

- Let me do a fill-in-the-blank exercise with you. You can write these down or simply answer them in your head.
 - The person I find most irritating is _____ .
 - My best friend is _____ .
 - The person I call when my life is falling apart is _____ .
 - The person I have trouble forgiving is _____ .
 - If I could have one person tell me they are proud of me, it would be _____ .
 - If it wasn't for _____ things would be better in my life right now.
 - I could take a one week vacation with _____ .
 - When I post to Instagram or Facebook, the person I most want a "like" from is _____ .
 - How many people hit the list more than once? How many of us are on other people's lists?
 - How does it feel when someone finds you irritating? Won't forgive you? Thinks you are not very good at something you are proud of?
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- We are in week 3 of our freedom series. If you haven't been here, I encourage you to go back and listen (or at least read the notes) to get caught up.
 - We saw that we are designed for freedom and that freedom is best experienced when we live life God's way. Last week we explored what this looked like with regards to our time. This week we are looking at freedom in relationships.
 - Relationships are interesting things.
 - They give us our biggest joys and problems.
 - They are the source of our best and worst memories.
 - If we are honest, many of us struggle with being free when it comes to relationships.
 - We are all influenced by people.
 - Our desires for approval or to avoid disapproval (we all desire approval from someone) are not because of being sinful people.
 - Really, these are not bad desires. God designed us to be motivated by these cravings for approval, because they reveal what we love better than almost anything else.
 - We did not get to define who we are. We did not create ourselves. We didn't choose our DNA, intellectual and physical powers, families, cultures, early education, time periods, or most other major influences.
 - You might be trying to "re-make" yourself, but you know that your life fits into a larger purpose or story. Despite postmodernism's attempts to convince you otherwise, you cannot create our own ultimate meaning.
 - So, we cannot help but derive our identity, value, and meaning from external sources and we instinctively seek them from external personal sources.
 - We let other people, particularly those people whose approval we crave, or who we let define our value, dictate what we do or feel.
 - It can leave us feeling trapped.
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- The good news is that you don't have to be.
 - You can be free from living by the expectations of our parents or spouses or others.
 - You can be free from having to prove yourself.
 - You can be free from anger, bitterness, unforgiveness or from disappointments that flow from your expectations of others.
 - You can be free to live, love, serve and lead others exactly the way God designed it.
 - If **FREEDOM COMES FROM DOING LIFE GOD'S WAY**, then how does this look in relationships?
 - **FREEDOM FLOWS FROM HOW I SEE GOD AND HOW GOD SEES ME.**

- We are using the Proverbs of Solomon, a man who knew a lot more about life than you or I ever will. He made many observations about relationship, about the interactions of people.
- One of the most powerful observations he made, one we referenced last week, and the one that is key to relational freedom, is this one:

29:25 Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is kept safe.

- What is the fear of man?

I. Fear of man is about who matters most.

- There is a fear of man that comes because of what they can do to us. Being faced with someone who is holding a gun, who can fire me now, or that judge who can take away my license can lead to fear.
 - Fear of man as described in Scripture is not about that. It has to do with caring about what other people think of me.
 - There is nothing wrong with caring what people think of us. A good reputation is a good thing.
 - The fear of man is when we care TOO much about what people think of us.
 - Fear of man is a matter of what matters most to you.
 - Some of us would say, "Yup, that's me." For many though, we are not sure. It might be us some times, but we don't think this is us.
 - As we most things, fear of man manifests on one of two ends of the spectrum. The pendulum swings one of two ways.
- A. Defensive manifestation.
 - Fear of man is characterized by wanting to be liked, loved and accepted. This can come out a variety of ways. You may be characterized by some (or all) of these.
 - Fear of looking foolish (Praying in public, sharing with others, saying something in meeting, dancing at a wedding). We won't do anything that might make us look stupid.
 - Appeasement. (You will do or say what you think they want, just to keep the peace)
 - Chameleon. (Base your words or actions on how you might fit in in a situation)
 - Co-dependency. (Take actions that aren't for the best of others because we want to make sure they are OK (as we define it). We support and enable rather than confront.)
 - Easily manipulated. (Find great difficulty saying no.)
 - "Nice" is better than "good." (We hate it when people don't like us.)
 - Defensive (Always deflecting)
 - Blaming. (Our problems are the fault of others, not ourselves – there is a reluctance to own our own problems.)
 - My value (and consequently, our identity, emotions and actions) is determined at some level by whether or not people like me, accept me, or include me.
 - Some of us have seen this in our parents, friends, parents and we are determined not to be those kinds of people. They are weak. 😊
- B. Control manifestation.
 - We swing the pendulum to the opposite end. Fear of man is still there, but it manifests differently.
 - Independence. (We do whatever we want. The desires and needs of others are not much of a consideration.)
 - About control. (my circumstances, my image)
 - Tendency to ignore others advice and opinions. (I am sufficient)

- Driven to succeed.
- Determined not to be let down. (Perhaps it happened before or we saw it – it will not happen to us. They are relationally careful.)
- Solve other people's problems for them. (Jumping in and doing things for others, even when it is not needed or welcomed)
- Rarely seek forgiveness. (Pride becomes a problem)
- My value is determined by what I do and by whether I feel I was successful.
- Most of us tend to one side of this pendulum or the other, but we can do either at different times. Either way is not freedom.

II. Fear of man will destroy your freedom

29:25 Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is kept safe.

- The word snare refers to traps set by hunters to catch animals or birds.
- The thing about snares is that they are hidden. They rely on deception, on not being seen.
- Once an animal is caught in a snare, they do not die immediately.
- They are caught. I beings to suffocate. Cut off circulation. Robs the animal of full movement.
- They are not dead, but they are dying.
- The fear of man slowly destroys us. We are not free. We find ourselves building up resentment. We are anxious. We can never be who we really are. We must put up a front. We do what we don't want or not what we do.
- This starts young (fear of man is called "Peer Pressure") and does not go away automatically as we get older.
- The first step towards freedom is to understand your fear of man.
- What is it that you really fear? Until you define it. Until you own it. Until you can get it in front of you, you cannot be free from it.
- What exactly are you afraid of?
- Naming your fear causes it to lose much of its power and reveals the lie for what it is.
- *"The person(s) whose reward of approval we desire most – whose curse of disapproval we most fear to receive – is the person(s) we will obey, our functional god."* (Jon Bloom)
- Fear of man is based on lies from the enemy. The longer they stay hidden, the more power they have.
- **FREEDOM FLOWS FROM HOW I SEE GOD AND HOW GOD SEES ME.**

III. You find freedom not by eliminating fear, but by transferring it.

29:25 Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is kept safe.

- "But" . . . whoever trusts in the LORD is kept safe.
- We do not gain relationship freedom by just stopping fearing man.
- When simply state that we don't care anymore about other's opinions, that leads to arrogance. Isolation. It is not freedom.
- Freedom comes not by removing our need for approval or our fear of disapproval, but by transferring it to the right place.
- It is only when we turn our desire for approval towards God that this will ever change.
- The opinion of God about you and his approval has to outweigh all else. When we move towards this, we will find freedom.
- Why? Because this is a place of safety. Of surety.
- We talk a lot about how we see God. I wonder if a more important question is how God sees us?

- When we confess our sins and turn our life over to God, we are his. Not only are we designed as he desired, image bearers of the Almighty, but we are in his family as liked, loved, treasured and value children. God never looks at you with frustration or disappointment.
- I know from my own life, and from talking to others that many do not believe this fully.
- Fear of man is driven out by a trust in the Lord. A fear of the Lord. A belief that his opinion is the most important. I can only trust someone I know.
- His opinion matters more than others. My view of him should be dictated by his view of me.
- Freedom in relationship comes when I understand that his holiness, his justice, his character trumps all else. It comes when I really trust God, his love, his character and his view of me.
- When I do this, it gives me relational freedom.

9:8 Do not rebuke mockers or they will hate you; rebuke the wise and they will love you. 9 Instruct the wise and they will be wiser still; teach the righteous and they will add to their learning.

- From fear: We would hold back when we should speak, or only say what they want, or feel bad when they reject that instruction.
- From trust: Whether they listen or not, I listened to God. I spoke when I should. The results are up to him, and God sees me the same either way.

11:13 A gossip betrays a confidence, but a trustworthy person keeps a secret. 14 For lack of guidance a nation falls, but victory is won through many advisers.

- From fear: Don't want to look foolish so don't seek help. Try to do it on our own. Hide failure. Don't attempt anything in the first place.
- From trust: Look for others ideas knowing that this doesn't diminish my own value. Even if they are smarter, God doesn't see me as worth any less.

15:1 A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.

- From fear: We must defend ourselves. We must prove why they are wrong. We cannot examine ourselves honestly but must hold others accountable for their actions. We fight back, we gain support for our side. We gossip.
- From trust: We can listen. Ask questions. Consider where we are wrong. Make changes. Admit our faults. Ask forgiveness. Whether they do the same does not change the depth of the approval that we have from our Father.

13:10 Where there is strife, there is pride, but wisdom is found in those who take advice.

17:9 Whoever would foster love covers over an offense, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends.

19:11 A person's wisdom yields patience; it is to one's glory to overlook an offense.

20:22 Do not say, "I'll pay you back for this wrong!" Wait for the LORD, and he will avenge you.

- From fear: We are proud of our side. We must share with others. We put each other down. We gossip to defend my side of the equation. I must win. I cannot just let it go. We look to get even, or take satisfaction when bad things happen to them.
- From trust: We can focus on the problem. We can be vulnerable. We can forgive. We can be patient with them. We can restore relationship, extend the olive branch, be humble, because it is not about them walking over me, it is about a God who is intimately acquainted with me in all my messes and died for me anyway. I trust him to deal with the other person – I don't have to make anything happen.

27:5 Better is open rebuke than hidden love. 6 Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses.

- From fear: Friendships are easily broken. We are scared to bring things up or deal with them when they bring it up. We throw away years of trust because of an unfair event or accusation. We won't trust them anymore. We retreat to superficial interactions.
- From trust: We can rebuke. We can accept rebuke. We can be hurt because we trust God even though we might not trust them in the moment. We believe God has my best at heart and he will always be my friend. I don't need to run away or retreat. I can be held.

27:17 As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.

- From fear: We think a friendship must be equal. We don't want to accept help. If they pay for dinner this time, we must next time. We strive for equal footing and proving ourselves. If we serve and they don't appreciate it, we are slighted.
- From trust: We can be dependent in situations. We can be bold to care for and serve them whether they appreciate it or not. We

- **FREEDOM FLOWS FROM HOW I SEE GOD AND HOW GOD SEES ME.**

- Rick Barry played NBA basketball for 15 years. He retired having hit a remarkable 89.9% of his shots from the free throw line. He used one of the weirdest free throw shots – an underhand shot known as the "granny style" shot.
- Barry's style seems to work better than the more familiar traditional free throw shot.
- "From the physics standpoint, it's a much better way to shoot. Less things that can go wrong, less things that you have to worry about repeating properly in order for it to be successful." In 2008, when Discover magazine asked a physics professor who agreed: the 45-degree arc angle and the natural backspin both increase the odds of the ball going into the net, relative to the more common method.
- Chances are, for many players shooting underhand is a much better strategy. So, why don't more players use this free throw style? Malcolm Gladwell propose a simple answer: players are too embarrassed or too proud – or both. It looks silly, and most players would rather miss shots than look like a "granny" and score more points.
- One day we will stand before Jesus and His glory and power, his greatness and goodness will devastate us.
- On that day it won't matter to us what people thought about us. All the good opinions in the world won't weigh an ounce, and all the disapproval of people in the world won't mean a thing. Only his approval and only his acceptance will mean anything and it will mean everything.
- On that day we will see that that is more than enough. It is everything. Because of Jesus, we already have that approval and acceptance.
- The path to freedom in relationship does not mean people don't matter. It does not mean that we don't care about what they think or about what is going on with them. It does not mean we won't be hurt.
- It does mean I can live, love, serve and lead without reservation because I am already fully and totally approved, valued and accepted.
- **FREEDOM FLOWS FROM HOW I SEE GOD AND HOW GOD SEES ME.**
- I can't love _____ freely until I don't need their love, acceptance, approval or respect to make me feel valuable or secure.
- I can't lead fully until I don't need the results of my leadership to make me feel valuable or secure.

- I can't serve unreservedly until I don't need their appreciation or recognition to make me feel valuable or secure.
- Write it down. Remind yourself regularly. Feel free to love others, serve others, lead others without reservation.