

TM A THRIVEMOMS
BIBLE STUDY

Freedom

LETTING GO AND
EMBRACING CHRIST

Kara-Kae James
& Ali Pedersen

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transforming lives together

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WHAT IS FREEDOM IN CHRIST?

I'll be honest—I was a terrible history student when I was growing up. I was bored with the subject matter. I mean, come on—the past is the past, right? I was completely clueless when it came to US history, world history, and even biblical history. But as I became an adult, things started to change. I realized the world was so much bigger than me and my Western privilege, and there was a great big world to learn from out there. I started learning about history and how it has shaped us, and what freedom has meant for different people throughout the centuries. My eyes were opened, and it has since transformed the way I live and approach everything I do.

Freedom to me always seemed like a no-brainer. I'm free because that's my life, my economic standard, my political status. But that's not the case for everyone. Most of us don't even have to think about our freedom; it's just something that we've always had—like our mother's eyes or our father's quirky laugh. Persecution is not part of our daily existence. For example, I would guess you have easy access to a Bible and may even have multiple copies around your house.

We feel free—that's enough, right?

Sometimes, because of our everyday reality, we tend to overlook what it means to be free as followers of Jesus. But I want to encourage us to shift our thinking from political, financial, or even religious freedom, to a different kind of freedom. *Freedom in Christ*. That's what we'll spend the next week diving deeper into as we read through the book of Galatians.

Day One

NO OTHER GOSPEL

Galatians 1

We kick off this week in a bit of a rough patch. One of our favorite apostles, Paul, is a little ticked off. It's like when your child "accidentally" throws your favorite tube of lipstick in the washing machine just for fun and then laughs in the corner as you cry in the laundry basket of ruined clothes a few days later.

Things just aren't good around Galatia, and Paul is extremely disappointed in the churches there. The tone he takes with these believers in his letter implies that he knows them well and has a deep relationship with them. I've read suggestions in some commentaries that say Paul might have taken the pen from his scribe and written the end of the letter himself. Probably in all caps, just to drive the point home ("Look at what large letters I use," Galatians 6:11).

 **Go to the Word:** Read Galatians 1:1-5.

How does Paul describe himself?

To whom is Paul writing?

If we compare and contrast almost all of Paul's letters against this letter, we find a difference right at the beginning. (For example, see 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians.) Don't be too quick to skip over the greetings of his letters—they can tell us a lot. “Grace and peace” is how he typically begins, and then he gives an offering of thanksgiving. But not here.

Paul jumps right from grace and peace into frustration: “I am amazed that you are so quickly turning away from him who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel” (Galatians 1:6).


Ouch.

I shared in my book *Mom Up* how some people in our lives have “refrigerator rights.” These are the people we have deep personal relationships with, who can literally walk into our homes and feel comfortable enough to help themselves to the fridge, and we can do the same in their homes. We don't only have rights to their food, coffeemaker, and best chocolate stash—we have rights to personally provoke and encourage them.

Hebrews 10:24–25 reads: “And let us watch out for one another to provoke love and good works, not neglecting to gather together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging each other.” The word *provoke* may sound negative at first, but the idea here is to call out and challenge the people who are walking through life with us, and to encourage them when they are struggling. Our refrigerator friends have earned the right to speak into our lives this way, and this is how we help each other grow. When one of my close friends sees me slipping, she has the right to provoke me.

Paul had this kind of relationship with the Galatians. He was calling them out on their slipping, continuing to push them away from the false gospel they had started to follow.

Paul uses phrases like “the gospel of Christ” and the “truth of the gospel” throughout this letter. Imagine you were explaining what the gospel means to a child. How would you describe it to them?

 **Go to the Word:** Read Galatians 1:3-5. Look at the way Paul breaks it down: What does he tell us about Jesus in these verses?

Verse 3:

Verse 4:

Verse 5:

 **Go to the Word:** Read Galatians 1:6-10.

This letter to the Galatians is all about the gospel, and in ways we might find that a bit surprising, because Paul was writing to Christians who already believed in the gospel.

Based on what you’ve learned about the Galatians, why do you think it was so important for Paul to emphasize his message about the gospel?

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Something we often forget—because it’s always right in front of us—is that we need the gospel just as much as non-believers need the gospel. We lose our way sometimes, we forget our journey, and we take our eyes off the destination ahead. We (often like children) need constant reminding of the gospel of Christ and the freedom that can be found in it.

How do we “distort the gospel” (Galatians 1:7) today in ways that may take away from the power of the gospel message?

What is Paul’s attitude toward people who distort the gospel?

PRAYER FOR FREEDOM

Pray with Paul, thanking Christ for rescuing us and freeing us from this present evil age. Ask God to remind you to stay close to the gospel of Christ.

Day Two

THE LAW AND THE PROMISE

Galatians 2:11-21; 3:1-29

I majored in journalism in college, and one course I had to take was media law. A lot of journalism students hated this course, mostly because the professor was really tough, but also because it was nothing like our normal docket of coursework. This class was all about learning a specific set of rules and guidelines that writers must follow when writing for media.

And me? I'm a type A, Enneagram-one rule follower. So ... I LOVED it. Learning the rules and how they fit together made sense to me, and I enjoyed the hours I had to spend memorizing each and every law that we bright-eyed, young journalists and PR professionals needed to know to step into our careers ethically and lawfully. That one class almost made me want to go to law school just because I'm that much of a rule follower.

Still to this day I love a good set of rules and margin. Rules make sense to me and help me feel at ease and able to accomplish what I need to do without distraction. So, as you might guess, I can sympathize with the Galatians a bit when we read about them falling back into the ancient Law.

You see, the ancient Law (prior to Christ's resurrection) was put in place to give people a way back to God. They could follow a set of rules, and this would put them in right standing with God. But Paul points out that Christ turned this idea on its head.

 **Go to the Word:** *Read Galatians 2:11-21.*

What does Paul say will not happen by the works of the Law?

What does he claim would be true if righteousness came through the Law?

 **Go to the Word:** *Read Galatians 3.*

Paul goes on to explain to the Galatians, in chapter 3, how Jesus changed everything! When Jesus died, He fulfilled the Law and made it obsolete! Rather than people needing to fulfill the Law in order to be saved, they only needed to place their faith in Jesus. Faith—not the Law—was the great gift here.

Let's pretend that Paul is a lawyer in this scenario, now that I'm reminiscing on my law study days, and look a little deeper at this text. In Galatians 3, what are five reasons Paul presents to the Galatians for understanding why salvation comes by faith and not by the Law?

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

“You foolish Galatians!” Paul calls his friends out yet again here in chapter 3. Not exactly a compliment. He wasn’t implying that they were just frivolous, innocent, or uneducated. The Greek word Paul used for “foolish” was *anoetos*,¹ meaning that they had been taught but were choosing not to use the power of their minds. Roughly translated, now this would probably read more like “Come on, you senseless idiots!”—along with even a few choice words not appropriate to repeat here. Paul had so clearly laid the path for them, yet it was almost as if someone had put a spell on them.

What was the purpose of the Law? Was it intended to justify someone? Did it restrain sin or expose sin?

The Law does not free us; only Christ does that. When God sent His Son to die for us, that sacrifice took away the need to follow all the steps to get to Him and obey some extensive set of rules (yes, that can be tough for us rule followers to get on board with). God’s promise here is solid. It’s secure. We don’t have to turn back to our old ways when the new and free is in front of us. Now we have a way to

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Him through confession, faith, and worship. Christ truly does cover all.

Sometimes it can be difficult for us to relate to biblical law. What are some examples of the “law” in your life that is holding you back from true freedom in Christ?

PRAYER FOR FREEDOM

Ask Jesus to help you open your eyes and see yourself as free from any shame or anxiety weighing on you due to a feeling of being imprisoned or confined by your personal “law.”