

LET JESUS  
SET YOU FREE.

A MAGAZINE FOR TEENS  
GOD+LIFE+FUN

## Don't take your **freedom** for granted.

Why religious oppression  
should matter to you

Texting and driving:  
**YOUR LIFE ON THE LINE**

**THE COST OF FREEDOM**  
Teens tell **ec** about growing up  
in a military family

**Is war right or wrong?**  
See page 51.

**11** great summer reads—  
there's one for YOU!

**TOUGH QUESTIONS:**  
How did life on  
earth begin?

WWW.LIFEWAY.COM

JULY 2011 // U.S.A. \$2.95

ISBN 978-1-4300-0411-0



9 781430 004110

 **LifeWay**  
Biblical Solutions for Life™

**“THE LOST  
ENJOY  
FOREVER  
THE  
HORRIBLE  
FREEDOM  
THEY HAVE  
DEMANDED.”**

—C.S. Lewis



**6 THE BIG YOU-GOTTA-READ-THIS LIST**

BY ANNA MCKENZIE

Check out our list of must-reads for this summer. PLUS: a few songs to add to your summer playlist

**8 DEADLY CONSEQUENCES**

BY HEATHER YATES

Distracted driving is a big deal. Find out why in this article.

**16 OFFBEAT SUMMER GAMES**

BY ADAM RICHARDS

Is your summer already boring? We've got a few suggestions for random games to spice it up!

**24 GROW UP!**

BY MISSY FAULKENBERRY

It's time to take some responsibility. Check out these practical tips for every phase of your life.

**40 TOUGH QUESTIONS**

BY ERIN DAVIS

This month we tackle an important question of faith: How did life begin?

**51 CHRISTIANS AND WAR**

BY DAVID CRIM

War is a reality in our world, but where does God stand on the issue? The answer might be surprising.

**54 MILITARY LIFE: A FAMILY AFFAIR**

BY DONNA MCKINNEY

Wonder how teens like you deal with having a parent in the military? Check out this profile.



**33 GIVE ME LIBERTY!**

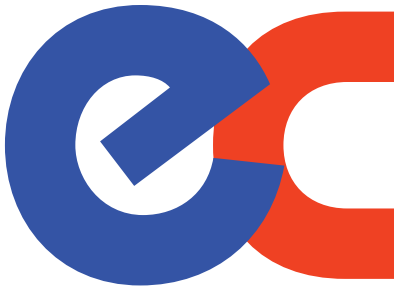
BY COURTNEY VEASEY

In a world that prides itself on freedom, it's hard to imagine religious freedom isn't a universal right. Learn the truth—and what being free in Christ really means.

**THIS MONTH'S STUDENT CONTRIBUTORS:**

A big thank you to our friends in Grass Valley, Calif., who helped shape this issue of *ec* magazine: Bobby Billock, Kylee Rice, Bella Billock, Austin Fields, Jordan Lambert, Lino Morin, Zachary Geoghegan, Kyle Marks, Joey Billock, Megan McGuire, Mason McGuire, Marc Yeolman, Stephanie Haggerty, Katie Geoghegan, Josh Northern, Madison Brown, Georgia Wilson, and Sean Rosch.

**COVER PHOTO:** Scott Greenwalt / **MAKEUP:** Lauri Leiwke



# DEPARTMENTS

VOLUME 17 • NUMBER 4 / ECMAGAZINE.ORG

July  
11



**17 THE RULES**  
DEVOTIONS: WEEK OF JULY 10-16  
BY DAN BARNES  
Following Christ isn't about keeping a list of do's and don'ts.

**23 FUN: MISCELLANEOUS**  
Here's a little bit of everything you wanted to know, but didn't even know you needed to know.

**27 ADOPTED**  
DEVOTIONS: WEEK OF JULY 17-23  
BY VICTORIA SINGA-NUGUID  
When you accept Christ, you become part of the family of God. Nothing more, nothing less.

**38 SNIPPETS & SOUNDBITES**  
All the random you can handle, including a cow that thinks it's a horse and a bug that looks like Elvis. No lie.

**43 CAMPUS CONNECTION**  
BY LEAH SMITH  
Use *ec*'s weekly devotion themes to lead a Bible study with these helpful tips.

**45 PRACTICE**  
DEVOTIONS: WEEK OF JULY 24-30  
BY NADINE ONTIVEROS  
As a believer, you've been set free from sin to practice righteousness.

**56 MK CORNER**  
BY IMB  
Want to do great things for God? MK teen says to follow where God leads.

**57 MOTIVATION**  
DEVOTIONS: WEEK OF JULY 31-AUGUST 6  
BY PAUL KELLY  
As a follower of Christ, you're called to serve others out of love.

**63 MUSIC CONNECTION**  
BY EC STAFF  
Check out these reviews of recent CCM releases, including Laura Story, Aaron Gillespie, and FM Static.

**64 THE PARTING SHOT**  
Five things we hope you remember after reading this issue.



PHOTOS © ISTOCKPHOTO AND JEN SISKKA / THINKSTOCK.

- 1 CONTENTS**
- 3 WRITER'S BLOCK**
- 4 STATEMENTS**  
We love to hear what you have to say. Here are a few things we just had to share.
- 4 QUESTION OF THE MONTH**
- 5 THE CONNECTION**  
Want to take a different look at the concept of freedom? Look to the prodigal son.
- 9 FREEDOM**  
DEVOTIONS: WEEK OF JULY 3-9  
BY NATALIE ELLIOT  
When you're free in Christ, you're free from living solely for yourself.
- 15 LIFE: ESSENTIALS**  
Some things you just need to know. Here are a few we thought were good.



### essential connection

encourages and equips students to live lives that honor God and change the world by providing daily devotions and relevant content.

#### PRODUCTION & MINISTRY TEAM

CONTENT EDITOR Mandy Crow

PRODUCTION EDITOR Emily Cole

GRAPHIC DESIGNER Jen Showalter

NATIONAL STUDENT MINISTRY LEADER

Paul Turner

EDITORIAL PROJECT LEADER Mike Wakefield

#### SEND QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS TO:

Mandy Crow, Content Editor

One LifeWay Plaza

Nashville, TN 37234-0174

or [ec@lifeway.com](mailto:ec@lifeway.com)

#### MANAGEMENT PERSONNEL

SENIOR DIRECTOR,

STUDENT MINISTRY PUBLISHING Jimmy Hester

MANAGING DIRECTOR,

STUDENT MINISTRY PUBLISHING Dawn Cornelius

DIRECTOR,

STUDENT MINISTRY Scott Stevens

DIRECTOR, PUBLISHING,

LIFEWAY CHURCH RESOURCES Gary H. Hauk

#### ADVERTISING

One LifeWay Plaza MSN 136 • Nashville, TN 37234

FAX (615) 251-2039

E-MAIL [magazineadvertising@lifeway.com](mailto:magazineadvertising@lifeway.com)

MEDIA KITS [lifeway.com/magazines/media](http://lifeway.com/magazines/media)

DIRECTOR, MAGAZINE ADVERTISING & CIRCULATION

Rhonda Edge Buescher

ADVERTISING PRODUCTION Scott Hancock

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

**essential connection**, JULY 2011, (ISSN 1078-2788; Item 005075081) is published monthly by LifeWay Christian Resources, One LifeWay Plaza, Nashville, TN 37234, Thom S. Rainer, President. © 2011 LifeWay Christian Resources. For inquiries, visit [www.lifeway.com](http://www.lifeway.com), or write LifeWay Church Resources Customer Service at One LifeWay Plaza, Nashville, TN 37234-0113. For subscriptions or subscription address changes, visit [www.lifeway.com/magazines](http://www.lifeway.com/magazines), fax (615) 251-5818, or write to the above address. For bulk orders shipped to one address, visit [www.lifeway.com/magazines](http://www.lifeway.com/magazines), fax (615) 251-5933, or write to the above address.

Annual individual or gift subscription, \$24.95. Bulk orders shipped to one address when ordered with other literature, \$1.55 each per month, plus shipping. Please allow six to eight weeks for arrival of first issue.

**Advertisement Disclaimer:** This magazine includes paid advertisements for some products and services not affiliated with LifeWay. The inclusion of the paid advertisements does not constitute an endorsement by LifeWay Christian Resources of the products or services.

Unless otherwise marked, all Scripture quotations are taken from the Holman Christian Standard Bible®, copyright 1999, 2000, 2002, 2003, 2009 by Holman Bible Publishers. Used by permission.

**LIFEWAY STUDENTS:** Helping families and churches lead students to KNOW Christ, OWN their faith, and make their faith KNOWN.



## Freedom!

**"I can't wait to get out of here!"**

I heard those words a lot in the small town where I grew up. From the most popular kids to the ones nearly everyone overlooked, there were teens—friends and foes alike—who simply wanted to graduate from high school and head out of town. They said they wanted to be free. Free from small-town life. Free from parental constraints. Free from homework, school, and teachers. Free to do whatever they wanted.

And some of them "escaped," almost as soon as graduation was over. They moved away, went to college, joined the military, and got married. And they discovered that freedom—at least their idea of it—wasn't all they thought it would be.

My classmates thought that being free simply meant they got to call all the shots. That they got to make all their decisions and do whatever they wanted and nobody could tell them what to do. The truth is, that's selfishness, not freedom.

And in the end, selfishness is just as constraining as living in a small town. You're consumed by your own needs, wants, and what's most important to you. You can't think about other people, and you always come first. That isn't freeing. Instead, it's just another heavy burden to bear. You're trapped under the load of all the things you think you want, need, or have to accomplish to be successful.

We live in a world that often confuses freedom with getting to do whatever we want—with selfishness, really. And that's what we want you to understand when you finish reading this month's issue of *ec*: that freedom isn't calling all the shots. Freedom in Christ is the only real kind of freedom there is—and it's the freedom from sin, the freedom to not be bound by your own selfishness and endless desires, but rather to be controlled by God's love.

It's the knowledge of that kind of freedom that fuels Christians to keep living their faith and sharing the gospel in places where it would be easier to simply shut up and quit, as you'll see in Courtney Veasey's cover story, "Give me liberty!" on page 33. It's the truth that calls us to take responsibility for our lives and honor God with them as Missy Faulkenberry points out in "Grow Up!" on page 24. It's the hope that keeps Meghan, Nick, and Matt centered when their dad, an Army officer, deploys to protect our freedoms. (See p. 54.) It is this truth, this freedom, that calls us, as believers, to let go of "every weight and the sin that so easily ensnares us" (Heb. 12:1) and race toward the truth with Jesus as our example.

Freedom isn't getting to do everything you want. It's being made new so that you can be everything God has created you to be. Let that truth change you this month!

*Mandy*

## do you really know god?

### TAKE A LOOK AT THE PLAN OF SALVATION

**Know God.** To be sure you are going to heaven, it is essential that you know God in a personal relationship. Without this relationship, you are completely separated from Him (Rom. 3:23; 6:23).

**Name Jesus as your Lord and Savior.** You must believe that Jesus is who He said He is—God's Son. As the perfect, sinless Son of God, only Jesus can forgive your sin (Rom. 10:9-10).

**Own up to your sin.** Take personal responsibility for your sin and confess it to God. He will hear your prayer and forgive you of your sin. Forgiveness is a free gift—all you have to do is ask (Rom. 6:23; Eph. 2:8-9; 1 John 1:9-10).

**Walk a different direction.** The Bible calls this turning away from your sinful choices *repentance*. To repent really just means to go in a different direction. As a Christian, you will want to live differently (Luke 13:3; Eph. 5:8).

# Statements

Have something to say? Send us an e-mail at [ec@lifeway.com](mailto:ec@lifeway.com), write ec letters at *One Lifeway Plaza MSN 174, Nashville, TN 37234-0174*, or stop by [ecmagazine.org](http://ecmagazine.org).

## Thanks, ec!

Thank you for putting the D-Word article about discernment ["The D-Word: Why we need discernment when choosing what to watch, read, hear, and play" in the April 2011 issue of **ec**]. The tips were really useful and practical, and it was a great reminder to discern what media I watch and listen to. Sometimes, I feel like no one understands why I don't watch or listen to certain things, and it's nice to know I'm not alone. I really enjoy reading your magazine each month. Keep up the good work!

**GRACE**, York, Me.

**(Editor's note:** *Thanks, Grace! We love to know when a particular article helps a reader. And I have to admit, there was a time in my life when I thought what I watched, read, listened to, and so forth didn't really matter. But as you're discovering—and as that article pointed out—what we feed our minds is important. So keep standing up for what you know is right! And know that you're not alone at all!*)

## Reader likes ec

This magazine is amazing. I love it. This magazine is bring[ing] me closer to God than I could have ever imagined to be. Keep up the great work.  
**KELSEY**, on Facebook

**(ec:** *Thanks, Kelsey! We're thrilled that you're a fan of ec. Every member of the ec team counts it as an honor and a great responsibility that we get to work on a magazine that helps teens grow in their relationship with Christ. Our goal with every magazine is to speak the Truth of God in love—through the articles and devotions. Sometimes, it's hard to know if ec is making a difference, but notes like yours help us to realize that God is at work, even when we might doubt Him! Keep reading, but most of all, keep seeking God. You'll never regret that!*)



© BRAND X PICTURES / THINKSTOCK

## overheard

### just in from Facebook:

★ "I LOVE THIS MAGAZINE!!! It is funny and very inspiring! =)" —Priscilla

★ Saw my answer to the question in my ec!!!!  
That is one of the coolest things ever!!!!!! I walked in and half the youth group knew who I was!!!!!! Thanks:)" —Rebecca

**things we wonder about:** Y'all are BEAST!!! —Alexa\*

\*Um, thank you. We think . . .



## question of the month

### How has God been there for you during a tough time?

"Last year, one of my teachers was in a serious car accident, and as a result of the injuries he had from it, her son died. At first, I was very angry, but through it all, God was there for both me and my teacher."

**EVAN**, ON FACEBOOK

"When I was younger, I really struggled with my parents' divorce and the treatment from my father. Through much pain and many mistakes, God simply waited for me to reach out to Him. He showed me how He can take it. Recently I was struggling with handling unwillingly getting taken advantage of by an adult. God stood by me subtly reminding me that He can and desires to carry me through anything I'm struggling with. Simply put, God has been my safe haven of love in its purest form."

**DAYTONA**, ON FACEBOOK

### Next month's question:

### What's your favorite movie from the last six months?

So just what are you thinking? Here at **ec magazine**, we want to know. Each month you'll find a question we want your input about. So check it out and e-mail us with your thoughts! We can't wait to hear from you! Find us on Facebook or visit [ecmagazine.org](http://ecmagazine.org).

© GEORGE DOYLE / THINKSTOCK



# A wayward son

**EVER PUT YOURSELF** in the shoes of a person in the Bible? Read the story below for what the prodigal son might have been thinking. (See [Luke 15:11-24](#) if you have no idea who that is!)

I'm tired of my dad's rules. He doesn't understand me one bit. He expects me to be like my older brother. I wish I hadn't been born into this family.

I've had enough! I'm leaving this house and getting the freedom I deserve. If only I had the money. That's it! My dad is supposed to leave me an inheritance after he dies. I'm sure he won't mind if I ask for it now. He'll probably be glad I'm gone.

My dad gave me the money! This must be the right thing to do. I'm free! Free from the

expectations. Free from chores. Freedom at last! I'm taking my money and going as far as I can from home.

I'll show everyone, especially dad, who I really am and how successful I can become. My dad doesn't care about me. So long everyone.

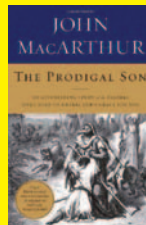
My new life is the best. All those things my dad warned me about how not to spend my money were all wrong. He just didn't want me to have fun. Who needs a job? I'm going to party all day, every day. No one's going to tell me how to live. I'm not hurting anyone, and no one misses me. This is what freedom is all about—doing what I want, when I want, and how I want. This is the life!

What's happening? I could have never predicted a famine. How could I have known?! There has to be a way out. Surely someone will hire me and pay me decent wages.

I'm so lonely. Starving, too. What am I doing? Even the pig's food is appetizing. My dad's employees have more than me. Maybe my dad will at least hire me. I don't think he will accept me as his son again. I'm headed home, but definitely not how I had planned. How could my dad ever forgive me?

Is that my dad? It is! He looks so happy, like he is about to cry. I don't deserve his attention. Now he is giving me his most treasured possessions and wants to throw a party in my honor?

I now know that true freedom is found in the center of God's will as I live in obedience and serve Him. That is a high calling I never want to miss out on. ★



READ  
**The Prodigal Son**  
John MacArthur  
(Thomas Nelson, 2010)

In this book, MacArthur attempts to take this parable back to its roots and help readers better understand its profound meaning.

LISTEN  
**To Bring You Back**  
Paul Alan (Whiplash Records, 2008)

This song is written from Jesus' point of view and will help you recognize how much He loves you and wants to rescue you from sin.

STUDY  
**Luke 15:11-24**  
The Bible  
This passage is called "the parable of the prodigal son." Read it again.

## WORD STUDY

**PRODIGAL.** Prodigal used as an adjective means "wasteful" or "extravagant." When used as a noun, it means one who uses his time, money, or strength wastefully. Examples are: 1. Spending way too much money for one particular item. 2. Sleeping during class. 3. Not using God-given talents. Christians can even be characterized as prodigal when our thoughts wander to wanting someone or something outside of God's will for our lives.

© ISTOCKPHOTO / 4X6



## What about you?

- What lies did the guy believe in this story?
- Which of the prodigal son's thoughts and attitudes have you had lately?
- Have you ever wanted to run away from home? If so, what were you in search of?
- How does it make you feel to know that God loves you so much He is willing to run to you, even when you have messed up?
- What is your favorite part of the story of the prodigal son? Why?
- What do these verses teach you about true freedom?

# THE BIG YOU-GOTTA-READ-THIS SUMMER LIST

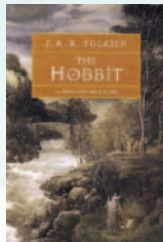
by Anna McKenzie

Summer is in full swing, but that doesn't mean you have to turn off your brain completely for the next month or so. If you'd like to exercise your brain by finding some good reads and a few new tunes to spice up your summer, we've got just the list for you!

## FANTASY FAVES

### THE HOBBIT

J.R.R. Tolkien



Bilbo Baggins is just a simple hobbit, but he finds himself caught up with a troop of dwarves and encounters everything from trolls to a tyrannical dragon named Smaug. *The Hobbit* is the page-turning prequel to *The Lord of the Rings* series, and it has the same epic appeal as the trilogy. (Peter Jackson's movie version of *The Hobbit* will hit the silver screen in December 2012. Jackson directed the movie version of *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy also.)

### THE NEVERENDING STORY

Michael Ende



Bastian Balthazar Bux thinks he's just reading a story, but he soon discovers that his life is wrapped up in a tale beyond his imagination. If you thought *The Neverending Story*

was just a quirky children's movie from the 80s that became an unexpected fantasy staple, think again. The book that inspired that off-kilter film is a bright, extraordinarily well-written adventure with plenty of twists and turns—that you just have to read to believe.

## PUZZLERS

### THE WESTING GAME

Ellen Raskin

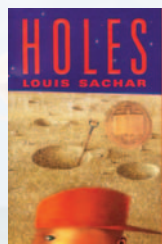


Samuel W. Westing left a mystery in his will for sixteen people who could get rich if they solve the puzzle. But it's a dangerous and intriguing game, and each

new event will keep you on your toes. This is a mesmerizing and enjoyable selection for the summer.

### HOLES

Louis Sachar



Stanley Yelnats just can't get a break. An unlucky set of circumstances lands him at a juvenile detention camp where every prisoner's daily task is

digging holes in the desert. But an ancient curse and a modern mystery are about to come unraveled. This story is well-written and very fun to read.

## CLASSICS

### DANDELION WINE

Ray Bradbury

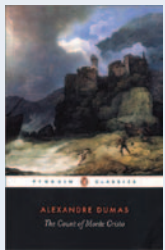


It's a hot, brilliant summer in a small town, but there's always something unique and suspenseful afoot. Ray Bradbury, a science fiction master, uses his one-of-a-kind

storytelling expertise to weave a series of tales about the unusual magic that summer brings to a remarkable community.

## THE COUNT OF MONTE CRISTO

Alexandre Dumas

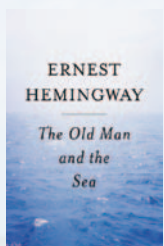


Edmond Dantes is punished unjustly for the crimes and conspiracies of others. But when he returns to his community many years later, having escaped from prison and

come into unprecedented wealth, his mission is to uncover the secrets that caused his incarceration. As the secrets come undone, so do the lives of his persecutors.

## THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA

Ernest Hemingway



An old fisherman battles for the catch of a lifetime, and his fight has made for a timeless tale, even so far as to represent the grand struggle of the

human race against the elements. Relentless determination versus overwhelming odds makes for a powerful story in this light novella.

## SPIRITUAL GROWTH

### UNDER THE OVERPASS

Mike Yankoski

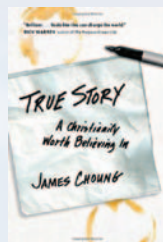


For five months, Mike Yankoski and his friend Sam decided to be homeless in several different cities in order to sympathize with the homeless community.

These two Christian men were on a mission to better understand and serve their neighbors on the streets. What they found surprised them, and their experiences put them in a position to minister to the homeless—and other Christians—for a lifetime.

## TRUE STORY: A CHRISTIANITY WORTH BELIEVING IN

James Choung



Did you ever have that friend who bombarded you with tons of tough questions about Christianity and the gospel? Did you know how to answer him or her? James

Choung writes this book (in story form) to help us answer the hard questions about our faith and to share Christ in a way that still sounds like good news to a jaded contemporary culture.

## HINDS' FEET ON HIGH PLACES

Hannah Hurnard



Much-Afraid is making her way to the High Places, but she has to face some fierce landscapes and conquer some cruel enemies first. Luckily, the Shepherd is there

to help her. This classic allegory of a believer on a sojourn of sanctification is still very relevant to the spiritual journey of the modern Christian.

## THE GREAT DIVORCE

C.S. Lewis



After they've died, a bunch of people (now ghosts) take a bus to heaven—but will they choose to stay there? In this hypothetical tale set in the

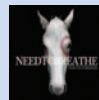
afterlife, C.S. Lewis highlights human nature, spiritual transformation, and the eternal consequences of the choices we make. **EC**

## SUMMER JAM LIST

Check out some of our favorite musical selections for summer!



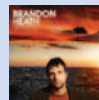
**SONG:** "Way Beyond Myself"  
**ARTIST:** Newsboys  
**ALBUM:** *Born Again*



**SONG:** "The Outsiders"  
**ARTIST:** NeedtoBreathe  
**ALBUM:** *The Outsiders*



**SONG:** "This Is the Stuff"  
**ARTIST:** Francesca Battistelli  
**ALBUM:** *Hundred More Years*



**SONG:** "Give Me Your Eyes"  
**ARTIST:** Brandon Heath  
**ALBUM:** *What If We*



**SONG:** "Eyes Wide Open"  
**ARTIST:** Jars of Clay  
**ALBUM:** *Jars of Clay Presents The Shelter*



# THE DEADLY CONSEQUENCES OF texting and driving

by Heather Yates

It's Tuesday night and you're channel surfing, waiting for your older brother to come home so you can eat dinner.

Your mom is in the kitchen making lasagna, and you can smell the aroma of garlic bread toasting in the oven. You're listening for the sound of the garage door opening, which signals your brother is home and you can eat.

*Where is he?* you wonder. *Practice should have been over an hour ago.*

Thankfully, you hear the familiar rumble of a car in the driveway. You dash to the kitchen.

That's when you hear it. A loud, heavy knock at the door. Three distinct, loud knocks.

"Who's at the door?" your mother asks. You jog back through the hallway, past the rows of baby pictures and knickknacks to the front door. You don't know it yet, but your life is about to change.

You find a man in a uniform, not much older than your brother, on the other side. "Is your mom or dad home?" he quietly asks.

You nod. You feel like you've just been punched in the gut, but you're not

sure why. Instead of yelling across the house like you'd normally do, you run back to the kitchen. "Mom, a police officer is here," you say softly.

Your mother's face suddenly goes pale, but she composes herself and sets out for the front door. You follow closely behind, hoping beyond hope that everything is fine, that your imagination is just running wild because you've never had a deputy at your house before.

"Are you Mrs. Daniels?" he asks solemnly? She nods and invites him in. He looks at you and says to her, "May I speak to you privately, please?"



You can probably guess the ending to this story. It ends in tragedy, with a loved one dead and those left behind left to grieve and wonder what happened.

It is a well-known fact that car crashes are the leading cause of death among teens. Detective Corey Davidson, a former traffic deputy for the Citrus County Sheriff's Office, has worked hundreds of traffic crashes.

"It's a sickening feeling," Detective

Davidson explains. "Knowing you're walking up to someone's door and their life will never be the same. I hate that pause between when I knock and the door actually opens. It seems like an eternity."

According to Detective Davidson, it's the distractions behind the wheel—also known as "distracted driving"—that are increasingly to blame.

"Changing the radio station, eating, talking on the phone, and now texting while driving . . . All of these things can be deadly to teen drivers," he says.

The U.S. Department of Transportation's official website about distracted driving, [www.distraction.gov](http://www.distraction.gov), lists three types of distracted driving:

- **Visual** (when you take your eyes off of the road),
- **Manual** (when you take your hands off of the wheel), and
- **Cognitive** (when you take your mind off of what you're doing).

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration also revealed this startling statistic on that site:

*The age group with the greatest proportion of distracted drivers was the under-20 age group—16 percent of all drivers younger than 20 involved in fatal crashes were reported to have been distracted while driving. (NHTSA)*

So, take responsibility for your driving by being focused solely on the task at hand. **EC**

WEEK OF JULY 3-9

# FREEDOM



## Freedom!

It's the rallying cry of enslaved people all around the world. Freedom is the dream of countries long-ruled by the iron hand of a dictator. It's the heart's desire of people held captive by dead-end jobs and a broken economy—and of teens like you who long to call the shots in your own lives.

In its most basic definition, freedom is the power or right to

act, speak, or think as you want, without hindrance or restraint. And sometimes, as believers, we mistakenly take that to mean that our lives are all about us. We can say whatever we want and do whatever we want, whenever we want. It's all about us. All about me, mine, my.

But that's not truly freedom; it's selfishness. And it's not the life God has called us to live as Christ followers. Read Scripture and you'll find that Jesus has called His followers to love God and to love others as themselves. Jesus quietly reminds those who believe of His own example of

giving up His rights so that He could meet the needs of others.

In the end, selfishness is a trap. Living only for yourself is disappointing, exhausting, and leaves you feeling lost, useless, and without purpose. True freedom—the freedom to be the person God created you to be—only comes through a relationship with Jesus Christ, who can free you from sin and a life that's all about you.

Let Him free you from your selfishness this week. A life that's all about you never satisfies. Be free!

## THE COST.

Read 2 Peter 2:9-14.

But these people, like irrational animals—creatures of instinct born to be caught and destroyed—speak blasphemies about things they don't understand, and in their destruction they too will be destroyed. —2 Peter 2:12

**M**URDERS. ROBBERIES. Hit-and-run accidents. Have you ever watched the news and been astonished by the things people do with little thought about the consequences?

But that I-can-do-what-I-want attitude extends to more than heinous crimes; it's a part of our everyday lives and daily decisions. We think we can say whatever we want, make morally questionable decisions, and choose to live in opposition to God's standard with little or no consequences.

There's a problem with that logic. If you are a Christian, then you have submitted your rights to Christ; He has control of your life. There is a standard by which you have been called to live and choosing to live in opposition to it has consequences.

Scripture clearly outlines those consequences, as seen in today's harshly worded passage. Paul's words were aimed at false teachers who thought they could do, say, and teach whatever they wanted. Yet Paul said the consequences of their disobedience would destroy them.

As a believer, you may sometimes choose to live in opposition to God's standard. That doesn't mean you lose your salvation, but it also doesn't mean that God erases the consequences of your sin. When you sin, there are always consequences—sometimes devastating ones.

God has called you to more than that. Count the cost of your choices today and choose obedience. Once Christ has freed you from sin, why would you want to go back to it?



*When have you experienced the consequences of disobedience to God?*

1

MONDAY > 7/4

## PLEDGE ALLEGIANCE TO...

**S**OME PEOPLE IN THE WORLD say they find freedom in doing whatever they want to do. They tout their lifestyle as real freedom, but in reality they are enslaved by it.

Read 2 Peter 2:15-19. Focus on verse 19.

**They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption, since people are enslaved to whatever defeats them. —2 Peter 2:19**

- ★ Read the story of Balaam (Num. 22:22-35). Why do you think Peter mentioned this story?
- ★ Have you ever been promised something only to realize you didn't get what you were guaranteed? How did that make you feel?

- ★ Why do you think people try to get others to commit the same kind of bad choices they make? Have you ever been guilty of this? Explain.
- ★ What gives you a sense of freedom? Why?
- ★ To what do you feel enslaved? Explain.
- ★ Do you think Christ has the power to free you from sin? How do you make that belief a reality?

A lot of people think Christianity is about a list of do's and don'ts; they believe serving God means giving up freedom. Don't be fooled! The truth is everyone is slave to something. People end up serving many different masters. Maybe it's an addiction, like drugs or porn. Or maybe it's the desire for academic achievement or the need for others' approval. Whatever becomes the focus of your life is what enslaves you. That's the point of today's verses. The false teachers said their message brought freedom, but it only brought corruption and defeat.

So you have a choice: do you pledge allegiance to self and sin and the consequences that go with it, or do you choose to serve Christ instead? What changes will you make this week to make Christ the ruler of your life?

2

TUESDAY > 7/5

# LIBERTY AND JUSTICE FOR ALL?

**WE WERE ALL ONCE** enslaved to sin, but thankfully we don't have to stay that way! A change can be made through the power of Christ. This is the good news we are to share with others.

Read 1 Corinthians 6:9-11. Take note of verse 11.

**And some of you used to be like this. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.**  
—1 Corinthians 6:11

- ★ How do you stand up to the list given in verses 9-10? With what do you struggle?
- ★ What does it mean to be “washed,” “sanctified,” and “justified”?
- ★ How does it make you feel to know that as a Christ follower you are no longer guilty before God?
- ★ Do you believe that all sins are equal? Why or why not?

- ★ Do you think someone can continue to struggle with a sin and yet be a believer? For example, can an alcoholic or homosexual ever be a Christ follower?
- ★ What about someone who is selfish or who talks negatively? Why or why not?

Often, verses 9-10 serve as a “Do Not Enter” sign posted on church doors. So-called believers point to homosexuals or drug addicts and say “There’s no room for you here until you get your life straight.” They withhold the life-changing message of Christ from those they deem unworthy. Yet how many Christ followers are guilty of continued disobedience in other areas like greed or gossip? There is no double standard with Christ. Everyone is guilty before God, and anyone who accepts His gift of love and mercy will become justified in His sight. Only Jesus can take away your sin and free you from its burden. Jesus can change lives. Be careful not to withhold His gracious gift from others.

Personal Space

3

WEDNESDAY > 7/6

# FREE TO BE.

**THOSE OF US** who are believers have real freedom, but that doesn't give us license to do what we want. Use your freedom to bring honor to Christ.

**“Everything is permissible for me,” but not everything is helpful. “Everything is permissible for me,” but I will not be brought under the control of anything.**  
—1 Corinthians 6:12

Read 1 Corinthians 6:12-13. Ponder verse 12.

- ★ What does it mean to say that everything is permissible?
- ★ What do you give up in order to grow closer to God? Is it worth it?
- ★ What controls you? Explain.
- ★ How is it difficult for you to honor God with your body? Do you struggle with sexual temptation, body image, eating disorders, or something else?
- ★ How does your self-control benefit others? How does it benefit you?

The freedom you have as a Christian doesn't set you free to do whatever you want. It sets you free from the bondage of sin. As a believer, you've been called to live in obedience to Christ. Sin no longer has control over you. And how you live in that freedom tells the world whose you are and whom you represent. In our world, freedom is often viewed as the opposite of self-restraint. Yet many times, freedom comes from showing control—from being obedient to God's standard.

What about you? Are you indulging yourself or are you living wisely for God? What changes will you need to make this week to better represent Christ in every part of your life?



*Don't keep others from God's grace.*

**“THERE ARE TWO FREEDOMS:  
THE FALSE WHERE A MAN IS FREE  
TO DO WHAT HE LIKES;  
AND THE TRUE WHERE A MAN IS FREE  
TO DO AS HE OUGHT.”**

—CHARLES KINGSLEY

**YOU ARE *free*  
TO *be* THE PERSON  
GOD *created*  
YOU TO BE.**

**WHATEVER IT TAKES.**

**ASK YOURSELF:** are you willing to do whatever it takes to see people come to Christ?

**Although I am a free man and not anyone's slave, I have made myself a slave to everyone, in order to win more people. —1 Corinthians 9:19**

**Read 1 Corinthians 9:19-23. Think about verse 19.**

- ★ What did Paul mean when he said he made himself a slave to everyone?
- ★ What's difficult about that idea?
- ★ How do verses 20-22 apply to your life today? How have you become like others in order to show them Christ's love?
- ★ When have you NOT followed these instructions? What happened?
- ★ How do Paul's instructions relate to how Jesus lived His life? Explain.
- ★ Is there anything you should NOT do or say in order to share Christ with others? Why or why not?

This was a difficult passage for me when I was in high school. I was taught that I was to be different from others to demonstrate God's work in my life. Yet these verses seemed to say I should act like others.

Yes, relationships with unbelievers are necessary in order to share God's love, but not at the expense of living a life that's pleasing to God.

So how do we balance? Jesus showed us how. He was in constant relationship with God. Jesus' inner circle was a group of men who yearned to love God more. But Jesus also spent time with so-called sinners. He ate with them; He talked with them. He was their friend.

Do you have a group of believers who help encourage you and hold you accountable? Do you develop relationships with non-believers? How can you share the hope of Christ with someone this week?



*What will you sacrifice for Christ?*

**BUT IT'S MY RIGHT!! WRONG.**

**WE ARE BIG ON RIGHTS** in this country, as we should be. However, there is something that supersedes rights in the kingdom of God—moving the gospel forward.

**Read 1 Corinthians 9:1-12. Concentrate on verse 12.**

**If others have this right to receive benefits from you, don't we even more? However, we have not made use of this right; instead we endure everything so that we will not hinder the gospel of Christ. —1 Corinthians 9:12**

- ★ What was Paul upset about in this passage?
- ★ Why is it important to provide for ministers and missionaries?
- ★ How can you help those in the ministry this week? This doesn't necessarily have to be monetary assistance!
- ★ How could the message of Christ have been hindered by Paul demanding the people provide for him?

- ★ What's more important, having material possessions or spreading the message of Christ? Explain. How do you show this in your life?
- ★ What rights do you need to give up in order to share Christ's love with others?

Unless you work at a church or are a missionary, this passage may be one you routinely skim over. Maybe you think, *What does pay for ministers have to do with me?* This passage reflects a bigger truth, though. Paul was describing a God-given right that he had. According to God, he was entitled to provision from the people to whom he was ministering. That should sound familiar to you. As Americans, we defend, protest, and write our legislators, all in the effort to claim what is ours! But Paul refused to use this right. He chose to go without so that the message of Christ could be proclaimed. Wow. What a shift in perspective! How could you go without something you deserve this week in order to honor God? Are you willing to make that sacrifice?

# FREEDOM

## KNOWN > 7/9

**AMERICANS ARE BIG ON FREEDOM** and rightfully so! We are free to speak our minds and make certain choices. However these freedoms are not without cost. American men and women give their lives to protect our liberties; others campaign tirelessly to make our country fair and just for all. And true freedom is not without limits. There are laws in our country to protect the liberties of all citizens. Our freedom is restricted when it interferes with someone else's independence.

Freedom in Christ is similar in many ways. We are free from any eternal consequence of sin. We are free to live in close relationship with God. The penalty of our disobedience was paid at the high cost of Christ's death on the cross. That's why our freedom should not be an opportunity to act as we please but rather a chance to serve Him and others in love. So here are some questions to challenge you:

- ★ Do you feel free? Why or why not?
- ★ Do you struggle with feelings of guilt, shame, or disapproval? Ask God to give you a sense of freedom to be who He created you to be.
- ★ How do you live differently because of the freedom Christ provides?
- ★ In what areas do you need to experience greater freedom?
- ★ Do you sometimes abuse the freedom you have in Christ? How so?
- ★ How can you show others what true freedom looks like?

## GOING DEEPER

To learn more about the concept of freedom in Christ, read:

**1 CORINTHIANS 10:23-33**

**GALATIANS 5:1-14**

**JAMES 1:21-26**

**1 PETER 2:13-16**

## PRAYERS, THOUGHTS, & QUESTIONS:



**If you're a Christian, Jesus has set you free from sin. How are you going to use that freedom?**

## READ THROUGH THE BIBLE

Get to know God better by reading His Word. Follow our plan and read through the entire Bible in one year!

- Ezra 1–Nehemiah 6
- Acts 1–6