

'My heart broke for them'

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Green resources churches, individuals in the fight to end human trafficking

After working overseas for 25 years as one of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship's field personnel among unreached people groups, **Nell Green** confesses that her initial desire was to leave the issue of ending human trafficking to more able missions workers.

But when she landed in Houston, Texas, to start the next phase of her ministry, Green says her calling was unavoidable. With an international port, interstate corridor, airport and political border, Houston is a prime location for human trafficking, in which individuals are illegally traded for the purpose of forced sex or manual labor. One in four victims of sex trafficking passes through Houston at some point.

"I told God that I had seen enough hunger. I had seen enough poverty. I had seen enough injustice and hate," Green said. "But the bottom line is that we are supposed to be addressing the things that break God's heart. And God's heart is broken by what we do to people and by the fact that we as Christians let it happen. I don't want to waste another day."

According to the International Labour Organization's global report, approximately 2.4 million people are victims of human trafficking worldwide — a \$30 billion industry. Hundreds of thousands of these victims are in the United States.

This year at a popular Houston shopping mall, two teenage girls befriended a pair of young men and agreed to accompany them on a beach trip to the West Coast. Upon arriving in California, the girls were sold into the local sex trade and only rescued after law enforcement located their cell phones by GPS. Across town at the base of an overpass, immigrant workers line the roads daily awaiting a ride from would-be employers, many of whom deny pay, leaving workers with only a growing debt and fear for their family's safety. In a growing trend within

Houston high schools, female students are trafficked by their boyfriends, who profit from a thriving teenage sex market.

"The face of human trafficking is right here in the United States," Green said. "It's your average teenager. It's your typical day laborer. It's the people you see every single day and assume their lives are just like yours. But they're not."

Green works primarily toward education, prevention and legal remedy in partnership with local and national organizations. Green also spends her days frequenting local human trafficking hubs and raising awareness among college students, who are eager to see the true face of trafficking and respond to injustice.

She feels an inescapable call to equip local churches, which, burdened with the injustice that surround them, began to request her help in mobilizing their congregations against human trafficking. As a result, Green developed "Getting Started in Addressing Human Trafficking," a guide through which churches can:

- Offer an "Introduction to Slavery" semi-

nar, learning from CBF field personnel about human trafficking and how the church can respond.

- Utilize prayer guides and initiatives as the congregation discerns God's call.
- Educate youth, who are on the front lines of the battle against human trafficking due to potent purchasing power and proximity to potential victims.
- Educate the congregation with films, dramatizations or testimony from a trafficking victim.
- Get involved with organizations and legislation fighting to end human trafficking.

"I've been to Thailand and seen the girls. I've been to North Africa and seen the factories. I've seen the little boys put on the street in Senegal. I've watched the six and seven-year-old girls tying knots for rugs. And it never occurred to me that I could do anything about it," Green said. "But when I finally realized how much I could have done and how little I did, my heart broke for them all over again."

By contributing writer Blake Tommey



Youth from Calder Baptist Church in Beaumont, Texas, raised \$600 to purchase jogging suits, underwear and flip flops, which were given to the Houston Police Department for distribution to women and girls who are possible victims of trafficking.

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