

**AN ENCOURAGING WORD FOR TROUBLING TIMES #106** (by Rev. Dr. Alice Wolfe,  
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**“The Above-Ground Railroad”**

In the early 1800’s, a network of people risked and sometimes gave their lives to help Freedom Seekers (men, women, and children who had run away from their slave masters) flee the horror of slavery in the South and escape to freedom in the North (particularly Canada, the “Promised Land”). This network of people became known as the Underground Railroad. “Agents” helped the Freedom Seekers know where to go and who would help them at the next stop. “Conductors” helped guide people to safety. Some people opened their homes as “stations,” safe places where the Freedom Seekers could hide, rest, and eat along the long journey. The Underground Railroad had many “lines” (routes) to help Freedom Seekers from so many different places find their way to freedom. The brave participants of the Underground Railroad helped (an estimated) 40,000 to 100,000 men, women, and children make their way to freedom!

Unfortunately, we still have many people in slavery today. Men, women, youth, and children are enslaved in domestic servitude, sex trafficking, forced labor, bonded labor, child labor, forced marriage, and all kinds of human trafficking. Many people of color have been unjustly imprisoned for crimes they didn’t commit or were sentenced to long prison terms for minor crimes—and they are forced to labor for others. Still others are enslaved in poverty and pervasive discrimination because of laws and practices and prejudices in this country that discriminate against people of color. MILLIONS of people around the world are still seeking freedom today, and they need people to help them.

Maybe it’s time to bring the Underground Railroad above ground... and establish “The Above-Ground Railroad” (not to be confused with actual trains that run on railroad tracks above ground). What might happen if men and women across our nation today worked openly (not in hiding like the Underground Railroad) together to create an intentional, strategic network to help men, women, and children find their way to freedom? In the same manner people helped in different ways in the Underground Railroad, people would help in different ways in The Above-Ground Railroad. Some churches and communities already provide “safe houses” for people to escape from human trafficking and abuse, but we need more. Some groups and agencies work very hard to end human trafficking, but they can’t do it alone. We need more “safe houses” and “safe places” where Freedom Seekers can find rest, support, and help. We need “conductors” to help guide people to safety. We need “agents” to help the Freedom Seekers know who can help them and where to go for help. Some abolitionists speak out against slavery in our world today, but we need more—and we need many more to rally together to help abolish unjust laws and practices that promote discrimination. We need thousands (or millions) of people to (in some way or other) stand up for what is right and stand up against the injustices. The journey will not be easy, and it will require bravery, risk, and sacrifice. Why would anyone (why would you) consider being part of an Above-Ground Railroad? Because God calls his children to help the oppressed and fight for the rights of those who have none. God reminds us through the Prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 1:17, NLT):

***“Learn to do good. Seek justice. Help the oppressed. Defend the cause of orphans. Fight for the rights of widows.”***

God calls us to love others as ourselves, to love and treat others as we want to be loved and treated, to seek justice and stand up against injustice, and to help the oppressed and those who have no voice. Why? Because God is love and just. God loves and wants all of his children to be free—not only in this world, but for all eternity. That is why Jesus came—to sacrifice his life on the cross so all people may be forgiven and set free from their sins—so people may have new life here and everlasting life in heaven (the true Promised Land). As we follow our “Conductor,” Jesus, in living lives of love and justice, we point people to God and hopefully help them find freedom and new life in him. The roles we play in the Above-Ground Railroad (how we love, seek justice, and make sacrifices) will vary from person to person, but the ultimate destination is the same—helping people make it to and find freedom in the Promised Land find freedom! How is God calling you to be a part of the Above-Ground Railroad?

**PRAYER:**

God of love and justice, thank you for loving us unconditionally and sending Jesus to pave the way for our path to freedom from sin. Forgive me for all the times I have been part of or ignored injustices. Open my eyes and ears that I may truly see those who are enslaved and hear their cries for help. Give me your courage and help me to live a life of love and justice. Help me know how you want me to help and be willing to do so... Amen.

**LIVE IT!**

Pray and ask how God wants you to live Isaiah 1:17, then do it!