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Emmanuel

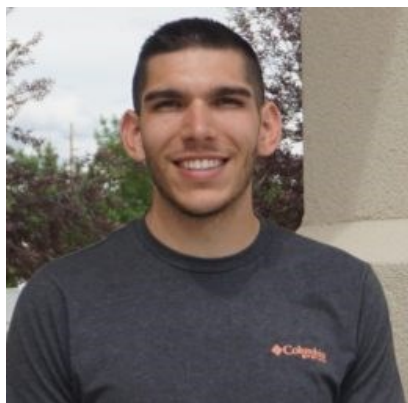
21 Day Challenge Devotional Guide

21 Days

Freedom in Christ

By

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Trey Haidle Joined our staff July 2020 as the Student Ministry Director but was not new to Emmanuel.

Trey's family has attended Emmanuel for many years and was part of our youth group growing up. Prior to coming on staff, Trey attended Moody Bible Institute in Chicago IL where he studied Biblical Studies and played basketball. Trey finished his education at Moody by interning at Emmanuel January 2020 and graduated that May.

Trey has a passion for youth and a desire to see them grounded in their faith and cultivating a vibrant relationship with the Lord. He has an innate ability to connect with students and develop strong relationships as well as loves the opportunity to evangelize through sports.

In his free time, you will find him playing any sport available or spending time in the outdoors with his friends.

Introduction

The definition of freedom according to the Oxford English Dictionary is, “*The power or right to act, speak, or think as one wants without hindrance or restraint.*” More often than not, this is how freedom is understood, to do whatever we want whenever we want to do it. There is a desire that is deep within us to be free to act in accordance to our will and our will only.

Unfortunately, when freedom is understood as doing what our heart desires, then becoming a follower of Jesus Christ has the perception of forfeiting freedom. However, as Jesus teaches, there is always a master over us. It’s either sin or Christ. A. W. Tozer reaffirms the reality that we live under a master in *The Pursuit of God*:

“Anyone who might feel reluctant to surrender his will to the will of another should remember Jesus’ words, ‘Everyone who sins is a slave to sin.’ We must of necessity be a slave to someone, either to God or to sin. The sinner prides himself on his independence, completely overlooking the fact that he is the weak slave of the sins that rule his members. The man who surrenders to Christ exchanges a cruel slave driver for a kind and gentle Master whose yoke is easy and whose burden is light.”

We are either enslaved to sin or a servant of Jesus. The outcome of the two masters are night and day, and only one leading to freedom. As Galatians 5:1 says, “For freedom Christ has set us free.”

This 21-day study will be spent looking at what the Bible has to say regarding freedom. In contrast to the definition in the first paragraph, I believe that freedom is not lost when becoming a follower of Jesus, but can only be found in Jesus. My prayer for this devotional is that freedom will be found in Christ Jesus. *To be bound to Christ is to be free.*

Day 1

Introduction: At some point in their life, every kid tries to hide the evidence of an accident or a mistake they made by simply covering it up. They believe if the evidence is covered up and out of sight, they are free from that mistake. But as the song from Tangled goes, “Mother knows best.” The mom of the house always knows what has happened, even if it has been covered up. Simply because a kid covers up an accident does not mean they are free from it or its consequences. It is not until the mom has forgiven her kid that they are free. And we all know the type of freedom that comes when your parent looks you in the eyes and forgives you. Honestly, our sin condition is a close parallel.

Acts 13:36-39

“For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep and was laid with his fathers and saw corruption, but he whom God raised up did not see corruption. Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, **and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses.**”

Think about it: For thousands of years, sin was dealt with by sacrifices according to the law of Moses; however, these animal sacrifices were only to cover the sin of man temporarily until Jesus paid the ultimate debt. Freedom, like that of a parent forgiving their child, was not experienced in full until Jesus died for the sin of the world. As Paul writes in verse 39, “everyone who believes is freed from everything from which he could not be freed.” There is no more need to “cover it up.” We know freedom is not found through concealing sin, but that there is freedom in confessing your sin to the one who is faithful to forgive all sin! God has already paid the debt for our sin, and all we have to do is give them up to him through confession. He is faithful to forgive every sin.

Take away: Freedom is not found by covering sin up, but by confessing our sin.

Personal reflection: When was a time that you confessed your sin and experienced freedom? Is there sin in your life you are still just trying to “cover up?”

Day 2

Introduction: There are times animals act in a way that is completely and utterly baffling. One scenario that has resulted in horses frequently responding in an unfortunate way is barn fires. There are multiple accounts when a horse is freed from a burning barn, but instead of running out of the fire, they just run back into the barn from where they were just freed. If we are being honest, we relate to that horse to some degree. How many of us continue to run to the same sins that Jesus has already freed us from?

Galatians 5:1, 5:4-6

“For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery... You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace. For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.”

Think about it: In Galatians 5, Paul is addressing the misconception that we are justified (saved) by grace through faith but sanctified (on-going change of heart to look more like Jesus) by our own doing. Paul is arguing that we are justified by grace through faith, and a continuation of that is to be sanctified by grace through the Spirit. At the heart of the issue, Paul is saying that God is changing us from the inside out, not the outside in. Paul would address this in verse 6, “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision (works of the law) counts for anything, but only faith working through love.” It is almost a default for us to believe our works are what bring us closer to God, but that has never worked and never will work. It’s faith alone in Jesus Christ.

Take away: God wants us to be free people.

Personal reflection: What would it look like to stand firm in freedom through Christ in your daily life?

Day 3

Introduction: Certainty is freeing. Think about the way uncertainty can take your mind captive if you are not careful. Anxiety can creep up when your future is uncertain and shaky. What if you are uncertain if you are loved? There is a certain type of bondage and weight that comes for a child who doesn't know if their parents love them. They believe they are responsible to earn that love. However, compare that child to the one who is continually reaffirmed by their parents that they are loved and are proud. That certainty of love is freeing. Many believers are living like they must earn the love of Jesus, much like the first child. Jesus wants you to be certain about his love and about your future.

1 John 5:13-15

“I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life. And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him.”

Think about it: 1 John is called the “love book.” It emphasizes God’s love for us over and over again, and then commands us to share that love to others. John says the whole purpose of 1 John is so “you may know that you have eternal life.” The disciple John, who walked with Jesus for years, wants you to know that you have eternal life when you believe in the name of Jesus. That is absolutely freeing! There are so many people who are living their life right now just hoping to be good enough, or that their good outweighs their evil to go to heaven. It is like the child who is trying to earn their parents’ love. We know our good will never outweigh our sin, it is only through Jesus alone we are saved, and we can be confident in our future through Jesus.

Take away: You can be certain of your future through Jesus Christ.

Personal reflection: Do you still live in fear of your future or your relationship with Christ? If so, what are you fearful of?

Day 4

Introduction: Have you ever heard the phrase “only God can judge me?” It is oftentimes said in correlation to rebellion. Especially within the music world, and particularly rappers, the phrase “only God can judge me” is being used frequently. Just go to a music platform like Spotify or Apple Music and search “only God can judge me” and see what comes up. In actuality, for the nonbeliever, this phrase is one of the most bone chilling statements. However, for the one who has placed their faith in Jesus, it is liberating. Here is Paul’s take on the phrase “only God can judge me.”

1 Corinthians 4:1-5

“This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful. But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. In fact, **I do not even judge myself.** For I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore, do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God.”

Think about it: There is a difference between evaluating your life and placing a judgment on your life. It is healthy to be continually evaluating your actions and what your motives are behind your actions. However, many of us actually judge ourselves more than we do evaluate. Oftentimes the judgments that we pronounce upon ourselves go something like this: “God can’t heal and use someone as broken as me,” or “I have sinned one too many times to be forgiven.” Yet the only judge’s opinion that matters is God’s and his judgment to his followers is “JUSTIFIED.” God sees you as righteous, not through your actions, but because Jesus is righteous! God is in the business of using broken people to fulfill his will, regardless of whether or not you see yourself as worthy.

Take away: You are who God says you are.

Personal reflection: Do you ever find yourself refraining from serving the Lord because you are worried about others’ judgment on you or even your own self-judgment?

Day 5

Introduction: Disney makes some of the best movies known to mankind. It doesn't matter if you are a 2-year-old girl or an 80-year-old man, you can enjoy a Disney movie. However, Disney movies always end just a little bit too soon. The vast majority of Disney movies end with a wedding. Even though the wedding is a climax, it is never the end of the story. That is just where the story begins. In our story of freedom, salvation is just the beginning! Unfortunately, like many Disney movies, we cut our story of freedom short, limiting our understanding of freedom to the moment of salvation only. However, the story of the rest of our life is finding out what that freedom is like and experiencing it in every area of our lives.

Romans 6:20-23

“For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. **But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life.** For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Think about it: Freedom from the bondage of sin that once held you captive is just the start. Sanctification, the ongoing work of God in the believer's life, is just a continuation of experiencing freedom from sin. After Jesus has set you free, and only then, will you experience freedom from addictions and sin that once enslaved you. At the end of the wait is glorification, when you spend eternity with God. At the end of time is when that freedom becomes sight.

Take away: Freedom is an ongoing experience for the believer.

Personal reflection: Are you seeing freedom from sin in your life right now? What are you continuing to see freedom from and what is one area of your life that you want to see freedom grow?

Day 6

Introduction: Have you ever been so grieved by something you said or did that you had trouble sleeping at night? Peter absolutely had one of those experiences after he denied Jesus three times. Think about how much his heart must have hurt to look Jesus in the eyes and promise that he would always follow him, just to deny knowing Jesus three times that same night. His actions must have eaten at him even after the resurrection. I'm sure Peter was puzzled how he could have fallen away from his promise to follow Jesus so quickly. But here is what Jesus does to help release Peter from this shame and guilt.

John 21:15-19

“When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon, son of John, **do you love me more than these?**’ He said to him, ‘Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.’ He said to him, ‘Feed my lambs.’ He said to him a second time, ‘Simon, son of John, **do you love me?**’ He said to him, ‘Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.’ He said to him, ‘Tend to my sheep.’ He said to him the third time, ‘Simon, son of John, **do you love me?**’ Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?’ and he said to him, ‘Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Feed my sheep. Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go.’ (This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this he said to him, ‘**Follow me.**’”

Think about it: Jesus knows that Peter’s hurt from denying him three times and Jesus intentionally seeks Peter out. They have breakfast together and enjoy a meal prepared by Jesus himself. After they finished, Jesus looked up at Peter and asked him three times, “Do you love me?” All three times Peter affirms that he loves Jesus. Why does Jesus do this? I believe part of the reason is to give Peter an opportunity to start fresh. For every time Peter denied Jesus, he was given the opportunity to look Jesus in the eyes and say “yes I love you.” Jesus wants your love. If you have a past that is filled with unbelief, or even denying Jesus as Lord, he is asking you now, “do you love me?” It’s an opportunity to start over again, for he is quick to forgive. Jesus ends his conversation with Peter the way it started years before...” Follow me.”

Take away: Jesus wants your love regardless of your past.

Personal reflection: Do you still have past sin and guilt that is eating you up? If so, just write out a prayer to God emphasizing your love for him. For he is a God that heals, and it starts with love. up? If so, just write out a prayer to God emphasizing your love for him. For he is a God that heals, and it starts with love.

Day 7

Introduction: Have you ever tried to walk from one side of a room to the other while it is completely dark? It normally ends in a stubbed toe or stepping on a Lego. No matter the case, it is normally slow moving and you always end up a little off track from where you wanted to go. This is how most people feel in their walk through life. We kind of know where we want to go but not sure how to make it there. The best way to illustrate this is through the example of light and darkness. It is easy to walk with a purpose when there is light, we know where we want to go and how to get there. But we also know what it is like to walk in the dark, continually guessing where we are and where we are going.

John 8:12

“Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, **“I am the light of the world.** Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

Think about it: One of the first things to observe in this passage is Jesus says that everyone is either walking in light or in dark. It's one extreme or the other. Everyone who does not follow Jesus is walking in darkness. All we need to do is look at the world around us to see that this is true. The rat race for money, possession, and power is evident. There are wars and rumors of wars. People pursuing whatever their heart desires, moving to and fro with no direction. But Jesus says that he is the light, and what does light do, it reveals and illuminates everything around. When we follow Jesus, the hard questions about life and the purpose of life come to light. We no longer walk aimlessly in the dark stumbling about, but have hope and purpose through Jesus!

Take away: Jesus is the light of the world, illuminating what was once concealed.

Personal reflection: Write about a time that you knew you were walking in spiritual darkness and what that was like. What is it like to walk in light of the true Light, Jesus Christ?

Day 8

Introduction: The story of Louis Zamperini from the book *Unbroken*, is one of my favorite stories. Louis was a WW2 prisoner of war in Japan, where he spent a couple long years in horrible captivity. He was beat and was forced to do hard laborious work while having little to nothing to eat. However, the greatest imprisonment he faced was not physical, but it was after he was rescued. He fought with hate, addiction, depression, suicidal thoughts, and apathy. He worked so hard to be freed physically from Japan only to become captive mentally. Louis believed his physical freedom was all he needed and joy would stem from physical freedom. The whole story is a spiritual battle but embodies itself within the battle of his mind. The end of the story is beautiful! It doesn't end with his deliverance from Japan, but his transformation after he gives his life to Jesus, resulting in true freedom.

1 Peter 2:13-17

“Be subject for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or the governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. **Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God.** Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.”

Think about it: It is passages like this that make us realize that the freedom that God speaks of is not the same freedom that man speaks about. Peter tells us to be subject to every human institution that has authority over us, and to honor the emperor. The emperor was Nero when Peter wrote this, and Nero was one of the greatest persecutors of Christians during this time. Peter is saying that we can live subjected to human authorities and yet be free. This is possible because the freedom he is talking about is not a temporal and superficial freedom, but a spiritual and eternal freedom.

Take away: Living as a servant to God is living in freedom.

Personal reflection: When you hear the phrase, “live as people who are free,” what do you think that looks like? Would you say you are living as a person who is free?

Day 9

Introduction: Here is a question that almost every Christian will ask in their life: “If God’s grace is so good and God has forgiven me of my sin, then should I keep on sinning?” It is a legitimate question. Thankfully, Paul addressed this exact question for you and I today in Romans.

Romans 6:15-19

“What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves to that one who you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves to righteousness. I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. **For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.**”

Think about it: Paul gives an emphatic answer to this question, “By no means!” Even though Christ has set us free from the power of sin, we need to make the decision every day to be obedient to that new identity. If sin and lawlessness were once our master, why would we want to go back to that hurt? God is continuing to change your heart, but you must give yourself to God every day and submit your will back to him. Sanctification is God’s continual working in your life to make you look more like him. Sanctification comes when you are ready to be free from your old master and submit to Christ.

Take away: Submit yourself to God daily and a changed heart will come.

Personal reflection: Is there a sin that has a hold in your life? Are you still trying to fight this sin or are you openly submitting yourself to it?

Day 10

Introduction: When we talk about freedom through Christ, we like to talk about the moment our sin was forgiven. However, we oftentimes neglect the fact that Jesus has given us power and freedom in our daily walk as well. Jesus has come to give life abundantly and that overflows into our daily walk.

Romans 8:1-4

“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. **For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.** For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, **who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.**”

Think about it: There are only two laws that everyone falls under, either the law of the Spirit of life or the law of sin and death. The law of the Spirit set us free from the law of sin and death. Notice it is not just the law of death, but also of sin in the here and now. Jesus has given you everything you need to overcome sin today in your life. The power of sin has no hold on you. Victory over sin comes with walking in the Spirit of God. When you walk in the Spirit, then the sin that once seemed inseparable from you will start to fade away. That sin once had a hold on your old self, but Jesus is making you new again, and sin is contrary to who God has made you to be.

Take away: Walking according to the Spirit will result in freedom now from sin.

Personal reflection: Are you actively seeking to walk in the Spirit? What has been the outcome of this walk? How have you seen the Spirit change who you are?

Day 11

Introduction: I will never understand Black Friday. Every year there are videos of people fighting over the last TV or a mad dash to their favorite aisle as the doors are unlocked. Every year, I am entertained watching the mayhem (and thankful from my couch with popcorn). I am reminded every time I watch the mayhem during Black Friday that man naturally thinks about themselves before anyone else. Black Friday is just one example of man's natural selfishness. In a stark contrast, Jesus has called Christians to think of others and love them before ourselves. Paul reaffirms this selflessness in Galatians.

Galatians 5:13-14

“For you are called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’”

Think about it: Paul wants those who are free in Christ to know that they are now commanded to love others rather than satisfy their own desires. When it comes down to it, choosing to love the other person and place their needs first is a freeing philosophy. Even if the person is our enemy, God tells us to love them. There is no longer a need to evaluate whether someone is “worthy” of your love. The answer is always to love them.

Take away: Free people put others first.

Personal reflection: Are you consumed by one-upping the person next to you or are you placing the needs of others first?

Day 12

Introduction: Kobe Bryant is attributed as one of the best basketball players to have ever played the game, if not the best. He is praised for his clutch shooting toward the end of basketball games and many iconic game-winning shots. However, I believe one of the things that made Kobe so good at basketball was the fact that he would keep shooting the ball no matter how bad he had been playing. Kobe missed 14,481 shots in his career. That is 1,064 more than any other NBA player ever! Those moments of victory in his career are peppered with small blunders all around them, but he never let those blunders or misses derail him from what lies ahead.

Philippians 3:12-16

“Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. **But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead,** I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

Think about it: There is a saying, “the best basketball players have the shortest memory.” I believe this is true for basketball, but I also believe this to be true for the believer as well. Paul starts this passage by saying that he is not perfect. There is a reason that Paul calls himself the “chief of all sinners” in 1 Timothy. The one thing he does though is this, “forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead.” Jesus has erased your past sins and is calling you forward to kingdom business. Paul finishes by saying what lies ahead is the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Take away: Press on in your faith and lean into Jesus.

Personal reflection: Are you abandoning what the Lord has before you because you are still enslaving yourself from your past? If so, why do you think you hold onto those mistakes while the Lord has already forgiven you and is calling you forward?

Day 13

Introduction: Do you have any of those small sayings that ring around in your head on occasion? Many of these little sayings have nuggets of truth in them and shape how we live life. Sayings like: “happy wife happy life,” or “life is not about you,” or “money isn’t the answer.” These truths can change how we see and do life every day. Romans 6 contains one of those truths that I believe is worth quoting often and will change how you see and live your life.

Romans 6:6-11

“We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. **For one who has died has been set free from sin.**

Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.”

Think about it: Did you catch the truth? Here it is, “consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.” Make that truth personal to you! Every time you are ever tempted to sin or stray away from God, quote this verse but use a personal pronoun. “I am dead to sin and alive in Christ.” This truth will change your life. Your old self was a slave to sin, and you knew nothing but sin. But now you are alive in Christ and the sin that once reigned over you has no hold on you. You are free from the penalty AND the power of sin in your life! That is freedom in Christ!

Take away: You are dead to sin and alive in Christ.

Personal reflection: Do you consider yourself dead to sin and alive in Christ? If you do, how can you see that in your daily life?

Day 14

Introduction: Paul is adamant in his writings that those who are in Christ have a different identity. There may not be a clearer change of identity than that of Paul in the Bible. He knows what it was like to be dead in his sin and to be made alive in Christ. It wasn't his works in the Law that changed Paul, but the voice of Jesus. Paul hated Christians and wanted to see them persecuted for their faith. However, he would become the very Christian he once hated. He understands the complete identity shift that happens when you place your faith in Jesus.

Romans 8:12-17

“So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. **For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons,** by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs – heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified.”

Think about it: Paul draws the distinction between two different identities. The first one being a spirit of slavery that defines every person who has sinned. You and I were once identified by a spirit of slavery to sin. But for all who have placed their faith in Jesus, we have received the Spirit of adoption! What does it mean to be adopted as sons and daughters of God? It means you have a Father you can always run to and who will forgive you through the abundance of his grace! The prodigal son is a perfect illustration of this (see Luke 15:11-32). There is not a greater blessing than to be in the family of God, to have a Father that is quick to forgive and rejoices in his relationship with you. That is the Christian faith. That is freedom. To know through the ups and downs of life, and the struggles with sin and the victories of life, that your heavenly father loves you through it all.

Take away: When your faith is in Jesus, you are no longer identified as a slave but as a child of God.

Personal reflection: When you understand your identity as a child of God, how does that influence how you interacted with God?

Day 15

Introduction: Have you ever been tempted to take the things of this world, the sins that entice the flesh, and justify living in sin, while also trying to live for Christ? Paul is writing to the believers in Corinth and they were in the midst of trying to justify a continual life lived in sin, while also living as a child of God. At one point in time, we were defined by our sin and it was our identity before we knew Christ. The Corinthian church is in a battle much like the church today. They are in the midst of learning their identity is no longer in their sin, but as a child of God.

1 Corinthians 6:9-11

“Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. **And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.**”

Think about it: Verses 9 and 10 describe every man and every woman that has ever lived (minus Jesus). It labels the unrighteous (or the evildoer) as the one who practices sexual immorality, or the greedy, or the drunkard, or name any other sin. That should be the end of the passage. Man is bound and enslaved to their sinful actions and thus will reap the outcome of their works, eternal separation from God. But then we get this short sentence that changes the whole passage, “And such were some of you.” Paul then goes on to talk about being washed, sanctified and justified in the name of Jesus! Amen! *You were at one time identified with your sin, but now your identity is not unrighteousness and wickedness, but forgiven in Jesus Christ your Lord.*

Take away: In Christ Jesus, you are no longer defined by the sin that once enslaved you.

Personal reflection: Like the church in Corinth, do you still identify yourself by the sins that God washed you from? Or do you look at the sin that was in your life and say “that is who I was; not who I am?”

Day 16

Introduction: For many of the Jews, they believed the Law was what set them free and liberated them. However, what they did not know was that the Law was pointing toward Jesus the whole time. Jesus would ultimately fulfill the Law. Many of the Jews at the time held onto the Law rather than Jesus. For the Jews who believe Jesus, that truth sets them free. Here is what Jesus had to say to the Jews that believed in him regarding their freedom.

John 8:31-34

“So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, **‘If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.’** They answered him, ‘We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, you will become free?’ Jesus answered them, ‘truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin.’”

Think about it: Earlier, to this same group of Jews, Jesus said, “I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins.” This is the truth that will set them free. Jesus said “unless you believe,” then you will die in your own sins. You and I are chained to the consequences of our sins and the only outcome of sin is that we will die and are separated from God forever. That is unless we believe in Jesus as Lord. The truth of who Jesus is sets free everyone who believes. That is what Jesus means when he said, “the truth will set you free.” This is an encouragement for us to share this truth with others. We get caught up in what people will say or if we will be judged for our faith. Yet the very message of truth is freedom. You and I must take the message and deliver it to those who need the same freedom we have experienced.

Take away: The truth will set you free.

Personal reflection: When you share the gospel, do you see it as a message of freedom? Why or why not?

Day 17:

Introduction: Have you ever locked your keys in your car before? Or have you locked your house key inside and you are left standing outside? In both of these situations, the person is helpless and cannot get into their car or house until someone comes with a spare. It is a helpless feeling standing outside your own house with no way to get in. It is only when someone else intervenes with a key that you are delivered from your own mistake. This is where we have all been in relation to the Kingdom of God. We have locked ourselves out as a penalty of our sin. But praise be to God, for the only one who is free and is able to set us free has intervened.

John 8:34-36

“Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. **So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.**”

Think about it: If the Son was not free, then you and I would have no hope to be set free. It is only because we have a savior who chose to intervene for mankind that we may be set free from sin. Jesus says “everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin,” encompassing the whole population of the world minus one, Jesus Christ.

Therefore, if the Son sets you free, you are free indeed.

Take away: Only the Son can set you free from the power of sin.

Personal reflection: Write down the first time you remember experiencing freedom from sin through Jesus.

Day 18

Introduction: Throughout the years, America has produced a few TV shows that can be both inspiring and gut-wrenchingly embarrassing in the same episodes. “America’s Got Talent” may be the apex of those shows. In this show, people from around America come to present their talents for judges. Some of these “talents” only end with everyone cringing while others end in tears and inspiration. The most beautiful part of the show is the golden buzzer. If one of the four judges love a performance enough, they will hit the golden buzzer. The contestant automatically moves onto the finale, regardless of the opinions of anyone else. For the contestant that receives the golden buzzer, they went from needing to impress millions of Americans to only performing for one. Paul has the perspective of performing for one judge and one judge only.

Galatians 1:6-10

“I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and turning to a different gospel – not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accused. **For am I now seeking the approval of man or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.**”

Think about it: The churches in Galatia started to abandon the gospel of Christ for something that was more appealing to man. At the core of the gospel is God’s grace and nothing more! In some way, Galatia was pulling “extras” into the gospel message and was making it about appealing to others. Yet, Paul wants the Galatians to know they are servants of God not man. God commands us to love God and love others. That is what pleases him. You are free from the burden of performing for man, running the rat race of popularity and status. We don’t live to please man; we live to please God.

Take away: Free people live for Him, not them.

Personal reflection: After you make a life decision, are you more worried about the opinion of others around you or of God?

Day 19

Introduction: The book of Philemon does not get a lot of attention, so let me give you some background. Paul is writing a letter on

behalf of a man named Onesimus. He was once Philemon's slave but ran away. Paul became a father figure to Onesimus and he gave his life to Jesus Christ. While Paul was imprisoned, he sent Onesimus back to Philemon with this letter.

Philemon 1:15-17

“For this perhaps is why he was parted from you for a while, that you might have him back forever, **no longer as a bondservant but more than a bondservant, as a beloved brother** – especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.”

Think about it: In this letter, I believe we get a beautiful picture of what it means to be brothers in Christ. Onesimus is going back to his old master to apologize for running away. Not to be a slave again, but to partner in the gospel with Philemon, who is also a believer.

In the grand scheme of the Kingdom, we are all in the same position - sons and daughters of God. When that is embodied, we no longer see ourselves as more valuable or better than another. Loving one another becomes almost second nature and skin color, ethnicity, language, and income mean nothing for how we treat others. This is a beautiful story of reconciliation and a new partnership in the Kingdom of God.

Take away: When Christ sets you free, you seek to free others.

Personal reflection: When you look around at the other believers, do you naturally judge them by ethnicity, or income, or personality? Or do you see them simply as brothers and sisters in Christ with the same mission as you?

Day 20:

Introduction: One of the best feelings in the world is that moment you crawl into bed after a long day of labor. To know that you worked your butt off all day and had nothing left to give. There is a satisfaction in doing a day well from start to finish. One of the worst feelings is when you procrastinated and now you know you will not be able to finish a project or job on time. That feeling can feel like it puts you in a bondage. As Paul is nearing the end of his life, he writes a letter to his ministry partner, Timothy. In this letter, he gives us a small description of the freedom he is feeling after “a long life’s work.”

2 Timothy 4:6-8

“For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. **I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.** Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.”

Think about it: Oh, how I long for the day to see Jesus face-to-face and hear him say, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” Paul is on the brink of seeing Jesus and he knows he has “fought the good fight.” The battle for your faith is an everyday fight. Do you get excited when you think about the end or do you get anxious? Maybe you have forgotten that you are in a spiritual battle and thus are losing that battle to sin over and over. We know that our days are numbered, and many believers are “procrastinating” in their faith. From the example of Paul, it is evident that there is freedom in being able to look back and say “I have fought the good fight.” That fight is being fought right now.

Take away: Live today in light of eternity.

Personal reflection: How are you doing in your spiritual battle? What victories are you seeing in your life? What defeats are you seeing in your life?

Day 21

Introduction: Have you ever been reading a book and became afraid of what your favorite character will do and decided to take a quick peek in the last chapter to see if their name is still there? Or maybe before you watch any movie, you need to know who dies. Or maybe you are baffled that people peek at the end of the story to see how it ends. Whatever the case may be, there is a peace that comes in knowing the end of the story. When it is not a fairytale or a novel, but rather our own lives, a desire to be certain of the future is not an uncommon desire. Jesus has made the end known many times, and we can be confident in the future.

Revelation 22:12-13

“Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.”

Think about it: Jesus wants you to know the end of the story, not just your story, but the whole story. Jesus is coming again soon, to gather his people and he will create a new heaven and a new earth. When you dwell on the end of the story, the conflicts in the middle don't cause the same anxiety as they once did. The more you look to the second coming of Jesus, the less your uncertainties in life look threatening. That math test, the finances, car problems, or relationship struggles are just a small hurdle in a story that will end with victory in Jesus.

Take away: The end puts the now into focus.

Personal reflection: How often do you think about the fact that Jesus is coming again soon? Does dwelling on the end of your story affect how you live now?
