

PHASE THREE: WALKING IN FREEDOM

LESSON EIGHTEEN:

In order to keep moving forward in our new lives, we need to commit to following through with the things that help us focus on God and His plans: daily getting into His word and thinking about what it means, communicating with Him in prayer and filling our minds with input that helps us grow in understanding of His ways. We also need to be aware of new amends that need to be made so they don't snowball and block our relationships. John 3:21 "Whoever lives by the truth comes into the light." John 8:32, James 1:22, 1 Thess. 5:21

NEW LIFE FREEDOM LESSON 18

Imagine that you've been climbing a long winding path up the side of a mountain. It started off with a few slopes that became steeper and demanded more endurance, and then the real challenge began. You kept at it and learned to handle even more rugged stretches until you finally reached an area of level ground with a place to rest and look back at the path you've travelled. You realize that you've come so much farther than you could have imagined when you began. The view from your current position tells a story of strength and determination, and it's tempting to rest a while before going back down and celebrating your accomplishment.

But when you turn around and look up, you realize there's still more climbing to do. You can keep going and aim for the top of the mountain, or you can say you've done enough and head back down. This is a picture of our path to freedom. It's tempting to call it complete when the most damaging habits are broken and the most painful lies are replaced with truth. It was hard work and you're feeling better. You believe these changes will probably last and it seems reasonable to regain some control by handling things yourself now. You want to live on the highs you've experienced and coast on to the end.

Does that sound like a pattern from your past? Have you made great progress in an area of your life and watched it fade when you lost sight of what got you there in the first place? We need to make sure we keep using the tools that will help us be consistent in following God and His plans for us. We need to remember that freedom isn't just a short trip, it's a lifetime adventure.

First, we take some quiet time to honestly assess where we are in the journey. Are there any issues that still pop up and sidetrack us? What lies are still lurking in the back of our minds, and how do we respond when our enemy throws them at us? Are we using the truth we've learned and are we

confident in how we stand in God's eyes? This is a time for us to pray again as David did in Psalm 139:23-24, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my thoughts. Examine me, and see if I have not represented my feelings as they really are. Keep on always searching me out." We're making ourselves open to God's input at every moment and listening to what He reveals.

Paul talks to the early church in Corinth about the necessity for this kind of checkup. In 1 Corinthians 10:12, he says, "If you think you are standing strong, be careful not to fall." In other words, pay attention! This happens when we think we're finally mature enough to figure everything out on our own and forget we really need to stay in teamwork with God. We should absolutely celebrate our growth, thanking Him for His grace and strength while committing to continuing the work. Hebrews 10:23 says, "Let us hold tightly without wavering to the hope we affirm, for God can be trusted to keep His promises." He promised to never leave us and we can see how He hasn't.

By now we should understand how much we need God's word. It can sharpen our discernment in telling the truth from the lies our enemy sends. Remember that Jesus said, "I am the way the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6) He's the real truth. Just as those who work with cash learn to spot counterfeits by studying the real things, we can recognize how Satan uses his imitations to deceive and pull us away from the right way. The bible helps us to be prepared for his attacks by giving us examples of those who have succeeded and failed in the battle.

We can make a collection of favorite verses as ammo against him. Psalm 119 shows us what this looks like. In verses 9-11, the writer asks, "How can a young person stay pure? By obeying your word. I have tried hard to find you – don't let me wander from your commands. I have hidden your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you." In verse 27, we read, "Help me understand the meaning of your commandments, and I will meditate on your wonderful deeds." Verse 34 continues, "Give me understanding and I will obey your instructions. I will put them into practice with all my heart." Reading is a start, but we need to spend time thinking about what we've read and then choose to live by what we understand.

Staying in touch with God through prayer might have seemed tough in the beginning, especially when we read in 1 Thessalonians 5:17: "Pray without ceasing." Some of us struggled to have even a few moments of regular prayer, but what about now? If we remember that prayer is a conversation with God and we're remembering to concentrate on what we're saying instead of how, it's not that hard to keep it going. Read Matthew 6:5-13 for Jesus' instructions on prayer. Any place is a good place to talk to Him, even if it's just a simple cry for help in the middle of a tough situation. Relationships thrive on communication, and our relationship with God is no different.

We need to make sure we're maintaining exposure to material that will keep us growing and providing healthier places for our minds. In the past, we were attracted to some things that seemed good but were really harmful and took us down some dark roads. We see the difference now and aren't falling for the idea that a little bit won't hurt. If your time of reflection shows that you've relaxed your standards, read what Paul states in Galatians 5:7-8, "You were running the race so well. Who has held you back from following the truth? It certainly wasn't God, for He is the one who called you to

freedom.” Make a clean break with anything that gets in the way of an open relationship with God and ask Him to lead you to better things.

Finally, keep accountability in your relationships by staying current with any amends you owe for hurtful words and actions. We’ve learned how good it feels when we don’t drag any baggage around, so don’t let any start to pile up now. Paul encourages us in Colossians 3:1-10 by showing us what we have to look forward to and reminding us of the results we got by living the old way. In verse 10, he says, “Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him.” That’s the focus of the rest of our lives and what will keep us climbing higher.

Scripture references

Psalm 139:23-24, 1 Corinthians 10:12, Hebrews 10:23, John 14:6, Psalm 119:9-11,27 and 34, 1 Thessalonians 5:17, Matthew 6:5-13, Galatians 5:7-8, Colossians 3:1-10