

To KNOW Christ and one another more deeply,
To CARE for one another in truth and in love,
To GROW as followers of Jesus.
- CG Mission Statement

Worship: Galatians 5:13-14

(Here is a psalm/song to help your group as you worship. You can go through it together or in groups in meditation and/or in

Read Galatians 5:13-14 using the prayer practice of Lectio Divina. Read the passage aloud 3 times. After each reading, spend a few minutes reflecting. After the first reading, open yourself to the presence of God. On the second reading, listen for a certain word or phrase that stands out to you. On the third reading, listen to what God's invitation might be for you.

Icebreaker

As a child, what food did you refuse to eat? How about now?

Text for Discussion: I Cor. 8: 1-23, 9:19-23

Turn in your Bibles and read this passage aloud together.

Aid for Discussion: Sermon Summary

Freedom – especially when people are given more political and economic freedom – is a good and beautiful thing. But our Founding Fathers never thought our liberty absolved us of responsibility for others, or that liberty could be separated from moral truths, which stood independent of our personal preferences. For them, freedom wasn't just a right; it was a responsibility, even an art: "Nothing is more wonderful than the art of being free, but nothing is harder to learn how to use than freedom."

This is quite different from the current American idea of freedom, which is based on the absence of limitations or boundaries. Our culture cherishes the ability for an individual to freely determine and choose how to live. But this modern conception falls short and is incomplete. Autonomous freedom comes at a cost as we must continually give up one freedom to pursue another. Our pursuits and desires therefore create their own constraints, and whatever it is we are ultimately chasing (the object of our passion) controls us. Meaning freedom is only good if it enables us to actually do something good. Our freedom is therefore in choosing what we will serve and choosing the right boundaries because of it.

The Christians of Corinth believed Christ made them free to do whatever they wanted. Paul reminded them that freedom has never meant radical individualism. Freedom is always relational; it's our ability to willfully *relinquish* our rights to love and serve others. Mutually loving and caring relationships are fundamental to our happiness. So to be fully human, we must learn to be dependent, vulnerable, and receive the love of others. This requires self-sacrifice, forsaking our own freedom for the benefit of others, especially those who don't agree with us. We were made to love and to be loved, so we are most free when we sacrificially live in community. And how are we called to use this freedom?

> We are most free when we love and serve others. When we feel stuck (personally, emotionally, philosophically, spiritually), the best thing we can do is to care for and serve others. This may seem to limit our freedom, but by practicing this in little ways – the "small deaths to self" – we remember that the way of the cross, not our cultural norms, will ultimately lead to our flourishing.

> Cruciform Freedom. If Jesus shows us what a fully human life looks like – the way of humility, obedience and service – then when we follow this trajectory, we are going along with the grain of the universe in the direction our soul was made to flourish.

> Love is more important than knowledge. The Corinthians prized knowledge, just as we do today. But while knowledge can puff up a person, love builds up. Knowledge that divides or looks down on those who think differently is not being used in the service of God. So if knowledge doesn't lead to love, we have missed the mark. True knowledge rests in the fact that we are learning to love as Jesus loved.

> We must ask what ways we as Christians act that are stumbling blocks for those who do not yet know Christ. What is acceptable accommodation, and what is unacceptable compromise? Where are we focusing on our old idols, leading others to harm? Are our practices consistent with our allegiance to Jesus alone as Lord? How can we turn away from our modern radical individualism to serve our community and help others to know and experience the love of Christ?

Christ is the only one whose worship will set us free because Christ is the only one who paid the ultimate sacrifice of His freedom so that we might be truly free.

Guiding Question of the Week

(This question is intended as a target for the whole conversation. Do not ask for responses now. It will be repeated later in the study.)

In the wisdom of God, what is freedom and what is freedom for?

Questions for Discussion

(Remember it is better to wrestle deeply with two good questions than gloss over many. Sub-bullets are intended for potential follow-up.)

Opening questions...

- Take turns reading through the entire passage – I Cor. 8 1-13, 9:19-23. What stands out to you?
- Name some issues today that are similar to the “food offered to idols” issue.
- Looking at vs. 1 how have you seen knowledge “puff” people up and love “build” people up? Are we using knowledge as a weapon or an instrument of love?
- How do you distinguish between these “disputable matters” (i.e., matters where believers can come to different conclusions based on different interpretations of scripture) and matters that are not disputable according to scripture?

Digging Deeper...

- How does our response to disputable matters affect our ability to do evangelism in our current culture?
- How might we need to restrain our own freedoms in the name of helping others not to stumble? Does this principle apply both to our Christian brothers and sisters, and our non-Christian friends and family? Is there a difference in how it applies?
- Describe a time when you have released your rights to serve someone else. How did it make you feel?
- How can we learn to genuinely understand how people think who are not coming from a Christian point of view without being judgmental?

Application Questions...

- What is one thing you can do to show love or to encourage someone this week?
- What is one thing we can do between now and our next meeting to act on the reality of what we explored today?

Praying for One Another

(Here are some ideas from the study to help focus your time in prayer as a group. Use by themselves or along with other prayer requests.)

- Thank God that we are set free in Christ.
- Pray that we would be able to release our rights to serve others.
- Pray that God would give us wisdom as to how to use our freedom in Christ.

Experiment of the week

(A suggestion for engagement in following the way of Jesus this week)

Simplicity Experiment

Test your true freedom by buying only what you need for a week. Having more choices doesn't always lead to more freedom. The Experiment involves 3 commitments/practices:

- Buying only what you need for a week.
- Keeping a record of what you buy daily.
- Keeping a journal about your experiences.

Bring your journal to the group next week and share about your experience. This experiment can also be done for 30 days (see next page for details).

The 30 Experiment Simplicity

“Simplicity is freedom...The Christian discipline of simplicity is an inward reality that results in an outward lifestyle.”

- John Ortberg in “The Life You’ve Always Wanted”

The Experiment

This experiment involves three commitments/practices:

1. Buying only what you need for a month.
2. Keeping a record of what you buy daily.
3. Keeping a journal about your experiences.

FAQs

* **How do I distinguish between a “want” and a “need”?**

Good question! Unfortunately, there is no infallible answer. Part of this experience will be for you to wrestle with this concept throughout the month.

* **How do I deal with others who will be affected by this?**

It is important to recognize that this experiment WILL affect others, especially those closest to you. Before you embark, sit down and have a talk with your family, roommate, etc. to make sure they are willing to support you in this.

* **What do I journal about?**

In general, you want to keep a running record of how simplicity is affecting you. Some specific ideas:

- As mentioned above, you’ll want to keep a record of what you buy each day.
- Use your journal to answer several of these questions each day:
 - Why did I buy what I bought today?
 - Why did I NOT buy what I passed on today?
 - What did I wrestle with, and why?
 - What am I discovering in this process?

* **How can I learn more about simplicity?**

* It is highly recommended that you read chapter six in Richard

Foster’s *Celebration of Discipline* as you begin the process. For more extensive reading, read the book *The Freedom of Simplicity*, also by Foster.

- Consider reading and/or studying specific Bible passages such as Leviticus 25:23 (an interesting take on private property ownership), Proverbs 11:28 (much of Proverbs is about riches and our attitude towards them), the book of Ecclesiastes in the Old Testament, or Luke 12: 22-34 in the New Testament.