to be an intimidating topic where you stay away and just keep it at arm's length and pretend it doesn't exist. There actually is a way to dive in and get some help or find some resources. So, I want to thank you all for making that possible for us.

**Mike Bartel**

Thank you.

**Darlene Line**

Thank you.
We want to thank you for being a part of the table where we discuss issues of God and culture and we look forward to having you back soon.