

Freedom

Have you ever sat and pondered the lyrics to the song God Bless America? I love when it's sung at the park on the 4th of July. I get emotional as I put my right hand across my heart, close my eyes, and think of all the soldiers who fought wars so that I could live free. I think about living in America, where I have religious freedoms. I don't take for granted the lives lost, laid down fighting a war they may or may not have understood or believed in. With Memorial Day just passed and the 4th of July coming this week, I am especially aware of the precious men and women who paid the ultimate price for America to remain "the land of the free." And what I am also aware of is there is a vast difference between political freedoms and spiritual freedoms.

The reality is, while I live in a land of freedoms, I don't always live free. I find myself enslaved to sin, in bondage to unhealthy life choices, and chained to a past that doesn't allow me to move forward.. You see, what political freedoms provide is a land of freedom, what Jesus provided in His death and resurrection is a life of freedom. Freedom from sin, freedom from bondage, freedom from slavery to the law (Galatians 5:1). To know and live in the freedom that Jesus provides is to know and experience true freedom.

Jesus tells the Pharisees what true freedom is (John 8:31) Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

Jesus invites us into a relationship with Him so that we can know Truth and live free. Jesus is Truth. It isn't what He does; it's who He is. If you want to experience true freedom, repent, give your life to Jesus, and follow Him. Read scripture and obey it! James 1:22 - 25 is clear about what happens when we hear scripture but do not obey. It's also very clear about the freedom that comes when we intently read and obey scripture.

Let's seek God together and discover His truth, obey His truth, and live a life of freedom in Christ.

Week 1

Talking to God

Ask God to reveal anything in your life that is not beneficial or has mastered you. And then ask Him to reveal to you who your neighbor is and how to love them like yourself.

Going Deeper

Galatians 5:13-14

You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love.

For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

1 Corinthians 6:12

“I have the right to do anything,” you say—but not everything is beneficial. “I have the right to do anything”—but I will not be mastered by anything.

These two truths in scripture are what we are to do with our freedom.

We do not use it for our own selfish indulgences or allow ourselves to be mastered by anything. How many times have you heard or have you said, “I have a right to ...?” I often used to say, “I have a right to say what I want. It’s true, and therefore I have the right to say it.” It’s always in those moments that I needed to stay silent and guard close to my heart what I thought I had the right to say. It’s never been beneficial and usually has been led by selfish motives. I don’t want to be mastered by my rights, I want to be surrendered to God’s will. We give up our rights (our will) when we follow Jesus. Our freedom is in Christ, and our freedom is fully experienced when we serve one another humbly in love. When we get our eyes off ourselves and onto Jesus and the people (our neighbors), He brings us to love and serve. It’s at that moment when we will experience true freedom.

Jesus tells us who our neighbor is in the story of the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29–37) Jesus is responding to the lawyer’s second question and his attempt to tell Jesus who he would like his neighbor to be. I wonder if the lawyer was hoping Jesus would tell him to look in the mirror and that his neighbor would look like, act like, believe like, and worship just like him. Jesus actually told him the complete opposite. He told him to go and love everyone around him, regardless of their ethnicity or socioeconomic status. Your neighbor is anyone standing next to you, period. Engage them, be kind to them, love them as yourself. Give them the best of you and hold nothing back.

Take Action

This is two-fold. Begin every day by declaring to God that you lay down your rights to follow His will and then ask Him who you can love today and how that might look. It might be sitting with someone who is alone at the park and engaging them in conversation. It might be buying a meal for a homeless person and sitting with them and talking to them while they eat. It might be having a conversation with your next door neighbor and asking if they need prayer for anything. Maybe it’s as simple as buying coffee for the person behind you at the coffee shop. Whatever it is, be led by the Spirit and love them like yourself.

Week 2

Talking to God

Invite God into every area of your finances. Don't let being unemployed keep you from talking to God about finances. There is financial freedom in His truth.

Going deeper

God knew we would have to choose between our devotion to money or our devotion to Him. We can't serve two masters (Matthew 6:24)

As with everything, Jesus talks about money to reveal the heart of man (Matthew 6:21). He knows that our relationship with money can prevent us from fully trusting Him. If we are pursuing money, then we are not pursuing God.

How many times have you made an idol out of what God has given you? That job you wanted so desperately. Do you find yourself working and working and still coming up short? Still, wanting more? No matter how big the paycheck, it doesn't seem enough, so we put in more hours, work hard for a promotion, and maybe get a side job - and still not satisfied with the wealth it brings? Ecclesiastes 5:10 speaks to how meaningless it all is. The pursuit of the American Dream. How many people come to the land of the free and find themselves buried in debt or in despair because the dream is unattainable?

Let's live generous lives. Love extravagantly, give freely, and be led by the Holy Spirit with all we pursue. Money, finances - it's a blessing from God to be used for the furthering of the Gospel and His kingdom. Yes, He wants his children to be blessed, but not obsessed with the blessing. Let God bring the increase. He is trustworthy, so let's trust Him with our finances.

Take Action

Tithe, it's that simple. Give God back what is rightfully His and give with a cheerful heart, reminding your soul that you are completely dependent on God because He is trustworthy. Can I encourage you to prayerfully tithe, meaning, don't look at your paycheck and use a calculator to determine what a tenth of your check is? Rather, invite God into your finances and ask Him how much you should give.

Week 3

Talking to God

Ask God to help set you free from your past and reorient your life around the truth of God.

Going deeper

Philippians 3:13-14

Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us.

I don't know about you, but sometimes our past is hard to forget. Sometimes the sins committed against us or through us hold us captive, and we live as slaves to what was done to or through us instead of what was done for us at Calvary.

I think of Paul's life before God's glory interrupted him on the way to Damascus. His name was Saul, and he brutally persecuted Christians, threw them in prison, and violently killed them. Then Jesus. Then Jesus. We all need a "Then Jesus" moment. Where His glory falls on us, and we are blinded to who we were, and the trajectory of our life is forever changed by one encounter with Truth.

Saul abandoned his life as a Pharisee and followed Jesus. He left his heathen, violent, persecuting friends and following Jesus. Jesus called him by a new name - Paul.

I love that Paul writes, "I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do; forgetting what is behind..." (Philippians 3:13) He sets the stage that he is a work in progress; He isn't perfect. A disciple of Jesus is saying to himself I am a work in progress, and the one thing he does is he forgets his yesterdays so he can stay focused on the upward call - Jesus. Paul is encouraging us not to get distracted by our yesterdays, our past failures, our mistakes.

But rather, "strain (force yourself) and press on (determined and hurried) towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." .

Take Action

Assess your life. What parts of your life do you need to leave behind so that you can fully, completely, and with full devotion follow after Jesus and walk into freedom? If there are major things you need to walk away from, talk to your pastor. You do not have to do this alone!

Week 4

Talking to God

Ask God to reveal any areas in your life where you may need healing and reconciliation.

Going Deeper

Colossians 1: 21-23

Through Christ we are reconciled, without blemish and free from accusation. Are there areas in our lives where we still need healing? 2 Corinthians 5: 17 says that "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation: old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new." Are we still holding on to past hurts, abuse, or unforgiveness? I encourage you to ask God to

reveal the areas that need healing and reconciliation. When we hold on to those things, we do not allow ourselves to live in the true freedom God has called us to. Asking those questions is not easy, working through them is even harder, but we serve a God whose name is healer, reconciler, forgiver and transformer. You are not alone, God is willing, eager to help you, if you would be brave enough to ask. Would we allow God to work through the hurt, pain, and despair in our lives, in order to freely run with him.

Take Action

Ask God the hard questions, be vulnerable with him and allow him to uncover the areas in your life you need healing from. God has given you a home at Upward Call Church, there are Elders and leaders willing to pray with you and help walk you out of bondage and into freedom.