

Free Indeed!

Recently I had the privilege of speaking in a women's prison. I shared my story which I call, "[How to Handle the Things You Hate But Can't Change](#)." (How's that for a topic of interest for incarcerated people?)



But then I was able to speak briefly about what we have in common, a situational loss of freedom. I have lost the ability—the freedom—to walk, and they have temporarily lost the ability—the freedom—to walk out of lockup. Still, even while imprisoned by our situations, Jesus offers *true freedom*

that has nothing to do with our circumstances. He promised to His disciples, “You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” He even said, “If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.” (John 8:32, 36)

So what does THAT mean?

What was so crazy great about this opportunity to speak to and hug and love on the precious ladies in the women's prison, was that the previous weekend I had given four messages on freedom at a women's retreat at sea. (You can listen to the recordings [here](#), if you like.) So many facets of freedom were already rolling around in my head as I thought about Jesus' offer of freedom to women in prison.

- As we look at our past, Jesus can set us free from guilt

when we confess our sins and receive His forgiveness and cleansing (1 John 1:9). He can set us free from shame, that feeling of not just *making* a mistake, but *being* a mistake, when we receive His gift of honor as He showers pleasure and acceptance on us.

- As we look at our present, Jesus can set us free from the “tapes” of lies and misbeliefs that control our lives, as we replace the lies with His truths. For example, a number of the ladies at the retreat had lived in bondage to the lie that

<u>Lies/Misbeliefs</u>	<u>Truth</u>
“If I mess up, that would be the end of the world. I have to be perfect.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none">❖ Only God is perfect❖ He has promised to hold my hand when I stumble.<ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ Psalm 18:35◆ Psalm 73:23❖ I am longing for Eden

they had to be perfect in order to be acceptable. The weight of needing to be perfect is soul-killing because it's impossible for imperfect people to be perfect! But we can be set free by embracing the truth that only God is perfect, so we can let go of the unrealistic expectation that we can ever live perfectly this side of heaven. God knows we will stumble, and He has promised to hold our hand when we do. And beyond that, He understands our longing for perfection is actually a longing for the perfect home of Eden, which we will get to experience on the New Earth we read about in the book of Revelation.

- We can walk in the breathtaking freedom from the soul-crushing imprisonment of unforgiveness by forgiving those who have hurt or offended us. The weight of others' sins against us is bad enough, but Jesus said that if we refuse to forgive, we will be subject to tormentors—demonic torturers (Matthew 18:34-35). When we release our offenders over to Jesus for Him to deal with, we are set free—free indeed!

- As we think about the future, there is glorious freedom when we trust God instead of being controlled by fear. So often, we are in bondage to fear because we want to be in control. We forget that we are not God, wanting to manage not only our own lives but the lives of others. There is freedom in trusting God instead of trying to control others.

- Proverbs 29:25 assures us that fear of man is a snare. This isn't talking about being afraid of people like some are afraid of heights, or the dark, or spiders. Fear of man is about working for other people's approval and fearing their disapproval. When we look to Jesus, though, we see how He modelled living for "an audience of One," caring only about pleasing His Father (John 8:29). When we follow Christ's example, living to please the Father instead of fickle people, there is freedom! I can personally attest to this. Because of my stubborn attachment to a biblical sexual ethic, I have been slamed online by people who despise God's standards. The slime slides off, though, when I keep my focus on the Lord and, like Jesus in Hebrews 12:2, I can "despise the shame" by refusing to accept it. That's what freedom feels like!

- There is true freedom in accepting God's choices for our lives: personality and temperament, introversion or extroversion, health limitations, even capacity. (Some people naturally have a "gallon" energy tank, while others naturally have a cup.) Resenting and fighting God's choices—even gender!—leads to expending mental and emotional energy that is restricting and costly. But embracing God's right to make these decisions for our design and our lives, laying down our non-existent "right" to define ourselves the way WE want, brings us freedom.

<i>Lies/Misbeliefs</i>	<i>Truth</i>
"My parents' problems were my fault."	❖ I don't have that kind of power.
"I am responsible for my parents (or my children's) happiness."	❖ Each one bears his own load – Gal 6:5
	❖ Each one is responsible for his own choices – Ezek. 18

- One of my dear friends discovered, in the process of working through the challenges of parenting a prodigal adult child, that there is freedom in owning 100% of our own part and 0% of other people's choices and behaviors. There's no point in taking on

guilt or responsibility for someone else's choices; they are completely responsible for their part.

- And finally (though definitely not exhaustively), we are free to choose our attitudes. We can decide to either live in bondage to an attitude of entitlement or a continual expectation of the negative, or live in freedom by developing an attitude of gratitude. I love Dr. Charles Swindoll's poem on Attitude:

The longer I live, the more I realize the impact of attitude
on life.

Attitude, to me, is more important than facts.

It is more important than the past,
than education, than money,
than circumstances, than failure, than successes,
than what other people think or say or do.

It is more important than appearance, giftedness, or skill.
It will make or break a company . . . a church . . . a home.

The remarkable thing is we have a choice
everyday regarding the attitude
we will embrace for that day.

We cannot change our past . . .
we cannot change the fact that people
will act in a certain way.

We cannot change the inevitable.
The only thing we can do is play on the one string we have,
and that is our attitude.
I am convinced that life is 10% what happens to me
and 90% of how I react to it.
And so it is with you . . . we are in charge of our Attitudes.
It's possible to be "free indeed." Regardless of your
circumstances. Choose the freedom Jesus offers!

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Cruise Ships, Roller Coasters, and Attitudes

Last month, an engine fire disabled the cruise ship Carnival Triumph in the Gulf of Mexico. Almost no electricity, only one working elevator, and worst of all, a handful of working toilets for 4000+ people. Crew members handed out bio-hazard bags to set inside trash cans as ad hoc commodes, then collected them from hallways. Suddenly, the luxury vacation turned into a nightmare for a lot of people, especially those on the lowest floors and those in inside cabins.

No one had any control over their circumstances. They only had control over their attitudes. Some screeched their rage at Carnival, threatening that they would "own" the company after their lawsuits were filed. Others, with grace, remarked that they had a three-day wonderful cruise followed by a four-day

camping trip. Some passengers set up a “tent city” on the pool deck, moving their mattresses and bedding to an outdoor location away from the growing stench of human waste. Others left their hopelessly dark cabins to set up their new digs in the now-worthless elevator lobbies.

No one was seriously hurt and everyone made it back safely to the U.S. (the huge ship was towed to Mobile, Alabama).

Now, I am a self-professed “cruise queen.” It’s my favorite kind of vacation, and I’ve been on that ship twice. If I’d been on that cruise, I would have been one of the people most affected by the loss of power, since the handicap accessible room cabins are on a lower floor, and the ship is too big for me to navigate without a scooter—which is useless when the batteries run down and you can’t recharge them, not to mention the elevator problem. So I thought about how choosing one’s attitude makes all the difference in any situation. A lot.

One of my most vivid memories showed me how true this is.

Before my mother died, I went to Las Vegas with her and my sister for a family wedding. My sister Julie and I decided we wanted to go on the roller coaster at New York, New York. To our surprise, Mom indicated she wanted to go too. I had never seen our mom as a roller coaster kind of person . . .! I sat next to her, with Julie in front of us. It was fine when the lap bar was locked in place, but she looked at me quizzically when the workers secured us in heavy-duty shoulder harnesses.

“Mom,” I asked, “You *DO* know that this thing goes upside down, right?”

Eyes wide open, she said, “*WHAT????!?!?*”

And we were off.

Mom did not have a good time. Every time I looked at her, she had her lips tightly pursed and her eyes narrowed. Julie and I

were whooping and hollering with fun, and Mom was miserable. Mom was experiencing the exact same thing we were, but she had a very different attitude about it.

They take your picture while you're on rides like this, and I asked playfully, "Mom, you want our picture as a souvenir of our trip?" She growled, "NO!" And I laughed. . . and bought it.



Attitude is everything!

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“What Do You Say When People Call Christians Hypocrites?”

I was just wondering... when people call Christians hypocrites, what is a good response? Isn't everyone a hypocrite in one way or another? I mean, I TRY not to be one, but like all humans,

I mess up. Thankfully I am a Christian and have God's forgiveness. What is a quick reply that I can give people who accuse me of hypocrisy?

That is a tough accusation, for sure. Too bad it's so often accurate.

I would agree with the person that many Christians are indeed hypocrites, and it saddens God greatly. But you might remark that the church is supposed to be a hospital for sick people, not a museum for perfect people.

Sometimes, the "Christians are hypocrites" charge is nothing but a smokescreen, which is why I would ask if they have any personal experience with it, or if it's just something they've heard and they're using it to keep distance between themselves and Christians. Or, more accurately, between themselves and God.

If someone were to make that comment to me, I would respond with, "Is that something you've just heard, or have you had a personal experience with someone in a church who hurt you?" I'd try to find out the heart of the matter. Sometimes people just need for someone to know and acknowledge that they were hurt by a Christian who brought dishonor to the name of Christ, and they would appreciate a compassionate and regretful response. I have been able to say, "I am so sorry you had to experience that. So is God."

I would also ask, in humility, "Have I done anything to make you see hypocrisy in me that I need to ask forgiveness for?" And then be prepared to LISTEN to the answer!

Hope this helps!

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