

Break the Chains Bible Study Year 2

Session 1

A Woman in the Crowd

by Joyce Anderson-Reed

Trafficking in women plagues the United States as much as it does underdeveloped nations. Organized prostitution networks have migrated from metropolitan areas to small cities and suburbs.

A woman in the crowd is bleeding.

There are approximately 1 million prostituted women in North America, or 1% of women in North America are involved in prostitution.

A woman in the crowd is bleeding.

A national study shows that 75% of all women used in prostitution were victims of incest and/or physical abuse as children.

A woman in the crowd is bleeding.

Most of those involved in prostitution ran away from home at an early age to escape their abuse...then turn to prostitution as a way of survival

A woman in the crowd is bleeding.

12 is the average age of entry into pornography and prostitution in the United States. 1 out of every three run-aways will be lured into prostitution within 48 hours of leaving home.

A woman in the crowd is bleeding.

Every year a prostituted woman is raped 19 times, kidnapped 10 times, and beaten repeatedly.

A woman in the crowd is bleeding.

Prostituted women getting out of jail have no resources, they feel their only choice is to return to a life they know or where they are accepted.

A woman in the crowd is bleeding.

The process of recovery for a woman leaving prostitution takes two years of very supportive intervention. Women who are trying to leave the sex industry traditionally have the same needs as many battered women.

A woman in the crowd is bleeding.

And a woman, who had been bleeding for 12 years, came and touched the hem of Jesus' cloak, and immediately her bleeding stopped.

(Statistical information from www.VeronicasVoice.org/statistics with permission.)

The Scripture: Read Luke 8:40-48

The Story

This bleeding, Hebrew woman knew what it was like to be isolated in society, to have no self-esteem, to have no favored status within her family. She was an outcast.

When a daughter was born into a Hebrew family at that time, there was great lamenting. For a daughter would not likely fight for Israel, or win the favor of God. At the synagogue where her family worshiped, the rabbi taught that men are favored by God. The men sat in the prominent places in the synagogue. The men studied and read the Torah, the law. Women were prohibited from reading the Torah. If a woman accidentally touched the Torah, it had to be burned because the Torah must be kept pure. The men daily recited the Talmudic prayer which said in part: "Blessed art Thou who did not make me a woman."

A Hebrew woman's purpose in life was to marry and beget children. The father would arrange the marriage. It was only by marriage to an Israelite male that a woman could find completion under the law. She would be expected to listen to and to obey him, for he was the law, the representative of God.

Also, when a young Hebrew girl began menstruation, it was considered to be the bloody, unclean, sinful curse destined by her foremother Eve. In Hebrew the word *niddah* was used, which meant height of defilement—a woman's monthly exile from the human race. Leviticus 15 states all the conditions of uncleanness when a woman begins to bleed. Leviticus 15:25 is of particular interest to our story in Luke: "If a woman has a prolonged discharge of blood not at the time of her menstruation, or if her discharge continues beyond the period of menstruation, her impurity will last all the time of her discharge; she will be unclean as during the period of her menstruation." And verse 27 tells us this: "Whoever touches them will be unclean; he must wash his clothes and bathe with water, and he will be unclean till evening." Therefore, the woman in our text has been bleeding, has been *niddah*, for 12 years. She was an exile from her family, her society, her religious community.

This is a story that sounds all too familiar to a woman trapped in commercial sexual exploitation.

Kristy Childs grew up in an abusive home in Missouri. She kept running away; the social workers kept bringing her back. She was labeled "incorrigible." At twelve years old, she started hitchhiking and prostituted herself to truck drivers in exchange for food and a place to sleep. She was trafficked by truck drivers across the U.S. until she ended up in Denver with a pimp and a heroin addiction. She was arrested and, since she was a minor, sent back home—her abusive home. So she ran away again, this time from Missouri all the way to California. She found another pimp. She says, "By now the labeling of my lifestyle was so powerful that I didn't know what else to be."

She'd heard about Jesus in third grade and had accepted Christ at a church service. Over the years she had called on God for help. Once she prayed, "Let me die, God. If all you made me to be is a whore, just let me die."

Kristy was an exile from her family, her society, and her faith. She considered herself *niddah*.

For a woman who is *niddah*, there comes a point in her life where she must make a crucial choice: will she stay who she is, or will she become someone different? The woman who was bleeding for 12 years had such a choice. She decided to find Jesus. The fact that she had the courage to push through a crowd to touch the hem of a rabbi's garment was amazing. Everyone she brushed up against in that crowd immediately became unclean. According to Jewish Law, her touch even made Jesus unclean. But she was determined to change her circumstances. On the fringes of society, she risked everything to come in contact with Jesus, a man who could perform miracles. At this point, what did she have to lose? Her family has rejected her. If she had been married, her husband has most likely left her. She was unclean to everyone around her. No doctor could present her with a cure. She was doomed to a life of isolation, ridicule, and shame. So with just enough faith to extend her fingertips, to grab one of the tassels sewn on the edge of Jesus' cloak, she reached out . . . and was immediately healed.

Kristy came to a crossroads too. She had had several abortions, some forced on her by her pimp. She was on her way to the hospital for another one. But this time, someone took the time to explain to her what an abortion really was, and she couldn't do it. When she was allowed to listen to the baby's heartbeat, she heard God speak to her: "Have your baby. I'm bringing you out of prostitution!" She got up. She was immediately delivered. Her depression was gone.

With a brush of her fingertips, Kristy touched the hem of Jesus' garment and was immediately healed.

By now Kristy was in her late 30s. Over half of her life had been consumed by sexual exploitation. Changes didn't happen overnight, but even incremental changes are significant when you choose to break the chains of a prostituted life. She had her baby, a son. She was able to get back her daughter that had been taken from her several years earlier. She studied and took the GED. And then her friend Veronica was murdered. Veronica had put her father in jail for abusing her. When she did this, Veronica's mother threw her out of the house, out of her life. To Kristy, Veronica was someone who had had the courage to fight back. And Veronica was also the first real friend she'd ever had. Her death devastated Kristy. But God used Veronica's death to point her in a new direction.

Kristy got counseling. She started going back to church. In 2000, she began a ministry to prostituted women called "Veronica's Voice." She strives to hold on to the peace of Jesus each day. Her work is her passion. Her faith is her stronghold.

She seeks to make a way through the crowd so other bleeding women can touch the hem of Jesus' robe and find healing like she did.

(Kristy Childs shared her testimony at the International Christian Conference on Prostitution, at the Green Lake Conference Center, Green Lake, WI, September 2008. Used with her permission.)

Connecting with the Story

1. Were you aware that trafficking in the U.S. operates on such a huge scale? How did you find yourself responding to some of the opening statistics?
2. Where are you bleeding in your own life? Where do you feel *niddah*?
3. Are you aware of bleeding women in your own family? Your church? Your neighborhood?
4. Kristy's story as a young, abused run-away is more common than we might think. How many kids are reported missing in your community? How many of those are run-aways?
5. Are there pimps prostituting underage girls in your area? How would you find out? What could you do about it?
6. How did you respond to Kristy's story? Were you shocked? Angry? Outraged? Paralyzed? Weeping? Keeping an emotional distance? Identifying too closely? Explain.
7. Would you and the women in your church have the ability to walk the distance beside a woman leaving commercial sexual exploitation for a period of 2-3 years? What could you do to be better equipped to minister in this area if God connected you with a trafficked woman?

How do we assist trafficked, prostituted women to touch the hem of Jesus' robe?

- Don't judge.
- Maintain a ministry of presence.
- Be compassionate.
- Love unconditionally.
- Educate your church and community about the issues surrounding sex trafficking in the U.S.
- Learn if there are organizations in your area that provide safe havens for trafficked women.

Websites focusing on trafficking in the U.S.

- www.VeronicasVoice.org
- www.ProtectionProject.org
- www.PolarisProject.org

Joyce Anderson-Reed is an American Baptist missionary in La Paz, Baja California Sur, Mexico. She and her husband David work in partnership with the Mexican Baptist Convention of South Baja. Joyce has attended the International Consultations on Prostitution held at the Green Lake Conference Center, Green Lake, Wisconsin, and has a passion for this ministry.