

# **‘The Fight Will Not Be Easy, but It Will Be Worth It’**

It is a crime against humanity.

Every year millions of women and children fall into the hands of traffickers in their own countries and abroad. Almost every country in the world is impacted by this injustice. In 2012, the International Labor Organization estimated that almost 21 million people worldwide were victims of forced labor and trafficking. Many of them are young women and children, and many are victims of sexual exploitation.

Statistics like these spur a desire to help those trapped in slavery. Unfortunately, it's not an easy task. The abolition arena is filled with well-meaning individuals who have been overwhelmed by the enormity of the issue. But this Aug. 6-8, more than 1,000 abolition advocates learned about the power of perseverance.

At the third annual Exodus Cry Abolition Summit in Kansas City, Missouri, event attendees became equipped with skills and strategies designed to help them persevere and gain ground in the long-term fight against human trafficking.

Founded in 2008, Exodus Cry is a nonprofit organization committed to abolishing sex slavery through Christ-centered prevention, intervention and holistic restoration of trafficking victims. Exodus Cry is best known for its award-winning documentary film, *Nefarious, Merchant of Souls* released in 2011.

In 2015, the organization plans to release its next feature-length documentary about the demand side of the sex industry. *Liberated: The New Sexual Revolution* will reveal undiscovered fronts in the war on human trafficking and unexpected hope for victims around the world.

The 2014 summit included keynote addresses from leaders in the growing movement to abolish sex slavery, including Don Brewster, co-founder of Agape International Missions, an organization that is fighting the war against sex trafficking in Cambodia; Annie Lobert, a human-trafficking survivor and founder of Hookers for Jesus; and Benjamin Nolot, Exodus Cry founder and the director of *Nefarious*. The keynote presentations were enhanced by breakout sessions on public policy, online exploitation, deliverance and filmmaking. Worship sessions were led by prominent worship leaders and musical artists. Throughout all aspects of the event, the resounding theme was perseverance.

According to Brewster, some experts estimate that there are 1.2 million new people entrapped in slavery every year, or one new slave every 15 seconds. He acknowledged that those assessments can be defeating, and he stressed the need for unrelenting love in overcoming the obstacles faced by every abolitionist.

Brewster paraphrased 1 Cor. 13: "An abolitionist without love is nothing but an annoying sound," he said. "Until you experience the love (of God), you won't experience real transformation. When you pay the price to persevere in love, when you sacrifice to do that, then you get to be a part of God's miracle."

Corey Russell, a senior leader at the International House of Prayer in Kansas City, urged attendees to overcome the angst that abolitionists often feel as witnesses to oppression and to embrace the compassion that God is calling them to by becoming people of prayer.

Russell emphasized that the dialogue of prayer—both in speaking to God and in listening for His Heart for others and ourselves—is a critical piece of becoming fully committed to the difficult work of abolition. He also charged attendees to personal holiness, warning them about falling prey to

temptations.

"We have no power in heaven when that which we want to bind has bound us," Russell explained. "This burden started with God, and He has brought you up, into His heart."

Nolot reaffirmed the need for perseverance. He empathized with the feelings of many abolitionists who are immobilized when they become aware of just how big the task is. But Nolot also outlined a healthy picture of an abolitionist.

He recounted two of Moses' battles: one fighting for the freedom of a Hebrew slave and the other standing with his people at the Red Sea awaiting certain slaughter. Nolot noted that while the circumstances were similar, Moses' heart was different. In the first scenario, Moses ran scared. In the second, he stood in faith, transformed by God after his time in the wilderness. Nolot challenged abolitionists to embrace their wilderness season as a time to wait on God and grow in Him, so that when difficulties come, they will be able to persevere.

The Abolition Summit did more than charge attendees with a list of tasks; it provided the formula for maintaining a life in God and fighting the battle against human trafficking until the day when every person is truly free.

While human trafficking remains a global crisis, positive developments in Exodus Cry's departments of Prevention, Intervention and Restoration offer additional motivation to persevere.

Exodus Cry safe homes, or Lighthouses, continue to provide victims with a haven for seeking restoration, and a screening of *Nefarious* on Capitol Hill resulted in new anti-trafficking legislation. In addition, Exodus Cry concluded *Liberdade* this summer. The initiative—designed to bring freedom to the women and children trafficked in Brazil through prayer and outreach—resulted in heightened awareness about sexual

exploitation and the training of Brazilian abolitionists who are now better equipped to fight trafficking in their own country.

“We want to do more than just talk about human trafficking. We want to abolish it,” Nolot noted. “We are making progress, but we can’t do it alone. We need each other, and we need God’s intervention and direction. The fight will not be easy, but it will be worth it.”