

NOT JUST FOR SUNDAYS

# TAKEAWAY

Free

June 27, 2010

Part 1 – Free At Last

## Getting Started

This week we spent some time answering the question: Freedom, what is it? As you consider how you might answer this question, fill in the following blanks:

Freedom has moved me from \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_.

Freedom looks like \_\_\_\_\_.

Freedom feels like \_\_\_\_\_.

The expression of Freedom in my life would be evidenced by \_\_\_\_\_.

Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Freedom is free

Freedom is costly

Freedom moves from pity to compassion

Freedom is a right

Freedom is a gift

Freedom comes with expectations

Freedom is immediate

Freedom takes a lifetime

Freedom is a place

Freedom brings life

Freedom brings death

Freedom is personal

Freedom is for me

Freedom is for other people

Freedom is communal

Freedom is a person

Freedom is a thing

Freedom requires action

## Freedom From...

I have had a love/hate relationship with food most of my life. This remained a struggle even after I became a Christ-follower. I would go through periods of time when I would binge or eat secretly. I have been known to prepare two cheesecakes in order to hide one from my spouse so that he couldn't see how much I was really eating. Later, when I was alone in the house, I would have a feast and scarf down enormous amounts of cheesecake. In my heart, I felt this was wrong, but I thought I had no way to stop.

When overeating caused my weight to balloon, I would become angry with myself and try harder to be self-controlled. My dieting efforts would work for a time, but they wouldn't last. This became a pattern over the years, with me careening back and forth between gorging and dieting, gorging and dieting. It seemed like a never-ending cycle. Even though I was growing in my walk with Christ in many other areas, this one area just never seemed to budge. I couldn't understand why I had no willpower. After a while, I became resentful that I had to eat anything at all. I felt like it would be easier if my addiction were alcohol or even drugs. I thought if that were the case, I could just quit and never have to face it again. But I couldn't swear off food altogether—a body has to have fuel! At one point, I was angry that I wasn't "free" to eat a whole bag of cookies in one sitting. Looking back, I see that I had a pretty skewed idea about freedom. I thought freedom meant being able to eat whatever I wanted whenever I wanted it. What I didn't realize was that true freedom for me would mean being free from the entire cycle of overeating and dieting—freedom "from," not freedom "to."

More than a month ago, I confessed to someone that I was out of control and in bondage when it came to food. Through a series of events, God led me to His truth on the matter. Read John 10:10. Who is the thief Jesus is talking about? What does he want to do to us? Now read John 16:7-11. What does Jesus say about the enemy in verse 11? How about 1 John 3:8? According to this verse, why did Jesus come to earth? And then there is 1 John 4:4. How do the truths of the previous verses set us on a path to freedom when viewed in light of this last verse?

It used to be that every time I saw food, I was reminded of my bondage to it. But, once I studied and applied God's Word, I found that the works of the enemy have been destroyed and he is already defeated and condemned. Jesus paid an unfathomable price to make sure the enemy would have no real authority to use against us. What remains are lies and deception (John 8:44). As I follow Jesus more and more closely and allow His truth to permeate all that I am, the lies become less and less potent. Today, I am living out my freedom to eat just one cookie and carry no resentment that I am not eating a dozen. I am also learning that I am free to enjoy food as God intended. I find it astonishing that the thing I once believed had so much power over me now reminds me of Jesus. Every time I eat, I am aware of the freedom that was bought for me. Take a look at 1 Corinthians 6:12. As we head into this series on freedom, it might be good to ask yourself where in your life you are being "mastered" by something. Begin to pray, asking God to open your spiritual eyes to any areas in your life where freedom is not found. Know that you are not alone in your struggle. I will be joining you and praying this for myself as well.

## Failure's Freedom Found

*"What we are suffering now is nothing compared with the glory that will be shown in us. Everything God created looks forward to the time when his children will appear in their full and final glory. The created world was bound to fail. But that was not the result of its own choice. It was planned that way by the One who made it. God planned to set the created world free. He didn't want it to rot away completely. Instead, he wanted it to have the same glorious freedom that his children have."*

Romans 8:18-21 (NIRV)

We make a lot of choices. Some are good...some are bad. Some lead to bliss beyond our imagination. Other choices, made with the best of intentions, sometimes lead to pain and misery. As human beings we are inclined toward sin, leading to shame and destitution. We try so hard to be in control while claiming to give God control, because we really want what is best in our own estimation. So often, our attempts end in failure.

Freedom for me is learning that God is greater than all of that. God exceeds our human estate. He is bigger than our decisions. He is greater than our depravity. His love is never ending. His mercy is never failing. He cares for us despite the many times that we reach the end of our own ability and make careless moves outside of the plans He has for us. Lovingly, He guides us back to His side, but the depth in which He loves never changes. To me, freedom is knowing that we have a Rescuer, even when we don't deserve it.

God created us to live in and for His glory, yet He knew we were bound to fail. He still plans to set us free to live in the same freedom He originally intended us for. God alone gives us the freedom we long for, as the words from this Matt Redman song (*You Alone Can Rescue*) say so well:

*"Who, oh Lord, could save themselves, Their own soul could heal?*

*Our shame was deeper than the sea, Your grace is deeper still.*

*You alone can rescue. You alone can save. You alone can lift us from the grave.*

*You came down to find us, led us out of death. To You alone belongs the highest praise.*

*You, oh Lord, have made a way, The great divide You healed.*

*For when our hearts were far away, Your love went further still, Yes, your love goes further still."*

## Fear of Freedom

One of my favorite films is *The Shawshank Redemption*. The majority of the film takes place in a penitentiary in Maine where the main character, Andy, tries to walk out his sentence without ever losing hope. But when I think of freedom, one scene in the film stands out. There is an old inmate by the name of Brooks Hatlen who tends the prison library and eventually befriends Andy. Brooks has been in the prison for all of his adult life. So when he is released as an old man and tries to reenter society, he doesn't know how to cope. He had learned to handle being locked up and having every part of his life managed for so long, that when he gets out...he is lost. He ends up living in a small apartment working as a bagboy in a small grocery store. But his newfound freedom terrifies rather than energizes him. In a heartbreaking and haunting scene, you see this gentle old man take his own life rather than learn to walk in this new reality.

I wonder if we ever find ourselves in a situation like Brooks'. We get so used to the prisons we make for ourselves, or that get made for us, that the thought of freedom is even more terrifying. When I look at the people of Israel that Moses led out of Egypt, I think they felt that way. The Hebrews had lived in Egypt for 400 years. For most of that time, they were slaves to the Egyptians. When God sent Moses to deliver them by His miraculous hand, you would think they would have kissed Egypt goodbye and never looked back. But that's not the case. Read in Exodus 1:6-14 about the conditions they lived under in Egypt. Then notice how that lines up with what happened in Exodus 14:10-12, the first time they encountered trouble as they left Egypt. Then, they cried out again in 16:3 and 17:3. What were their reasons? Do you see a pattern here? It seems so ungrateful and in fact pretty stupid. But I wonder if you and I do the same thing. I wonder if we cry out to God to be delivered from something and then, when He answers, expect the new place to be without challenges of its own.

We can be trapped in any number of ways by any number of things. In the first section we asked what freedom looked like. Maybe we now need to ask how badly we want it. If God sets you free, will you look back to the familiar? Or will you journey to the new places and the challenges that freedom will bring?

Jesus said in Luke 4:18 that He came to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and to release the oppressed. As you begin to truly embrace the freedom that Christ died to gain for you, make a decision to not look back. As He leads you out of that cell, close the door and lock it behind you. Throw away the key and set your face in the direction of this new place of freedom that God is leading you into. Remember the words of 1 Peter 2:6 (NIV): "See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame."

***Freedom to me, right now, is reaching the end of my rope, my own individual capacity, and knowing that God is right there to suspend me and keep me from falling into "the great abyss." Knowing love and safety despite human depravity to me is freedom! ~ C. Ottinger***

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