

PHASE THREE: WALKING IN FREEDOM

LESSON NINETEEN:

Losing momentum in a lifetime of following God can happen to any believer. When we start trying to control things ourselves instead of seeking God's plans and make excuses for choices that don't align with His word, we realize we're getting stuck. Our support team can help us look at our choices honestly. Making a periodic time for assessing where we are in relationship to God, ourselves and others will help us keep from losing too much ground and show any patterns that need to be addressed. Gal. 5:25 "Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit." Prov. 3:5-6, Heb. 13:6, Prov. 13:20, Gal. 5:13, Gal. 6:2

NEW LIFE FREEDOM LESSON 19

We've come to the last lesson in this cycle, and some of us are wondering, now what? Now comes the rest of your story. What will you do with what you've learned? How can you stay focused and successful in the maturing of your faith and the development of your relationship with God? You may be concerned about losing momentum, but it doesn't have to be that way. Continuing your daily communication with God will help you spot issues you haven't dealt with fully or sources of confusion and distraction along the way. Remember that He's always available – no appointments necessary. Don't let things build up until they seem impossible to handle. The best time to deal with an issue is now.

We have the Holy Spirit as our constant guide and counselor. Galatians 5:25 tells us, "Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our lives." Don't hold anything back from Him. Be completely open to His prompting: some of us call this getting "Holy Spirit nudges." You can sense when He puts a finger on an attitude or action and invites you to stop and take a look at what's behind it and the best way to approach that situation. The more you listen, the more sensitive you'll get to these times.

God knows how easy it is to get caught up in what's going on at the moment. We read in Luke 10:38-42 about how two women were affected by a visit from Jesus and His disciples. One sister, Martha, took charge of fixing dinner while Mary, the other sister, sat listening to Jesus speak. We can

probably identify with Martha's frustration at being left to do all of the practical things by herself. She even asked Jesus to intervene and make Mary help her. Notice Jesus' response in verses 41 and 42: "But the Lord said to her, 'My dear Martha, you are worried and upset over all the details! There is only one thing worth being concerned about. Mary has discovered it, and it will not be taken away from her.' "

Those words might surprise us. But Jesus wasn't telling her that hospitality and service aren't important. He was just pointing out how the relationship with Him comes first. We do our best work for Him when we've had time in His presence before anything else. Then we're operating in His power and not trying to make things happen ourselves. This can be hard to remember when we're "sweating the small stuff" or under pressure to accomplish something. Listening to Him helps us strengthen the habit of giving Him first place.

Those times can show that we need a faith check. Where have we placed our trust: in our own abilities and consistency, or in God's promises? Ephesians 1:6-9 remind us what these are. "So we praise God for the glorious grace He has poured out on us who belong to His dear Son. He is so rich in kindness and grace that He purchased our freedom with the blood of His Son and forgave our sins. He has showered His kindness on us, along with all wisdom and understanding. God has now revealed to us His mysterious will regarding Christ – which is to fulfill His own good plan." That's a long list of the benefits we have through Christ, along with the assurance that He's got plans that include us. Remember these verses the next time Satan comes around trying to isolate and discourage you.

The urge to take over can pop up when we start to panic if things seem out of control in our current situation. This is a good time to slow down and honestly think about how different our lives are now compared to the past. Use Galatians 5:13 to help with this. "For you have been called to live in freedom, my brothers and sisters. But don't use your freedom to satisfy your sinful nature. Instead, use your freedom to serve one another in love." Breaking this verse down, we see we're in a new lifestyle now, not a temporary place. This doesn't include going back and forth between being ruled by our old choices and following the new. It's about staying in a commitment to God's leadership and allowing Him to use us to benefit others as well as ourselves. Most of our old decisions were based on pleasing or fixing ourselves. That's the old life of bondage. We're now taking deliberate actions to keep moving forward in freedom.

We may have to address fears of failure and the unknown, but we don't have to do it alone. We still have a support team that can continue to encourage us if we stay connected to them. Proverbs 13:20 says, "Walk with the wise and become wise; associate with fools and get into trouble." This is pretty basic. We get to decide what advice we take, what resources we use and what outcomes we want. As much as we'd like to arrive at the finish line now and coast all the way home, this is going to be the ongoing writing of our stories. If that seems too big, remember that any story is made up of small parts. It has to be done one day at a time.

We've used the book of Psalms many times for a good reason: they give us a view into the ups and downs of David's life. One thing has been consistent: David relied on God. Even when he gave in to sin, he knew his only hope was God's forgiveness and mercy. He expresses the same emotions we have

in words that help us describe what we feel too. Psalm 34:4-6 covers a wide range of feelings that you may recognize. "I prayed to the Lord, and He answered me. He freed me from all my fears. Those who look to Him for help will be radiant with joy; no shadow of shame will darken their faces. In my desperation I prayed, and the Lord listened; He saved me from all of my troubles."

If you decide to go through the six month cycle of teachings again, you can be sure God will show you new things. We're always growing, and His word is always fresh. If you decide to move on to other things, you have that same assurance of growth when you stay open to the Holy Spirit. He reminds us of what we've learned if we listen. Either way, God has promised to be with you, just as David says in the verses we just read. Keep writing and sharing your story.

Scripture references

Galatians 5:25, Luke 10:38-42, Ephesians 1:6-9, Galatians 5:13, Proverbs 13:20, Psalm 34:4-6