

## Week Four

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# The Rhythm of Freedom

“They broke bread in their homes  
and ate together with glad and  
sincere hearts, praising God...”

## INTRODUCTION

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### **We place a high value on freedom.**

When a human being is deprived of it, through being controlled or oppressed, it rankles against something deep within us. It feels wrong to the core, a 'crime against humanity'.

Freedom is seen as being worth fighting for – and sometimes, worth dying for. It's hard to forget Mel Gibson as William Wallace in the film 'Braveheart' yelling: They may take our lives, but they'll never take our freedom!"

Today, 'freedom' means different things to different people. To some, it might mean a freedom of speech... being able to say or write what you want. To others, it's about lifestyle – freedom to live how I want, to love whom I want, to be who I want.

Jesus, too, placed a high value on freedom. He said things like: "You will know the truth and the truth will set you free". He said: "When the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed." But what did Jesus mean? What does true freedom look like, and how can we find it? What role does God play in our freedom, and what role do we play?

This week, we'll look at God's heart for freedom, and how the New Testament writers understood it. As we do, we're praying that you find true freedom. And that, like the disciplines of Bible reading, prayer and worship, 'freedom' becomes an intentional rhythm in your life. Something you choose to walk in, day after day.

## BIBLE PASSAGES

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Use the notes on 'How to read the Bible' to reflect on or study one of these passages each day in the week leading up to small group session.

### Day one

Reading: John 8:31-36

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### Day two

Reading: 1 Peter 5:8-11

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### Day three

Reading: Ephesians 6:10-19

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### Day four

Reading: 2 Corinthians 10:3-5

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### Day five

Reading: Matthew 4:1-11

# 1 Rhythm of Freedom | God wants you to be free

Reading: John 8:31-36

## DEVOTIONAL

Our God loves to set people free. He has been doing this for years...

One of the best-known stories in the Old Testament is the story of the Exodus. God's people, the Israelites, are in captivity in Egypt. But through a series of miracles, God's power is displayed. The Red Sea is parted, God's people go free, and the mighty Egyptian army is drowned in the sea.

This story of God freeing his people isn't just a good old yarn from the history books. It's our story too.

In today's passage, Jesus is clear about our spiritual condition apart from Him. That we are slaves to sin. Jesus uses this analogy to make the point that a slave obeys his master because he belongs to him.

When sin is our master, we are unable to resist it. And so our greatest need (like those Israelites in Egypt) is for rescue... for someone to come and set us free from the grip that sin has on us.

And so, Jesus comes. He lives the perfect life we cannot live. He is tempted but he never once sins. And at the cross, he takes the punishment we deserve for all the things we've done and thought and said that are wrong. God's awesome power is displayed. The powers of darkness are crushed, and we go free. We did nothing to earn it, but we get to receive what Jesus has done for us.

Now, if we are Christians, we belong to Jesus. We have a new master... a master who is kind and loving, who understands us through-and-through, and who has our best interests at heart. True freedom comes from serving this wonderful master.

We sometimes act as though we'd rather be enslaved to sin than enjoy our newfound freedom. (That's not a new thing - after the Israelites were set free, many complained they wanted to go back to captivity!)

But true freedom is a daily choice to line up our thinking and our lives with the truth of who God is and what he has done for us. Over the next couple of days, we'll look at how we can do this.

## RESPONSE

Today, take some time to dwell on the truth of what Jesus has done, and any impact this has had on your life. What thought patterns or lifestyle choices is he freeing you from?

## NOTES

## 2 Rhythm of Freedom | Know who the enemy is

Reading: 1 Peter 5:8-11

### DEVOTIONAL

It's fair to say that the concept of Satan is not a popular one.

In our society, while many people are happy to believe in a loving, benevolent God who is there to protect them and their families, the idea of a personal force of evil, Satan, is rejected by most. Some see the idea as offensive, others as outdated, others still as childish or laughable.

But the Bible is clear. It teaches us that Satan is real and he is active. He has set himself up as the enemy of God. If we are part of God's worldwide family of believers, he is our enemy too.

Today's passage shows us just how deadly Satan is. Like a hungry lion, he lies in wait for an opportune time to take down his victims. It's imperative that Christians are alert to the reality of Satan and his capacity to get involved in our lives – in our thoughts, our emotions, our relationships and the circumstances of our lives.

We mustn't **overestimate** Satan. He is in no way equal with God. While our almighty God reigns eternally over all things, Satan's power is very much limited. As a created being, he is finite and he can do nothing without God's permission. What's more, God has already secured eternal victory over Satan through Jesus' death and resurrection.

**But there is still a battle taking place.** Until the time comes when Jesus returns to earth and the enemy is finally destroyed, Satan will continue to oppose God's people, trying to turn us away from our faith and towards sin.

God wants your freedom... even more than you do. We'll look tomorrow at how we can stand 'firm in the faith' against our enemy, looking confidently to the promise that God himself will make us 'strong, firm and steadfast'.

### RESPONSE

How seriously do you take the reality of Satan?

What comfort do you find in knowing that he can do nothing without God's permission?

### NOTES

## 3 Rhythm of Freedom | Prepare for battle

Reading: Ephesians 6:10-19

### DEVOTIONAL

Beneath the surface of daily life, Satan and his armies are waging an invisible war against those who believe in Jesus.

On our own, we are no match for these evil forces. But our God has not left us alone. His Holy Spirit remains with us and he has given us tremendously powerful weapons to fight with.

Good soldiers will always be well-acquainted with their equipment, and we too need to be familiar with and able to use each piece of armour that God has given us:

- The belt of truth gives us the conviction to defeat Satan's lies.
- The breastplate of righteousness brings assurance that we are blameless before God because of Jesus' death for us.
- The shoes of readiness keep us prepared to serve God.
- The shield of faith deflects all temptation and discouragement that Satan fires in our direction.
- The helmet of salvation protects our minds, assuring us that we are set free from sin and death by God's grace.
- The sword of the Spirit is the powerful truth of God's word.
- Prayer is constant communication with God. Through it, we receive power, guidance and encouragement for the fight.

The power of these weapons is their capacity to shine a light on the lies that Satan uses to undermine our faith in God. Freedom comes from choosing, day after day, to put on this armour.

So often, we rush headlong into our busy days unprepared for spiritual battle. We forget our armour and leave ourselves unprotected against Satan's schemes.

Yet we're told twice in this passage to put on 'the full armour'. A helmet or a shield alone is not enough to protect a soldier in the midst of battle. Every single piece is vital.

So have another look at the armour of God. Are you missing any of it in your life right now? How will you put it on today?

### RESPONSE

Where do you recognise there may be a spiritual battle going on in your life? How intentional are you about 'putting on' the armour of God?

### NOTES

## 4 Rhythm of Freedom | Disarm the lies

Reading: 2 Corinthians 10:3-5

### DEVOTIONAL

We've seen that God's armour is nothing like the world's. So it's clear that spiritual warfare is not like worldly warfare. As Christians, then, what are we fighting for and how should we fight?

The purpose of spiritual warfare is to disarm lies and demolish strongholds. Strongholds are deeply-rooted lies – mindsets and patterns of thinking that are not consistent with God's word.

They don't just deny the existence of God, they also lie about his character – casting doubt on his goodness, his love for us and his saving work for us through Jesus Christ.

Satan is a liar and we need to beware, because his lies saturate the world. Under the influence of Satan, our society loudly insists that 'truth' is whatever we want it to be, that good and evil are relative and that we are therefore free to choose how we live.

We all come to faith with ways of thinking that are, to some extent, influenced by claims like these. Not only so, but we all have hurts, disappointments and sins in our past that have shaped our beliefs – often bringing with them fear, confusion and shame.

We can often be blind to our strongholds, and so we need the help of the Holy Spirit – and other Christians – to see any areas in our lives where we're believing things that simply don't line up with Biblical truth. Once we recognise them, we can capture and disarm these strongholds using the mighty weapons we looked at yesterday.

The world tells us that freedom is found by believing and doing what we want. But this is just not true. Genuine freedom comes through renewing our thinking and replacing lies with truth, discovering the perfect will of God and choosing to walk in it.

### RESPONSE

Is there anyone in your life who speaks truth to you about Jesus, and helps you see any areas where you're believing a lie? Do you do this for anyone else?

### NOTES

## 5 Rhythm of Freedom | What victory looks like

Reading: Matthew 4:1-11

### DEVOTIONAL

All Christians face temptation.

Although it's not a sin to be tempted, we sin when we give in to it and break God's rules. So how can we resist? The story we read today gives us a perfect example of how we should handle temptation, and what victory looks like.

Jesus is alone in the desert. He hasn't eaten for forty days. He's lonely, hungry, no doubt tired and probably stressed. And Satan is persistent. He's not going to give up easily.

Underlying the temptations faced by Jesus are the same doubts the serpent presented to Eve in Eden (in a passage we looked at back in week one): Will God look after you? Does he really care? Wouldn't it be easier to give up on God's way of life and take matters into your own hands?

Unlike Eve, Jesus uses truth to displace the lies. I love how Jesus turns straight to God's word for that truth, quoting from scripture and exposing Satan's dark lies directly to the light it provides.

Satan knows when we are most vulnerable to temptation, maybe in times of loneliness, difficulty or even boredom. It's easy then to make excuses for our sin.

But God calls us to take responsibility for our behaviour and to overcome evil. What's more, he promises to equip us, by giving us 'everything we need for life and godliness' (2 Peter 1:3).

After trying his utmost to tempt Jesus, Satan eventually gives up, backs off and leaves Jesus alone. God's promise to us is this: if we resist temptation, not giving in to it, but trusting in Him, the temptation will eventually pass and Satan will have to leave us alone (James 4:7).

**This is the way to freedom.**

So, whatever trials, temptations or fears you're facing, the truth is that you too can be the kind of person from whom Satan flees.

**Wouldn't you love to live in that kind of victory?**

### RESPONSE

Write a prayer thanking Jesus for the victory He won over Satan.

As you read the Bible, ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you more of the truth of who Jesus is.

### NOTES