

LIVING  
IT OUT



**DAILY  
BIBLE  
STUDY**



CEDARCREEKCHURCH

# Free at Last – Irresistibly Free

June 20, 2022

## John 8:34-36

<sup>34</sup> Jesus replied, “I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave of sin. <sup>35</sup> A slave is not a permanent member of the family, but a son is part of the family forever. <sup>36</sup> So if the Son sets you free, you are truly free.”

This weekend, Pastor Calvin Sweeny told a story about a group of slaves living in Texas who didn't find out they had been freed until two years after the actual Emancipation Proclamation went into effect. All that time, they had technically been free but didn't know. They continued to act as slaves—as someone else's property.

It's impossible to put ourselves in their situation, but there was a time in my life when I chose to remain a slave to my sin rather than accept the freedom Jesus offers. I abused the freedoms and misused the blessings I received from both my earthly father and my heavenly one. Coming of age in the late 60s and early 70s, my friends and I were busy throwing off the cultural traditions of our stuffy, proper parents. We were anxious to engage the world on our own terms and thought very little of the potential consequences of our self-centeredness.

Fast forward 20+ years and I found myself a slave to “my freedoms,” which I believed entitled me to live as though I was an island unto myself—my actions weren't hurting anyone. Let's see ... two kids, bankruptcy, two divorces, too many jobs, extramarital relationships, and the alienation of my family.

Gosh, you have to wonder what my idea of *hurting* was, don't you? Well, that was the point. I just lived life for myself, but I was *not* free! I was enslaved to the idol of me. There was freedom to be had—I just didn't know it! The *religion* of my childhood was full of rules and commandments—I really didn't want that! But then, at a very low time, someone told me about developing a relationship with Jesus.

I had a choice: I could continue to be a slave to a very fickle and cruel master (me!), or I could give my heart to Jesus and enter into his family. I realized I needed Jesus to be set free.

Just like the story of those slaves in Texas, my freedom was waiting for me. I just had to accept it and learn to live in the truth of that freedom. I learned the hard way what Pastor Sweeney told us: “Freedom doesn’t come from sin—sin only enslaves us. Nor does freedom come from self—self will only deceive you. Freedom comes from a relationship with the Son of God, Jesus.”

Jesus invites us to be sons and daughters, to be co-heirs to his kingdom. Jesus sets us free to become a permanent part of his family and to receive all the blessings included in that relationship! That, my friend, is the best news ever!

Bottom Line: *Jesus sets us free to belong permanently to his family.*

### **Questions:**

Do you ever feel enslaved to something you wish you could let go of? What do you do about it?

### **Next Steps:**

Join a [Group](#). It’s a great way to be encouraged in your battle with sin. Confessing to other Christ-followers often opens the door to healing.

Explore [Celebrate Recovery](#), a consistent, biblical approach to dealing with your hurts, habits, and hang-ups.

### **Prayer:**

*Heavenly Father, thank you for loving me so much that you sent Jesus to set me free—free to be in your family with all the benefits and blessings of dearly loved children. Help me to honor our family—the church—and to serve it with my best offerings of self, resources, and love. Help me to lovingly celebrate the glorious differences in the way you created each one of us to be our own unique selves. Thank you for giving me a purpose that only I can fulfill. Thank you for being my good and gracious Father. In the beautiful name of Jesus I pray, amen.*

*This post was written by was written by Laurie White, a regular contributor to the LivingItOut.*

# No Way Out – Irresistibly Free

June 21, 2022

As I sat down to ask God what I should share for this devotional, my youngest son, Chase, came and joined me at the table. With his tongue hanging out, he very diligently began to cut identical squares out of tissue paper and placed them on the table. My heart exploded with love as I watched him, so happy and content, just cutting tissue paper. Then I heard God speak to my heart, “April, I love him even more than you[do]!”

This got me thinking of the amazing blessings that come with being a part of God’s family. As Pastor Charles Sweeney pointed out in his message, we are born into a family of unconditional love when we belong to Jesus.

There are not very many days that go by that I am not disappointed in myself for not being a better wife, mom, sister, Christian, etc. But as I looked at Chase, I realized he has Jesus—and Jesus covers all the places that I fall short. Nothing and no one can ever take that away from him.

## **Romans 8:38-39**

*<sup>38</sup> And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God’s love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God’s love. <sup>39</sup> No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

If you are feeling inadequate today, and life is beating you down as the enemy whispers that you are not good enough, remember this truth: You were born into a family of unconditional love—no person or thing can ever take that away from you!

## **Questions:**

Do you wake up most mornings feeling inadequate because of the enemy’s whispers?

Do you truly believe that you are forgiven of your past, present, and future sins?  
Do you think God has a plan for your life?

**Next Steps:**

Confess your questions and fears about your relationship with Jesus to a trusted friend.

Speak Romans 8:38-39 out loud and claim this blessing for yourself and your family.

**Prayer:**

*Abba Father, please help me accept the blessings that you have freely given me! I ask that any lies spoken over me be revealed and healed in the name of Jesus. Father, thank you for your peace that transcends all understanding and for your mercies that are new every day! Amen.*

*This post was written by April Willer, a regular contributor to the LivingItOut.*

# “Abba, Father!” - Irresistibly Free

June 22, 2022

At 22, I still view my dad as the same hero that I did when I was a child. Each Father’s Day, I have the chance to celebrate my dad and reflect upon everything he has sacrificed for me. He has been my greatest comforter and supporter. He first taught me about Jesus, and he still encourages me to constantly grow in my faith.

Throughout my life, my dad has provided me with unconditional love, despite my shortcomings. He portrays the grace of God by providing me with love and support that I do not have to earn.

This past weekend, Pastor Calvin Sweeney taught us that “we are adopted into a family of unmerited favor.” God pours out his immense grace and compassion on each of us—not for what we did—but because of who he is. Without a relationship with God, we are hopelessly enslaved to sin and the ways of the world. We fall into the endless cycle of following our own desires, falling into sin, and facing the consequences of our wicked ways.

However, God still looks at us fallen, broken humans and intentionally chooses us to join his perfect family. No amount of good works can earn more of God’s love—he already fully loves each of us, imperfect as we are.

## **Galatians 4:6-7**

*<sup>6</sup> And because we are his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, prompting us to call out, “Abba, Father.”<sup>7</sup> Now you are no longer a slave but God’s own child. And since you are his child, God has made you his heir.*

Pastor Sweeney emphasized that in God’s family, there is no “second-class status.” Each of us is chosen and called by God despite our backgrounds or pasts. He longs for his beloved children to live in community with one another as brothers and sisters, lifting each other up and sharing our triumphs and sufferings with one another. He is a good father, who invites us into an eternal, life-giving family.

In honor of Father’s Day, let us remember that we all have a heavenly Father who looks upon his children with unmerited favor and gives us blessings far beyond what we could ever earn. Like our fathers here on Earth, God is there

for us whether we are singing praises or sinking to rock bottom. Despite our struggles, let us not forget that we have a God who wants us to cry out “Abba, Father!” and provide us with blessings far beyond what we could ever imagine.

**Questions:**

What are some of the traps that you fall into to try to earn God’s favor?

How can you show others the love and grace of God in your daily life?

**Next Steps:**

Join a [Group](#) to get connected with a supportive family of Jesus followers, who will uplift and encourage you.

Identify ways in which you have tried to earn God’s blessings. Ask God in prayer to remind you that he provides his children with unmerited favor and that there is nothing that we must do to earn it.

**Prayer:**

*Heavenly Father, thank you for providing each of us with your unmerited favor. You are such a good father; you freely adopted us into your family and called us to be heirs of your kingdom. Thank you for freeing us from the enslavement of sin and evil, and for giving us freedom through your son, Jesus Christ. Help us to show this grace and mercy to others in our daily lives. In Jesus’ name, amen.*

*This post was written by Isabelle Billnitzer, a regular contributor to the LivingItOut.*

# Family is like Salad – Irresistibly Free

June 23, 2022

Freedom that comes from one's self isn't true freedom. Selfish or sinful freedom only brings decay and deceit. True freedom comes from Jesus—he chose to free us to be part of his family. Think about that for a moment! God chose us, and Jesus gave his life so that we could be free.

You and I were chosen!

What a blessing to be invited into a family of unearned blessings. We get the benefits—but it comes with some responsibilities too, as others are blessed by our contributions. Family isn't what you get, it's what you give.

## **Colossians 1:13-14**

*<sup>13</sup> For he has rescued us from the kingdom of darkness and transferred us into the Kingdom of his dear Son, <sup>14</sup> who purchased our freedom and forgave our sins.*

When my husband and I first started dating, I was invited to his sister's home for Thanksgiving dinner with the whole family. I was nervous because I had never met them, and John was nervous because they'd never met me.

We arrived, we ate, and we left. The whole visit took 45 minutes! When we got to the car, I couldn't help but laugh! "That was the fastest dinner I've ever eaten!" I said.

## **1 John 4:11**

*Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other.*

Turns out, John didn't want them telling me stories about him, so we left before they could! We've been married for over 10 years now, and I've certainly heard some stories, but we still laugh and tease about that dinner!

I'm reminded of Pastor Sweeny's salad analogy from last weekend. I love our family gatherings because we all bring something a little different to the table. There is a mixture of flavors—some are cheesy, others sweet, some bitter, hard, soft, and so on. Separately, we're just a list of ingredients in the salad, but together, we create a taste of love, kindness, family, and home.

## **Proverbs 11:25**

*The generous will prosper; those who refresh others will themselves be refreshed.*

John and I have had the joy and opportunity to share our faith. Our grandsons have come to church with us. My father-in-law, at 81 years old, was baptized this past year! My daughter and her children's father came with us to the couples' night.

I think the perfect salad recipe is: Lettuce [Let Us].

### **Let Us...**

- Gather—be present with one another
- Encourage—or bring courage to one another
- Motivate—move others into action
- Hope—without wavering

### **Questions:**

Do you believe that Jesus died to free you from the bondage of self?

Are you able to speak freely about the faith you have in Jesus? Why or why not?

### **Next Steps:**

Join a [Group](#) and start practicing conversations about faith, freedom, and family. Make a plan and take action to gather, encourage, motivate, and hope without wavering.

### **Prayer:**

*Father, I am so blessed to be chosen by you. Help me to inhale more of you and exhale more of myself with each breath of my being. Let me be so filled with your spirit that it spills over. Give me the courage and strength to bring your flavor into my gatherings. Gently remind me to be a blessing, as I myself have been blessed. In Jesus' name, amen.*

*This post was written by Julie Estep, a regular contributor to the LivingItOut.*

# Friday: Sunday Dinner

June 24, 2022

Family reunions and holidays brought the Cephas family together like never before. Maryland crabs and oysters were the foods of choice, and distant cousins became the best of friends for an entire day. The only thing that topped those moments were Sunday dinners.

Sunday was the day when everyone came together, and the stress of life took a break. We always looked forward to the food—a mix of southern soul and eastern shore seafood. Yet, more importantly, everyone benefited from our togetherness.

The generation that showed me what family meant has dwindled in size. Many of the siblings and cousins I grew up with in Ohio have moved away from each other. The Maryland family remains large, but even they don't connect as much anymore. COVID is easy to blame for separation during the holidays, but it seems the importance of gathering and the meaning of family was lost long before the pandemic.

Admittedly, I tried to avoid the Cephas Christmas gatherings and our annual Cephas Day celebrations while we were busy raising our family in the DC area for almost seven years. But it felt like home each time I did attend. Those elders who remained always brought the family necessities. It was always the same for those occasional visits throughout the years. Their happiness always let us know how much we were missed.

## **Hebrews 10:23-25**

*<sup>23</sup> Let us hold tightly without wavering to the hope we affirm, for God can be trusted to keep his promise. <sup>24</sup> Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. <sup>25</sup> And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near.*

Pastor Calvin Sweeney said the family is a mixture of the ingredients that make a salad. Each part contributes to the flavor, but you don't have a salad without the lettuce. And you don't have a family without the "let us." *Let us* is the essential ingredient in the pursuit of God's community of family.

To be part of God's family, you have to let us gather in worship. Let us encourage one another through difficult times. We need to know our family is there for us. Let us think of ways to motivate one another to love all people. Let us hope without wavering in the promises of God.

**Psalm 68:6**

*God places the lonely in families; he sets the prisoners free and gives them joy. But he makes the rebellious live in a sun-scorched land.*

God's family is there when our families aren't available. We're missed without knowing, so let us come together to experience the freedom gained through Christ's love. What are you bringing to Sunday dinner?

**Questions:**

Are you an active member of God's family? How do you contribute to bringing others to God's dinner table?

**Next Steps:**

Start finding freedom by joining a [Group](#) for the summer semester.

Start building a relationship with God by [attending weekend services](#).

Invite others to join you on your adventure.

**Prayer:**

*God, let us all be more purposeful in creating family bonds with all of your children. Thank you for showing us what it means to be part of your family and the freedom of walking in faith. Let us never forget the ultimate sacrifice that offers everyone a seat at your table. Amen.*

*This post was written by Jaron Camp, a regular contributor to the LivingItOut.*