

Freedom is a driving force in our world today. Refugees desire freedom from oppression. Addicts desire freedom from their "drug of choice". Some people desire freedom from weight gain, others from a conflict laden relationship and most people want freedom from their employer in the form of retirement. For the believer in Christ Jesus, there should be a great desire to be free from those attitudes and actions which are not reflective of the character of Christ in our lives. Spiritual growth can be defined as moving closer to Christ like behaviour in thought and deed. There are times in our lives when we get stuck on a character trait(s) that does not reflect Jesus, our spiritual growth is stalled and we are not free. It is possible for those who have accepted Christ as their Saviour to still display anger, bitterness, rage, jealousy, envy, exhibit control issues, addictive behaviours of overeating, abuse of alcohol and drugs, pornography, chronic complaining, negativity, gossip and lying. (Ephesians 4:25-30) The goal of this series is to help you move past behaviours and attitudes that are not reflective of Christ and His Church and move you towards genuine freedom. Freedom is journey not a destination. Each day we will make choices that bind us or free us. As you participate in your small group life and also do the personal study at home, the Holy Spirit will guide you into all freedom. "Whom the Son sets free is free indeed" (John 8:36)

1. What are the ways you have seen in society whereby people try to experience freedom? Are some of them healthy, unhealthy? Please list the ways people try to be free.
2. A driving philosophy in society is that to be free one must find their true self. It states that every obstacle, heartache and trial drives you deep inside and it is there you will find truth and freedom. This philosophy is summed up in Taylor Swift's latest video Out of the Woods (about a failed relationship) when it declares: "She lost him, but she found herself, and somehow that was everything."

Discuss:

- a. How has "finding yourself" become the driving force in society today? Discuss how this philosophy taking root in the world around you, and maybe (inadvertently) even in your own life.
 - b. READ: **Luke 9:24**. In what way is this verse contrary to the philosophy discussed above?
3. What do you think it is in our nature (character, personality) that seems to be determined to improve ourselves or do self development on our own?
 4. READ: **Luke 18:18-23**. Discuss:
 - a. What did Jesus ask this wealthy young business man to do?
 - b. Why do you think this was so hard to do for this nice young man?

- c. Discuss this statement: This scripture is not about money, it's about giving up control.
 - i. How was giving away his money, giving up control of his life?
 - ii. How did Jesus equate following him with the young man's need for control?
- d. **FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION ONLY:** What is an area of your life in which you would find it hard to give over control of that to Jesus? Please take just a moment to think about this before you move on to the next question.
- e. Discuss: How do you think that people feel in control of their lives by being angry, gossiping, living in fear, abusing food, alcohol or drugs?
- f. In what ways do you see this false sense of control that people feel is really a lie?

COMMENT: The first step toward freedom and spiritual maturity is the step of acceptance. Acceptance is an acknowledgement that I am powerless to find the answers to life's questions by looking inside myself. This is true for believers and followers of Christ as well as non believers. Acceptance is an acknowledgement that my life, or areas of my life have become unmanageable (anger, temper, fearfulness, timidity, negativity, complaining, substance abuse, etc.) Acceptance requires an understanding that I cannot grow to be like Christ on my own, on my own terms or in my own way.

- 5. **READ THE FOLLOWING VERSES: Jeremiah 10:23** (New Revised Standard Version) **Psalms 38:4** (NIV) **Romans 7:15-25** (The Living Bible) *these versions can be found on line at www.biblegateway.com*
 - a. In what ways do these verses sum up the human condition, and even the condition of followers of Jesus?

- 6. Discuss the following statement:

*PEACE GROWS IN DIRECT PROPORTION TO MY ACCEPTANCE;
MISERY GROWS IN DIRECT PROPORTION TO MY DENIAL*

What do you think this statement means in light of today's study?

STOP LOOKING IN AND START LOOKING UP

Pray this week that the Holy Spirit would touch your mind in such a way that you could come to realize an area of your life where you are trying to control and not accepting what is really there. Pray for awareness and insight into who you really are. Pray for the ability to accept life as it is, not as you wish it to be. For this is the first step in the Journey to Freedom.

The gospel that calls us out of the woods of sin and brokenness rewrites those final lines from Taylor Swift's music video.

*"She lost herself.
But she found **Him**.
And somehow that was everything."*

Please pray this prayer out loud as a group:

The Serenity Prayer

God grant me the serenity
To accept the things I cannot change;
Courage to change the things I can;
And wisdom to know the difference.

Living one day at a time;
Enjoying one moment at a time;
Accepting hardships as the pathway to peace;
Taking, as He did, this sinful world
As it is, not as I would have it;
Trusting that He will make all things right
If I surrender to His Will;
So that I may be reasonably happy in this life
And supremely happy with Him
Forever and ever in the next.
Amen.

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Encouraging Scriptures:

2 Corinthians 12:9

John 15:5

For personal Bible study this week:

Read Romans 10:1-4 (you could do a question per day if you like)

1. What does Paul mean when he says they sought to establish a righteousness of their own?
2. In Paul's time, circumcision was mistakenly thought to establish righteousness. What religious or non religious rituals do people use to establish their own righteousness?
3. Based on this scripture what is the righteousness that God approves of?
4. Have you trusted in the participation of religious rituals to establish righteousness? If so which ones?
5. Read Ephesians 2:8-10. Based on this scripture what is God's basis for our forgiveness.

Scripture resources: Romans 5:6

Ephesians 5:7

Ephesians 4:32

Ephesians 2:4-5

Titus 3:3-5