

From Rejected to Rescued, Horror to Hope

Jesus knew what it was to suffer pain, disgrace and humiliation. He was part of a despised, largely impoverished minority in a world where Roman power and Greek wisdom were the prototypes for what it meant to be human. The writer of Hebrews states clearly that it was suffering that enabled Jesus to fulfill His priestly ministry.

The model for the wounded healer is our Lord Himself, who “was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed” (Isa. 53:5, NKJV). Jesus took the sickness and sorrow of the world into His own person. He did not hold the hurting at a distance; He took their sickness and woundedness into His own soul.

As Jesus followers, we believe that God not only redeems people and makes them new. He will ultimately redeem the earth on that day when He makes everything new (Rev. 21:5).

The Jesus we proclaim is a historical figure, but He is also a living reality who still says and does everything He ever said and did. That is why the writer of Hebrews could say, “Jesus Christ, the same, yesterday, today and forever” (Heb. 13:8).

Finding Freedom From Exploitation

We live in a society where people want to see the metrics, where every program is measured to determine its effectiveness. The ultimate measure of Project Rescue’s strategy is in lives of the thousands of women and children who have received life-changing ministry over the last 25 years. On average, Project Rescue impacts as many as 50,000 women and children each year.

Few outreaches to the victims of sex trafficking have been more effective in rescue and restoration than Project Rescue. That success is rooted in a process that works in every nation and culture. It works because when the gospel is applied to human suffering with love and patience, the gospel is more powerful than any problem people have. It is, as the apostle Paul declared to new believers in ancient Rome, "the power of God unto salvation" (Rom. 1:16b, KJV).

The following stories are of women and children whose lives have been transformed from the unimaginable horror of injustice. It is also the snapshot of a growing network of Project Rescue ministry leaders with their own stories who continue to battle this evil relentlessly. They are passionate and professional, caring and dedicated so that victims of sexual exploitation can experience freedom, healing and empowerment as children of God.

Mather

When Mather was 19, an Italian businessman came to her village in Kenya speaking of a better, more prosperous life on the European continent. Mather was lured to leave the beauty of her country for empty promises. She followed the businessman to Italy, where the man suddenly took her into his own home to live as his "wife," though never making it official. After bearing a son, she pleaded with him to officially marry her, but he refused.

Years passed, and as Mather aged, she began to fall sick and undergo needed surgeries. A new fear set in as she discovered that this man had replaced her by marrying a young woman from the African continent, and she suddenly found herself thrown out and living on the streets. Without legal residency in Italy and without opportunities in her home country, she accepted an invitation from a Muslim businessman to work in Finland. After arriving, she quickly realized the serious danger she was in when the Muslim businessman began

threatening her and forcing her to deliver drugs for his drug trafficking business.

Feeling desperate for a way out, she convinced the man to allow her to leave the house and made her way to a local social work office. Burdened by her story, they contacted the police and formed a plan for her escape. She returned to the home, and while frantically packing her belongings, the front door opened and the man walked in. As dread and fear set in, she heard the sirens in the distance as the police came to rescue her and put an end to the nightmare she was in. A wave of relief washed over her as she was placed in a temporary shelter, but it was short-lived. Overwhelmed and weary, the weight of all the broken promises and shattered hopes and dreams broke her from the inside out.

Later that week, Maureen, a Finnish citizen who was born and raised in Kenya, arrived and took Mather to a Project Rescue aftercare home. As Maureen entered the home, she began to pray words of hope and healing over Mather. Mather felt the Holy Spirit rush over her; she realized Maureen was praying in her mother tongue and began to weep. This marked the beginning of Mather's healing journey, and thankfully it did not end there.

Her heart has been deeply burdened to minister to others who have become trapped in similar situations. She knows the pain and understands the fear and helplessness. As the Lord pieces together Mather's shattered dreams, He is using her to shine a light into places where it feels all other lights have gone out.

Isabella

Isabella was lost in her thoughts, overwhelmed with the situation she found herself in. Blessed with two children but having no income, she struggled to make ends meet and provide for her children. Her thoughts drifted to her sister who lived in Spain; by all appearances, life seemed to be going well for

her.

Isabella's thoughts seemed to spiral every day, leading her to the same decision: "If I move to Spain, I can make a better life for me and my children." So she packed up a few of her belongings, left her children with her mother, and tearfully said goodbye as she set off for Spain.

Upon arriving, Isabella discovered the harsh reality that her sister's "job" was prostitution. Bewildered and disheartened, Isabella left her sister in search of other options by which to survive. She had no other contacts besides her sister, and she was left without a choice but to return to her sister to accept the "job offer."

As her sister took her to the store to buy the clothes she needed to start the job, a sense of helplessness overwhelmed her. Feeling ashamed and deceived, yet left without a choice, Isabella began to "work." Time passed until COVID-19 began flooding the news. Everything shut down, including the club where Isabella worked, and she was forced to move to a 24-hour apartment.

It was at this apartment where the "We Hear Your Voice" detection team met Isabella and intuitively knew that she was being prostituted against her will. Initially, she was fearful to accept their help. However, the team continued to reach out while building trust and giving Isabella "Bags of Hope" filled with food and hygiene products. Eventually Isabella made the decision to take a step forward and accept a place at one of the team's safe homes.

Today, Isabella continues on a healing journey, and her bubbly, lively and fun-loving spirit is shining through. She is currently taking a hairdressing course as well. God is resurrecting His hope within her. No longer helpless and hopeless, Isabella looks to the future with hope and expectation, believing that with God's help and ours, she will

make a beautiful home for herself and her children.

Sonia

Sonia sat wringing her hands as she looked around her single-bedroom home, ashamed of the life she found herself living. Servicing customers had become the only life she was accustomed to living. Her life was a trail of false promises, bitter betrayals and shattered dreams.

It had not always been like this. She had been the innocent little girl with a bright future ahead. Yet this was stripped from her when her mother suddenly died. Her father remarried a woman who seemed to look for every opportunity to inflict pain. She withdrew Sonia from school, deprived her of food, and physically and verbally abused her.

At only 13 years old, Sonia felt she had no other choice than to run away. On her journey, she met a woman who accepted her, took her in and treated her in a way she always longed for since her mother died. She quickly began calling her "mom," and for the first time in many years, she felt loved. Suddenly one day, Sonia learned the bitter truth: The woman's "love" for her was all a lie. She had simply been waiting for the right time to sell Sonia into prostitution. Confused, blindsided and devastated, Sonia's life became a living hell.

Time eroded her hope to escape, and just when she was about to give up, one of her customers promised to help her escape after hearing her story. In the middle of the night, they fled and she began to hope for a future that she had never imagined for herself. Sadly however, her hope was short-lived, as the man was suddenly arrested for unknown reasons, leaving her stranded, homeless and without a way to support herself.

She realized she needed to begin a search to find the only person in the city she knew ... the woman who sold her ... the woman she once thought loved her and whom she called "mom." Exhausted, she found the woman who took her in, yet not

without a cost. Sonia found herself out on the streets, once again being forced to sell her body. And for the years that followed, she lived in this cyclical hell, feeling shamed by the lustful and degrading eyes of men and feeling the abuse of those who physically beat her.

For a moment, she was hopeful life would change when she met a man who proposed and married her. But her life after marriage simply turned into yet another shattered dream as her life in the sex trade continued. After eight long months of trying to block out the haunting sounds and memories of the brothel, Sonia finally escaped and found her way back “home” where she met our Project Rescue team. “I’ve always wanted to live a good life and do good things with my life. I just never had the opportunity to do so,” Sonia tearfully explained.

We met Sonia while pioneering a new Project Rescue ministry, and within a few days of sharing our vision with her, she unofficially began taking on the responsibilities of an outreach worker, going to her fellow “sisters” in the sex trade and offering them, too, a way out through Project Rescue. At the time of writing, Sonia has brought over 40 prostituted women into our program. She is a beacon of hope, helping to pave the way for other women and girls to come out of the trade. On the same streets where she once used to walk as a sex worker, being harassed and treated as nothing, she is now shown respect; she walks with dignity. Her life has been a story of sorrow and tragedy, but God is showing her that He holds the pen and is rewriting it as a story of hope and promise.

Saanvi and Riya

Over 14 years ago, two young girls, Saanvi and Riya, were rescued from slavery and brought to a Project Rescue home. Through the program, they embarked on the journey to restoration and found healing and new life through Jesus Christ. They earned their degrees in counseling and caregiving

and have since reintegrated into society.

Recently, Saanvi and Riya were asked by the government to assist in a rescue operation. Nervous that memories would resurface as a result of this operation, they were hesitant but agreed to help. Their fears were outweighed by their desire that others would experience the same freedom they now had.

Despite their hearts racing and minds full of doubt, Saanvi and Riya walked into the room confidently as the police raided the motel they suspected of trafficking. Their role was to convince the frightened young women and children to come with the police and to provide them comfort and compassion during a very uncertain and traumatic time.

Just as the police were finishing and preparing to leave, the memory of Riya's rescue flooded her mind, and she remembered hiding under the bed until the police found her. She quickly spoke up and insisted that they search under all the beds. As they searched, they found one last young girl.

While walking out of the motel, Saanvi and Riya began counting the number of women rescued. They praised God that because they were able to face their past and set aside their own memories, they were able to be a part of bringing 30 young girls into a life of freedom. They walked up to the officer in charge and asked, "So when is the next rescue scheduled?"

We rejoice with these two girls from our Project Rescue program as they participate in the freedom of others—tangibly and boldly.

David Grant is an Assemblies of God minister who began preaching at the age of 17. He has ministered in over 40 nations. After being exposed to the dark injustice of sexual slavery in Southern Asia, Grant and his wife, Beth, launched Project Rescue in 1997. Project Rescue now reaches almost 30 cities in 10 nations in Southern Asia and Europe. David and

Beth have two daughters and sons-in-law, and four grandchildren.