

# THE GREAT COMMANDMENT

**Our world is broken and filled with heartbreak, suffering and despair. This brokenness is particularly evident in the red-light community in Kolkata where my wife and I live. We, along with a team of passionate and inspirational people, work in a business that provides alternative employment for women involved in the sex trade and that is committed to sharing the message of Christ in a holistic manner.**

The red-light area in our community is home to over 10,000 women and girls who, for a variety of complex and heartbreaking reasons, have found themselves caught in lives of sexual exploitation, violence and abuse. Bina\* came to work for our business eleven years ago, and her story reflects the heartbreaking reality of life for many of the women in our community.

Bina was the eldest in her family of twelve, and lived in a rural area of West Bengal. She liked a local boy and hoped to marry him when she was old enough, but when she was only thirteen, her mother forced her to marry an older man.

A few months later, she was sent out by her mother-in-law to work in a nearby field. A group of boys (around Bina's age) were waiting for her there and they told her that she had been sold to them. "Then," Bina said, "they had their way with me."

Soon after this, Bina was sold to someone in Kolkata. She was taken to a noisy, crowded

part of town, to a house where men were constantly coming and going. Bina didn't understand what was going on at first, but soon did: her life in the sex trade had begun.

In Matthew 28, Jesus says, "Go and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you." But given all that has gone on in the lives of the women here in Kolkata's largest red-light area, how exactly do you do that?

How do we disciple women who have been raped, abused and treated as a commodity? Many of the women we journey with don't want to speak to us about second chances because they feel that they don't deserve them. Bina described herself as having been corrupted after her first night of being prostituted, and we have spoken to many women who told us, "I don't deserve what you are offering." How do we disciple someone who has been told that she is worthless, and is convinced that she really is?

How do we bring hope, healing, transformation and beauty to women who are sick? Most of the women we work with have chronic illnesses that impact their daily lives; many have HIV/AIDS. Lots of them, because of years of emotional, physical and sexual abuse, struggle with depression, self-harm and various addictions. How do we draw women who are battered and broken emotionally, physically and spiritually into a deep life-giving relationship with Jesus?

How do we draw women into deeper relationship with Jesus when their lives often continue to be a struggle? Just because a woman has left the sex trade and has come to know Jesus Christ, it doesn't mean that her problems instantly disappear. Many of the women we share life with continue to struggle with bad relationships and abusive husbands. Their physical health often never comes right, and many have to go on dealing with the deep emotional wounds from the suffering inflicted upon them in their life in the sex trade.

Again, how do we disciple in this context? The short answer is – we love.

A dear friend and mentor of mine recently expressed concern that we, as Christians, are often more worried about the Great Commission than we are about the Great Commandment. Jesus said, in the book of John, that "everyone will know you are My disciples if you have love for one another". The Great Commandment is the call to love God and love our neighbour, and it is out of this deep and humble love for God, and a deep and humble love for our neighbour, that we must disciple.



Discipleship, in our community, is about loving and knowing people, walking with them through the good and bad of life and never giving up on those we are called to serve, regardless of how hard it gets. It is about prophetically calling people into a new life-giving way of loving themselves, loving those around them and loving God. And it is about letting ourselves be discipled by those around us, learning from them and receiving from them the things that they have to offer us.

Discipleship, in our community, is going together, in love, on a new journey toward God. And this plays out in the lives of the women we work with in awe-inspiring ways.

After starting work in our business, Bina was determined to leave the sex trade. That is exactly what she did after receiving her first pay cheque, and she has never looked back. When Bina speaks about her life now, she says, "I come to work with my head held high. I have given up the line – I have freedom."

Bina has an incredible love for God which has healed her and transformed her life. In the same lanes where she used to be enslaved, you can still find Bina, sitting with girls still trapped in lives of sexual exploitation, patiently listening to their stories and lovingly offering them a message of hope.

Bina says, "I am now an advocate for [our business], letting women in the sex trade know that there is the possibility of another life where they can be free from prostitution."

Through the opportunity to leave the sex trade



by being part of a community built on love, trust and hope that is centred on Jesus, and through hearing the message of Jesus spoken in truth and acted out in love, Bina has been discipled into a new creation. She is now discipling the people around her, including me, in profound and beautiful ways. In Bina I see someone who loves Jesus, and who exhibits what it means to be a disciple of Jesus.

It is the work that God has done in the life

of Bina that gives me hope and inspires our community to continue to be Jesus' hands and feet in the lives of the women both in our community and the community of those still trapped in the sex trade. May Bina's story also inspire and challenge you to do the same in the lives of the people you are called to disciple. ☺

*Dan and Mai are Kiwi Partners and have a baby son named Bobby.*

\* Name has been changed