

Slavery Today
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One day our grandchildren are going to give us a history exam. How well will you do?

It won't be a test of what we knew about history. It will be a simple question about what we did about history.

It seems that, eventually, history convenes a tribunal of our grandchildren, and they ask us: where were you?

Where were you grandpa, when the Jews were fleeing Nazi Germany and seeking a safe shelter in the world?

Grandmother, where were you when Nelson Mandela was rotting in prison for more than 25 years fighting the apartheid system in South Africa? What did you do? Did you raise your voice?

Over time, there are just a few great dramas of human history which our grandchildren discover with crystal clarity – and they just want to know from us: what did you do?

It's a way of asking: what kind of family do I come from?

And what a glorious thing to be able to look that child straight in eye, and with all humility and gentleness say: well, I just did my part. To say, as my father's generation could say – well, we all did our part, at great cost, to make sure that the forces of good could wade ashore on D-Day and bring the Nazi nightmare to an end.

Or to say, well, all around the world, we raised our voices against the apartheid regime in South Africa and didn't stop until Nelson Mandela walked free.

Indeed, imagine your grandchildren asking: "Grandma, grandpa – where were you when children like me were perfectly safe from the terror of polio, but thousands of the world's poorest kids were crippled by the disease every day?" And how glorious for you Rotarians to say, with all humility and gentleness: "Well, we all just did our part.

We raised our voices and millions of dollars. And we didn't stop until every child was safe from polio.”

And in that moment your grandchild's heart will swell with a quiet joy and pride – because they will have learned something fundamental about goodness, and about the kind of family they come from.

Such an affirmation is all the more powerful because they know that not everybody actually passes the tests of history. Millions, in fact, did nothing to resist the rising Nazi evil. Millions were silent during the apartheid era. Millions closed their eyes and gave not one penny to safeguard children from the terror of polio.

And so it raises the question: what fundamental challenge of history might we be missing right now?

It's impossible to know for sure what will be on our particular history exam – because our grandchildren get to make up the questions from the clarity of their hindsight, not from the confusion of our present day pre-occupations.

But there is one question *I know* will be on the exam because it is the most iconic form of evil in human history – and because in our era, right now, there is more of it than ever.

This will come as a surprise to almost all of us because – like polio – almost all of our families are completely safe from this evil. And our safety actually puts us at great risk of failing this exam because it's likely we have no idea that millions of the world's poorest are victimized by this evil every day.

And that evil is very simply slavery. That's right – this ancient evil by which one human being owns another and uses violence to force them to work – this slavery actually thrives in our world like never before.

If when I say the word slavery you think only of illustrations in dusty books – of Moses freeing the Hebrew slaves in ancient Egypt, or Abraham Lincoln freeing the plantation slaves in America, or old pictures of slaves ships stuffed with human cargo from Africa – you will need to come with me on a journey of discovery that that will turn your world upside down.

There are really just three things that you need to know about modern slavery:

1. It is more vast than ever.
2. It is as brutal as ever.
3. It's more stoppable than ever.

First, slavery is more vast than ever.

This is why I am sure our grandchildren are going to ask us about slavery in our era – because there are more people in slavery now than in any other time in human history.

Experts tell us that there are more than 35 million people held illegally in slavery today. That's roughly the entire population of Canada and 3 times more slaves than were extracted from Africa during 400 years of the transatlantic slave trade.

And the profits are astronomical. Annually, slavery is a \$150 billion dollars business – generating more profit than Apple, Exxon, Chevron, Microsoft, Google and Facebook combined.

Slavery is not a relic of history – it's a larger reality now than ever before.

If our mental image of slavery is a black and white photo from the 19th century – we will need to update it with color for the millions of 21st century slaves laboring, for instance, on agricultural facilities around the world. Or if this is the picture of slavery in our minds, it needs to reflect the millions of slaves trapped by violence in brick factories today. The horrors and degradations of slavery that we learned about as children continue on an even more vast scale today. And of course, children, who in other eras found themselves born into slavery, today likewise find themselves inheriting the yoke of slavery by the millions, as the old violence and humiliation of slavery takes on 21st century forms.

If these realities of modern slavery seem shocking and surreal (and even unbelievable to you), I know exactly how you feel. I'll never forget the first time I met a slave – nearly 20 years ago. A tiny 10 year old girl – just a few years older than my own daughters – who was forced to sit in once place on the floor and roll cigarettes, 7 days a week, 12 to 14 hours a day, year in and year out. Or the time I was conducting an undercover investigation into the child sex trade in Southeast Asia, and found myself in the back room of a brothel where a dozen children between the ages of 5 and 10 years of age were

being sold to foreign pedophiles and sex tourists. After 20 years of working with International Justice Mission, the largest international anti-slavery organization in the world, I can stand before you and assure you that the modern face of slavery is not only real – but it is more vast than ever.

My colleagues and I have met tens of thousands of slaves, by name – and they are on every continent and in hidden away in every country, including my own, and yours.

This is why our grandchildren will one day ask us about it.

The second thing we must know about modern slavery is not only that it is more vast than ever – but also that it just as brutal as ever.

I want to be clear that we are not talking about metaphorical slavery – or harsh working conditions that seem slave-like – or parents putting children to work to help with the family income. We are talking about human beings that are owned by other human beings and are coerced to work by the sheer force of violence. These boys are beaten by their master if they do not comply. These men had their hands cut off when they tried to run away from their owner. There is a steel padlock on the cell where this young woman sleeps, and these slaves are held in a brick factory by terror. The brutality of slavery is real – and the face of those who administer the violence is real as well.

But here is the good news. Remember I said there were three things to know about modern slavery.

1. It's more vast than ever.

2. It's as brutal as ever.

But #3 is this: it's more stoppable than ever.

Why is that?

There are several reasons.

First, for the first time in history slavery is against the law everywhere in the world.

But then why so many millions still in slavery?

The answer is surprisingly simple. Slavery exists on a massive scale in our world today because there are huge swathes of our world where you simply do not get in trouble for enslaving a poor person.

In other words, while there are laws against slavery in every country; there many countries where these laws are simply not enforced – at all.

For instance, in South Asia, statistics show that if you enslave a poor person you are more likely to be struck by lightning than you are to be convicted of your crime.

While slavery exists in every country, it has concentrated itself in a few countries where slave traffickers can freely get away with it. In fact 70% of the world's slaves are in just 10 countries.

It's like the global AIDS epidemic. Every country has an HIV/AIDS problem and every country must have a strategy to address it. But as a global epidemic, the tide was turned when we realized that 70% of HIV transmissions were coming from a handful of countries in sub-Saharan Africa – and the world focused resources and strategies to make dramatic gains in the fight.

This leads to the final reason why slavery is more stoppable than ever. For the first time we are learning how to measure it and we have found the vaccine that stops it.

Imagine how difficult it would be to fight polio if you couldn't count who has it and therefore couldn't measure which vaccine works to reduce it?

This has been the problem with modern slavery. After it became illegal, it became a hidden crime and difficult to measure. But in recent years new techniques have been discovered to measure slavery and now we can increasingly see what interventions work and which do not.

And here is what we have learned. When effective law enforcement is combined with excellent survivor services – slavery rates fall dramatically. At International Justice Mission we have measured this impact many times – with outside auditors documenting reductions in human trafficking of 75% to 86% in just a few short years from communities where it once thrived. Because it turns out that the slave owners are not brave people –and if they think they are going to get caught and sent to jail, they stop doing it.

So what does all of this have to do with you – and this massive, world-wide family of Rotarians?

Well, you, indeed, are a unique force in the world. You bring together a global network of volunteers who dedicate your time and talent to tackle the world's most pressing humanitarian challenges. And look where the world once was in the fight against polio. A perfectly good vaccine existed to stop it – but the world's poorest and most vulnerable were suffering and dying without it. And the rest of the world simply didn't know about the crisis and had not built the capacity to address it. But Rotarians changed everything. You sounded the alarm that woke up the world – and in partnership you raised the resources to make sure everyone got the vaccine.

And today, I believe Rotary is uniquely positioned, once again, to change everything. For the first time ever in human history, there is a generation alive on planet earth that could bring an end to slavery as a force in human affairs. In thousands of years this has never before been possible – but now, on your patch of history, it is. We know what stops slavery, but there are millions of the world's poorest who simply don't have access to the vaccine.

You can change all that. You can sound the alarm. You can rally the political will and the resources to make sure even the poorest are safe from slavery. The forgotten millions who were once living under the terror of polio had no voice – but you lent them your voice, so they were heard and seen. And now millions are safe.

Today another unique moment in history is before you. As Pope Francis and the representatives of the world's great religions recently gathered to pledge to do all in their power to end slavery, they affirmed that “Today we have the opportunity, awareness, wisdom, innovation and technology to achieve this human and moral imperative.”

Likewise, as your own President Ravidran said in a ground-breaking speech on modern slavery at the Carter Center in Atlanta last year: “We are doing away with the idea that human trafficking is something that doesn't happen anymore, or that only happens somewhere else. It is here, and it is now, and it is everyone's responsibility to recognize that.”

Responsibility. That's really what our grandchildren are asking us about with their history quiz – when they ask: “where were you?”

And this is my great hope. That one day, when they ask us: Grandma, grandpa – where were you when millions of the world's poorest were languishing in slavery, in numbers greater than ever.

I hope we can simply say, with gentleness and humility, that we showed up, that we did our part – and together, we changed history, for good.

Thank you very much.