



FREE!



Small Groups

CONTENTS

1. **WHAT? ME? A PRISONER?**
- Matthew 6:19-24
2. **GOSPEL FOR DEBTORS**
- Matthew 6:25-34
3. **GOSPEL FOR SAVERS**
- Luke 12:13-21
4. **GOSPEL FOR SPENDERS**
- 1 Timothy 6:6-11
5. **GOSPEL FOR GIVERS**
- 1 Timothy 6:17-19
6. **LAW & GOSPEL FREEDOM**
- Galatians 3:21-29

INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

Our relationship with money is usually difficult. It can be the source of worry, shame, guilt, and tremendous conflict. The only thing more stressful than talking about money is talking about money at church! Nothing about this feels freeing.

And yet the Bible talks about money all the time. Jesus talks about money to his disciples, his opponents, and even strangers who ask him questions. Are we doomed to experience even more burden about money from the Bible?

Or what if we've been listening wrong? Can the Word of God give freedom after all?

God's Word comes to us in two forms: Law and Gospel. Both of these are good words of God, but they do different things.

When God speaks law to us, he's teaching us. The law tells us what to do and what not to do. That's really important! But the law runs into some real limits too. For one thing, we never get it totally right. So even while the law is teaching us, it's also constantly exposing our failure. It's also limited by the complexity of our lives. We're all different, and we have different questions. It's impossible to write laws that don't need interpretation for the unforeseen circumstances for all our different lives.

God's other word to us is Gospel. The Gospel is the good news of what God does for us in Christ. It tells us that there's hope for us in spite of our failures to do what God teaches and commands. And in the Gospel of Jesus, God gives us his Holy Spirit to make us wise and free. And in the

Holy Spirit, God guides us and empowers us to make good and godly decisions in all the complicated circumstances of our lives. I invite you to receive and learn freedom in this series. We're all different. Our financial situations are different. And we have different needs and questions.

But God has a freedom word to speak to all of us.

As we work through this series together, God's Word (both law and gospel) will lead us to three kinds of freedom:

- Freedom in our hearts and souls. This is an internal freedom that we feel instead of worry and stress.
- Freedom from the things that control us. Think of this like non-obedience to a slave master. We don't have to keep doing things that ultimately hurt us.
- Freedom for a life of goodness and joy. Christian freedom isn't anarchy. It's about being free to live together with God as God intended, for good.

If the Son sets you free you shall be free indeed. For where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.

In Christ,

Pastor Steve

HOW TO USE THE FACILITATOR GUIDE

This is meant to be a resource to help you guide your group through a Bible-based discussion and into your prayer response time. You'll begin with a brief introduction to the topic, followed by a warmup question, often somewhat related to the topic of the study ahead. From there you'll read Scripture together, explore questions in an open conversation (remembering to practice good listening and encourage dialogue), and close with a time of prayer with one another. We end with prayer prompts that may help you tie these passages to the needs or desires of your group, and to bless what the Lord has done in your time together.

There are likely more questions and, at times, Scripture, than your group will have time to cover. This is by design. We would rather you have more questions than you need than too few. We advise that the facilitator review the lesson ahead of the meeting and choose a few questions they'd most like to ask, so that you can skip over some questions for the sake of time. Remember, you're meeting routinely, so there will be time to circle back on these conversations again.

Please allot appropriate time for prayer at the end of your meeting. Prayer is an essential and irreplaceable part of small group. We'd rather you abbreviate the discussion and move on to prayer rather than have a long discussion and speed through prayer. That doesn't mean you can't pray efficiently (Mat 6:7), but we believe that God hears and responds to our prayers, and that we are knitted together when we pray with each other.

If you have any questions or comments, please contact Dan Kidd at dkidd@ualc.org. For more small group resources, including facilitator training, visit ualc.org/smallgroups

Special thanks to our authors: Brian Chandler, Elaine Pierce, Kathy Carr, and Katie Borden.

WHAT? ME? A PRISONER?

Matthew 6:19-24

FACILITATORS:

WEEK 1

As we begin this series, there are a few things to keep in mind that may help guide your discussions productively. First, many of us do not think of greed as a personal problem, but a sin of other people (richer or poorer, outside the church rather than inside, etc.) But it is our hope that the Lord will use these discussions to shape and transform us rather than feed into self-righteousness. Additionally, as Pastor Steve spoke of in the introduction of this series, God's word is both Law and Gospel. We can anticipate that these passages and discussions will convict us and show us ways that we might not be living as God created us to live. But it is our sincere hope that we each receive these words as an invitation to be set free of unnecessary burdens and grief, knowing that the Lord Jesus does set us free indeed.

INTRODUCTION FOR THE GROUP:

In this series, called Free!, we will be exploring together what the Bible has to say to us about the money, wealth, resources, greed and generosity, fear and hope, and what it is we treasure. Believing that the Holy Spirit guides us and empowers us to make good and godly decisions in all the complicated circumstances of our lives, we are invited to receive and learn about God's gift of freedom.

We are all different. Our financial situations are different. And we have different needs and questions. But God has a freedom word to speak to all of us. As we work through this series together, God's Word will lead us to three kinds of freedom:

- Freedom in our hearts and souls. This is an internal freedom that we feel instead of worry and stress.
- Freedom from the things that control us. Think of this like non-obedience to a slave master. We don't have to keep doing things that ultimately hurt us.
- Freedom for a life of goodness and joy. Christian freedom isn't anarchy. It's about being free to live together with God as God intended, for good.

If the Son sets you free you shall be free indeed. For where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom!

OPENING QUESTIONS:

- What is something you own that is of great value to you? Perhaps a special gift you've received or an artifact from an important time in your life? What makes that item special to you?
- What is something that some people deeply treasure that is not at all interesting or meaningful to you?

OPENING PRAYER:

Pray something like: *Lord, we thank you for helping us to make time in our week to gather together to minister to one another and meditate on your word. May your Spirit guide our conversation to give us ears to hear and eyes to see, and that as we hear your word, we would receive the freedom you so generously offer us. Amen.*

SCRIPTURE:

Have someone read Matthew 6:19-24. Thank them for reading.

DISCUSSION:

This passage is a portion of a large section of Matthew devoted to Jesus' teachings.

- Where is Jesus when he gives this block of teaching and what is the occasion? To whom is Jesus teaching and for what purpose?
 - This portion of Matthew is often called The Sermon on the Mount. The introduction to this sermon can be found in Mat 4:29 – 5:1.
 - Jesus is speaking to “large crowds” who had followed him from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and across the Jordan, after he’d gone throughout Judea teaching in the synagogues, proclaiming the gospel of the Kingdom, and healing diseases and illnesses. This is, perhaps, a significant portion of the teaching and gospel proclamation Jesus had given over this time, spoken to the crowd from the side of a mountain (believed to be in Northern Israel).
- How do you imagine those hearing this sermon received this passage? Do you imagine they understood what he meant? Did they receive it as good news, or as an uncomfortable rebuke?
 - We don’t know how the crowd received this or any portion of this sermon, but as we imagine how they might have, we can gain insight into how we might think others, especially others who hadn’t heard such a teaching, might respond to it.

Jesus begins this portion of teaching instructing his hearers not to store up for themselves “treasures of earth,” but to store up treasures for themselves in heaven.

- Why does Jesus treat these two activities as mutually exclusive? Why can’t we store up treasures on earth *and* treasures in heaven?
 - Explore with your group how the pursuit and collection of earthly treasures might be antithetical or counterproductive to the pursuit and collection of heavenly treasures. What are some practical examples of this?

The general wisdom of Jesus' teaching about treasure is at least somewhat self-evident. You have almost certainly heard the adage "you can't take it with you." I think it's fair to assume that nearly everyone who is pursuing riches and acquisitions, and storing up more possessions has heard this phrase, or something like it. They likely do not think that if they were to die tomorrow that their riches would come with them. And yet, there are still plenty of us for whom are tempted and plagued by greediness despite this wisdom.

- **Why, if we know that we cannot take our wealth or earthly treasures with us, do we pursue, worry about, and accumulate them anyhow?**
 - Receive all answers. One possibility is that we don't really believe in a life after our death, or because it is hard to imagine for us, we only think in terms of this present life.
 - We might fear the unknown circumstances of our life and believe that security can be found in careful and abundant planning for later seasons.
 - We may find earthly treasures more immediately rewarding or personally beneficial (rather than seeking the good for our neighbors alongside ourselves).
 - Or, we may simply not consciously think about what it would mean to store heavenly treasures, and instead default to storing up earthly treasures like the world around us.
- **Who is someone you know who is particularly good at storing up heavenly treasures? What does that look like in practice?**
 - Receive all answers.
- **What is a heavenly treasure you feel you have been accruing well?**
 - You may notice that we do not have a definitive list of what qualifies as heavenly treasures. So, this will take some creative imagination on your part. It seems safe to presume that the investments we put into practicing love for one another will be a key feature in heavenly-treasure-storing.
 - Consider Paul's words to the Corinthians, "*And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.*" (1 Cor 13:13) You might discuss with your group Paul's descriptions of love (13:3-8), noting that v. 3 begins "*If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.*"
- **What is a heavenly treasure you would like to put more focus and devotion into?**
 - This is a vulnerable question. Consider sharing an example with the group first to set the tone and establish the safety to do so.

As part of this teaching about earthly and heavenly treasures, Jesus says, "The eye is the lamp of the body."

- **What do "healthy eyes" and internal light have to do with the topic of earthly and heavenly treasures?**
 - Seeing, wanting, and taking is a dangerous progression that the Bible routinely warns about:
 - We see this trap in the first few pages of Genesis, "*When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it.*"

- In the Ten Commandments, the Lord says, “*You shall not covet your neighbors’ house. You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male or female slave, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.*”
 - In 2 Samuel 11, we hear this of King David, “*One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful, and David sent someone to find out about her.*” He was told she was Uriah’s wife and David sent his messengers to bring her to him.
 - What we choose to fix our gaze on, and how our hearts respond to those things, especially when those things are not ours, is incredibly important.
- Are there practical ways we might keep our eyes “healthy”?

This portion of Jesus’ teaching concludes, “No one can serve two masters. [...] You cannot serve both God and money.”

- In what ways is love or devotion to earthly treasures like bondage to a slave master?
 - Receive all answers. You may explore with your group the sage wisdom of rapper The Notorious B.I.G., “Mo’ money, mo’ problems.” In what ways do wealth and possessions create grief?
- How might the Lord be inviting you to experience freedom from the bondages of earthly treasures in this season?
 - This may or may not be clear for your group at this point in our series. Give your group the grace and encouragement to consider this question throughout your time of prayer and as you proceed through the series.

PRAYER AND MINISTRY:

This week’s passage instructs us to seek and store up heavenly treasures, and to let loose earthly treasures. Spend a minute or two silently, prayerfully reflecting on the question: How might you, Lord, help me store up treasures in heaven?”

As you are comfortable, share the things that came to mind with each other, alongside any other requests you may have for prayer, and pray that God would hear and bless these pursuits of heavenly treasure.

GOSPEL FOR DEBTORS

Matthew 6:25-34

FACILITATORS:

WEEK 2

In this discussion we will spend time discussing the oppressive influence of worry. The Gospel of Jesus sets us free from worry, from the bondages of fear for our future, and replaces this with a real hope of grace of God's Kingdom.

INTRODUCTION FOR THE GROUP:

Today we continue our series, Free!, where we are reflecting together on what the Bible has to say to us about the money, wealth, resources, greed and generosity, fear and hope, and what it is we treasure. We anticipate the Holy Spirit will use this time, God's Word, and our discussion to embrace the true freedom the Lord offers us.

- Freedom in our hearts and souls. This is an internal freedom that we feel instead of worry and stress.
- Freedom from the things that control us. Think of this like non-obedience to a slave master. We don't have to keep doing things that ultimately hurt us.

In today's passage we will hear how the gospel can liberate us from fear and worry.

OPENING QUESTIONS:

- What things cause you to worry?
- Have you ever been in a situation where you were genuinely worried about your finances? What was that situation like for you?

OPENING PRAYER:

Pray something like: *Father, thank you for this time together. We pray that you would take away our distractions so that we can focus on your word and each other during this time. May your Spirit guide our conversation and hearts. Amen.*

SCRIPTURE:

Have someone read Matthew 6:25-34. Thank them for reading.

DISCUSSION:

- After hearing this passage, what immediate questions come to mind? Are there things in the passage that are hard to hear? Are there things in the passage that are comforting?
 - Receive all answers. Take note of what is shared, these may be topics to home in on as our proceed in your discussion.
- How does Jesus use examples from nature to illustrate his point about worry? Why do you think he chose these examples?
- How do cultural and societal norms influence our inclinations to worry? In what ways are we “trained” to worry about things?
 - Think with your group about how the various forms of media rely on our raising our anxieties and adding to our lists of concerns: shows and movies, advertisements, athletic competitions, news media. Each of these things, in their own way, uses concern and worry to influence us. It’s no surprise that this would have a cumulative effect on us.
- How does Jesus' teaching here challenge these norms?
- How does this passage challenge the common perception of what it means to prioritize and plan for the future?
 - While we do not want to discourage thoughtful and appropriate stewardship of our wealth and resources, we aim to allow Jesus’ teachings to have a formative influence over every aspect of our lives, including how we plan for our futures.
- How does the Lord’s posture towards us (love, provision, forgiveness) free us to give love, generosity, and forgiveness to others?
 - As often as we pray the Lord’s prayer, we pray “forgive us our trespasses/debts as we have forgiven those who trespass against us/our debtors.” As those who have received the relief of our great debts, we know how loving it is, how freeing it is, when we relieve and forgive the debts of others.
- What are some areas where you struggle to trust God with your worries?
 - Facilitator, consider sharing an example of your own to set the tone of appropriate vulnerability.
- How might this passage provide us guidance in matters of worry? Do you find this teaching helpful or challenging? Encouraging or discouraging?
 - While this is a good and true teaching, at it seems intended to be encouraging and hopeful, it can sound like an unhelpful platitude to others. The Lord can liberate us into trust and relief of our anxieties, but this is not always quick or complete, and though it is true, it doesn’t serve us to be ashamed of our anxieties either.

The prevalence of social media and constant connectivity has contributed to heightened anxiety levels in our culture.

- How can we receive and respond to Jesus' words about not worrying about food and clothing to our own, specific worries?
 - Although many in our world today still worry about where they will get food, water, shelter and clothing each day, these may not be the things we worry about regularly in Columbus, Ohio. Still, the need to be in control of our own lives is what contributes to our worry. How we are perceived on social media and a constant fear of missing out are just more modern ways that we try to control our lives without trusting God to provide.
- In what ways does the principle of seeking first the kingdom of God (v. 33) manifest in our daily decisions and priorities?
- What role does trust play in the command to not worry about tomorrow? How might we come to know that God is truly and entirely trustworthy?
 - Receive all answers.

PRAYER AND MINISTRY:

Take time to pray today for the specific areas in each other's lives that are currently causing you to worry. Share areas in your life that you have trouble giving over control to God and pray for strength for each other in these areas.

GOSPEL FOR SAVERS

Luke 12:13-21

FACILITATORS:

WEEK 3

This passage is sandwiched between other passages that focus on being wise, not worrying, being dressed and ready for Christ, acknowledging Christ, and avoiding hell. It may help to read chapter 12 to get a sense of the full theme and flow of the passage. The good news this passage offers for savers is that the Lord is ultimately in control of our futures, and that while planning is wise, living in the security God is best.

INTRODUCTION FOR THE GROUP:

In this third discussion in our Free! series, we continue to hear how the Lord intends to set us free from all the things that would capture and imprison us; including money, wealth, resources, greed, fear, and pursuits of earthly treasures. We trust that God's Spirit will lead us to receive and embrace the Lord's freedom.

- Freedom in our hearts and souls. This is an internal freedom that we feel instead of worry and stress.
- Freedom from the things that control us. Think of this like non-obedience to a slave master. We don't have to keep doing things that ultimately hurt us.

Today we will hear from the Gospel of Luke that Jesus has great news to offer people who save money and wealth.

OPENING QUESTIONS:

- What do you think of when you hear the phrase "long-term perspective"?
- Share with us a time when you had a long-term perspective of something. What was the result of this? Did it benefit anyone?

OPENING PRAYER:

Pray something like: *Lord God, we come before you with open hearts and minds. Thank you for your grace and favor in Christ. Teach us through your word tonight that we may live lives that glorify you, and are guided by wisdom and goodness, to the praise of your eternal glory. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

SCRIPTURE:

Have someone read Luke 12:13-21. Thank them for reading.

DISCUSSION:

- What stood out to you about this passage? What caught your attention?

Facilitator, you might consider a Lectio Divina practice with your group, reading the passage a second time, slowly, and asking them again what they noticed in the second reading.

- What did the man who approached Jesus want from Jesus? Why do you think he might have asked Jesus to intervene in this matter of inheritance?
 - It seems that this man saw Jesus to be persuasive or authoritative and thought that he might be able to use Jesus to his advantage. Or, perhaps he knew Jesus to be one who cares for the needy, and that he might be able to help this man in his need.
- What does Jesus' response to the man tell us about how he perceives the man's request?

In Matthew 6:19-21 we hear,

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

- How are the passages alike?
- Does "laying up grain" for many years, truly help us "take life easy"?
- What are some things that destroy our earthly treasures?
 - Consider some of the things described in passage from Matthew, along with others.
 - For more examples or emphasis, you might read from Ecclesiastes 2 (perhaps vv. 1-11 and/or vv. 17-22)
- Look at the passages in both Matthew and Luke; What topic immediately follows both passages? (Hint: Look at the section titles in your Bible)
 - In both cases, Jesus moves into teaching his hearers not to worry, that God's provision is sufficient.
- What do the notions of not worrying and God's provision have to do with this parable from Luke 12?
- How many times does the rich man of the parable refer to himself? Why might all this self-reference be meaningful?
 - The rich man refers to himself at least 10 times. This self-interested focus is a clear motivation and problem for this man and his foolishness.

- What does this man’s self-interested focus tell us about greed? How does the sacrificial love of Jesus guard us against greediness and selfishness?

In Proverbs 14:8 we’re told, “It is the wisdom of the clever to understand where they go, but the folly of fools misleads.”

- How does this Proverb tie specifically to Jesus' instruction to be wise (v.20), and to be on guard against all kinds of greed (v.15)?
- Why does Jesus conclude this parable with the Lord calling this man “fool?” What is foolish about this man building up bigger barns to lay up his surplus grain?
- How might we be tempted to build up bigger barns or lay up our surplus grain? What might be the alternative?
- How can we guard ourselves against the foolishness that motivated this man?
 - It's not our actions that save us from worry. We can never plan perfectly enough to save us from the unknown. We have to put our trust in something greater than this world. Our true peace comes from knowing Christ, and our true inheritance is being in God's loving presence, enjoying his glory, now and for all eternity.

PRAYER AND MINISTRY:

Invite your group to prayerfully reflect on the things that may cause us to be anxious about our futures, to fear for our security. As you feel comfortable, share these things with the group. Pray for each other that you the Lord would bless you with trust in his security, that he would in fact give you your daily bread by caring for today’s needs.

Pray a closing prayer like this:

Lord God, you are our highest thought. Being in your presence is the fullness of joy. There is no greater delight than knowing you. We need your help and rescue from our own greedy hearts. They distract us from your true purposes for us, and rob us of the peace you generously offer us. By your grace, have mercy on us. Do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. Forgive us, renew us, and lead us. So we may delight in your will and walk in your ways. To the glory of your holy name. Your kingdom come. In Jesus's name. Amen.

GOSPEL FOR SPENDERS

1 Timothy 6:6-11

FACILITATORS:

WEEK 4

This week, we continue our study of freedom in the Gospel as it pertains to our financial lives. Specifically, this week we'll discuss what it means to be set free in Christ as spenders. While finances may continue to be a sensitive subject for various members of your group, don't feel the need to shy away from making this practical if group members appear to be desiring some application conversation. Taking full advantage of our time of prayer will serve you well, as prayerful encouragement to live free in Christ is a powerful a necessary portion of the mutual discipleship we share in our small groups.

INTRODUCTION FOR THE GROUP:

Today we'll continue studying what freedom in the Gospel means for our financial lives. We will consider our lives as spenders, and how we might live fully and freely in Christ as spenders in our contexts. At the root of this passage is not so much a directive about what to do with our money, but how to consider what mindset we have as we approach our financial spending habits.

OPENING QUESTIONS:

- What was your first job? How were you compensated?
 - When you think of spending money, do you typically have positive or negative thoughts as it concerns spending money? Why?
-

OPENING PRAYER:

Pray something like: *Lord, talking about our resources, our wealth and our money can be uncomfortable. Help us today to lean not on our own understanding, but to trust you with our time, our talent, and our treasure. Set us free from the things that seek to bind us. Give us new vision of a life liberated by your Gospel, draw near to you.*

SCRIPTURE:

Have someone read 1 Timothy 6:6-11. Thank them for reading.

DISCUSSION:

- What do you know about the epistle we call 1 Timothy? Who wrote it and when? What was the occasion and theme or focus of the letter?
 - According to church tradition it is Paul who wrote this letter to his young fellow pastor, Timothy.
 - The letter was most likely written somewhere around 63-65 CE.
 - The church at Ephesus was a mess—many false teachings were floating around about obscure matters obscuring the gospel of Christ and his teaching. Paul excommunicated 2 of the elders (1 Tim 1:19-20) and put Timothy in charge of shepherding the church through its troubles. Paul then left and journeyed on in his mission, leaving Timothy to care for and restore the Ephesian church.
 - Though 1 Timothy contains some instructions for the structure of this church community, it's worth noting that there's a fluidity of leadership represented across the early church. What seems to be a chief concern for Paul is the quality of the character of leadership in church.

Facilitator, if you think that this information might help your group hear the passage more clearly, consider re-reading the passage for them now.

- How do you define contentment?
- In what ways do we seek contentment apart from “heavenly treasures?”
- What might godly contentment look like?
 - Godly contentment is not a matter of being pious and going to church, is it? It's knowing the Lord and his will and way for us. We can receive his hope knowing that all we do, all we say, all we have are things we can trust in the care and lordship of the Jesus. We can be set free from discontent as the Lord redirects our pursuits away from things that will not satisfy us.
- What does Paul mean by saying “*if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that*” (v. 8)?
 - Part of godly contentment is a concern for meeting basic needs like food and clothing. One of the major responsibilities and expectations of God's people throughout the Bible is that they will care for the needs of the neighbor; especially the widow, orphan, and foreigner. Those without food or clothing—matters of daily survival—are not likely to find contentment.
 - Consider how Proverbs 30: 8-9 might apply to biblical contentment.
- What, if anything, is dangerous about wanting to be rich? (vv. 9-10) What are some temptations and traps of being “eager for money?”
 - Discuss with the group how eagerness for money (for any and all of us) causes us to wander from faith and pierce ourselves with many griefs.

- Do you think most people believe that they struggle with greediness? Or, do most people believe greed is a problem with others instead?
- If you were “eager for money” how would you identify that in yourself? What circumstances or season might make us anxious about or eager for money?
- How might living without a love for money, or an eagerness for what you don’t have, be a challenge in your own context (at work or school, with your family, among your friends, in your neighborhood, etc.)?

Many who travel to different parts of the world, especially to parts of the world where resources and wealth are significantly lower than our own, have observed that there is a distinct kind of joy or peacefulness about the people they’ve met.

- Do you think this is an accurate observation?
 - This is a routine experience for people who go on foreign mission trips; they encounter people living in relative poverty and recognize some characteristics like joy and peace that they wouldn’t anticipate from people in such a relative state of poverty.
 - It is worth noting that we might over emphasize this, and undermine the suffering that people experience when their needs are unmet. We oughtn’t spiritualize poverty such that we convince ourselves we’re sparing them from problems by hoarding wealth.
- If there is, in fact, a freedom of joy and peace that comes with less wealth, resources, or luxuries, why might we still be reluctant to let go of those things or our pursuits of those things?
 - We might not be truly convinced that the modest, content lifestyle is better than the alternatives. We may not be able to imagine that some of our creature comforts are not what is best for us. Or, perhaps we believe that we deserve the things we have and purchase while others do not.

In v. 11, Paul tells Timothy to “flee from all this.”

- What is ‘all this?’ What should Timothy pursue instead? How should he go about pursuing these qualities?
 - Timothy was instructed to flee from the traps and temptations that lead to being pierced with many griefs (along with the behaviors of the ungodly teachers in vv.4-5). Instead, he’s to pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, and gentleness.
 - We know that these are fruit of the Holy Spirit’s transformation in us, and generally these are things acted out in community by walking in the way of Jesus, led and empowered by God’s Spirit. Note that these are disciplines that are grown and cultivated by practice.
- How might our mindset toward wealth and resources be changed by pursuing these other things rather than wealth?

PRAYER AND MINISTRY:

Share with one another something you have been asking for from the Lord lately (either for yourself or for someone else). Take time praying for each other about the things they are asking for from the Lord. Then, conclude with a prayer of yielding; where we pray “your will be done” and we ask God to help us to know and trust his will over our lives, knowing that he invites and hears our prayers and our requests.

GOSPEL FOR GIVERS

1 Timothy 6:17-19

FACILITATORS:

WEEK 5

Today's passage continues in 1 Timothy. You may want to remind the group about who Paul and Timothy are and the occasion for this letter.

INTRODUCTION FOR THE GROUP:

This is the 5th part of our Free!, where we are listening and reflecting on what the Bible says about matters of money, wealth, resources, greed and generosity, fear and hope, and what it is we treasure. Believing that the Holy Spirit guides us and empowers us to make good and godly decisions in all the complicated circumstances of our lives, we are invited to receive and learn about God's gift of freedom. In this series we look to God's Word to hear freedom specifically in these ways:

- Freedom in our hearts and souls. This is an internal freedom that we feel instead of worry and stress.
- Freedom from the things that control us. Think of this like non-obedience to a slave master. We don't have to keep doing things that ultimately hurt us.

In today's passage we will hear how Christ's Gospel is good news for givers.

OPENING QUESTIONS:

- Are you good at gift giving? What gift are you most proud of giving someone?
- Do you know anyone who is a particularly good gift-giver? What makes their gifts remarkable?

OPENING PRAYER:

Pray something like this. *Lord, we ask that you would teach us to be grateful for your generosity, that we would be gracious recipients of your good provisions and blessings. We ask that you would use our time together, the passage we read, the discussion we have, and the prayers will pray to draw us out of our bondages and into the freedom of generosity. Amen.*

SCRIPTURE:

Have someone read 1 Timothy 6:17-21. Thank them for reading.

DISCUSSION:

Today's passage comes from a letter written by the Apostle Paul to a young pastor and friend named Timothy. These are the letter's closing words, Paul's concluding thoughts to Timothy. And our passage begins with Paul instructing Timothy to make some commands of those in his church—specifically “those who are rich in this world.”

- **What do you imagine Paul had in mind when spoke of someone “rich in this world?” What kind of person, what sort of wealth, might Paul have meant in his own context?**
 - Encourage your group to imagine what types of things might be a part of the material wealth and commodities of a relatively rich Ephesian. Consider also what Paul, a traveling pastor and tent-maker might have considered rich in that time.
 - Ephesus, where Timothy lived as a pastor at the time, was a major port of international trade. It was identified as the “first and greatest metropolis of Asia,” which they used as an inscription. Ephesus is believed to be the 3rd largest city in the Roman Empire. It was known to have wealth public donations that funded such projects as the Artemision (or Temple of Artemis), often appearing on lists of the great wonders of the world.
 - We do not precisely know the wealth, station, or vocations of the members of this church. But, it is quite possible that there was a broad economic spectrum among the community. Contextually, we can deduce that at least some of them qualified, by Paul's standards, as “rich in this world.”
- **What comforts, resources, or opportunities are available to us that would not have been available to even the richest of Ephesians at the time?**
 - Consider with your group some of the features of our lives that are ordinary for us but would not have been available to anyone in that age. Electricity, the connectivity and abundant information provided by the internet, airplane travel, numerous types of medicines like penicillin, ice cream.

Timothy was to command the “rich in this world” “not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain.”

- **Why would those with wealth and resources need to be commanded to not be arrogant? What does wealth have to do with arrogance?**
 - Consider the ways one might think of their possessions or their positions as a matter worthy of pride. Discuss with your group how we might associate wealth or status with importance, worthiness, or success. You might ask, “Why shouldn't the wealthy be proud and arrogant?”
- **Why would Timothy command them not to put their hope in wealth, declaring it “so uncertain?” Why might someone associate wealth with stability?**
 - Explore with the group the tension between good stewardship and putting hope in the stability of wealth. It is not our aim to seek poverty for ourselves, or to not save any money for seasons ahead. But, there may be some ways that Christians are called to use what they have differently than the world around us. Consider what those might be.

The passage goes on to command that they, “*put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.*”

- What does Paul mean when he says that God richly provides us with everything? Why might someone struggle to believe that everything we have is provided to us by God?
 - Receive all answers.
- Are you surprised that Paul would say that everything God richly provides us with is “for our enjoyment?” What might you have expected him to say instead?
 - We could, in hearing the Bible’s teachings on money or possessions come away with the perception that absolute asceticism is this purest form of Christianity; that we should feel guilty for having nice things and we should feel uncomfortable enjoying the things money can buy. This verse rightly challenges that notion. The Lord loves us and delights in us, and there is nothing inherently righteous about living without enjoyment. But *how* we enjoy what the Lord provides matters.
- What might it mean to be rich in good deeds? Is that a meaningful type of wealth or treasure? Do you know anyone who is “rich in good deeds?”

Paul says that in living a life rich in good deeds “*so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.*”

- How does a life of generosity, rich in good deed, lead one to take hold of a life that is truly life? What are some features of someone who had taken hold of that kind of life?
 - Think not only of those who have great wealth and give great wealth, but also of those who are generous with whatever they have to share.
 - Are generosity, a willingness to share, and routines of serving others related to enjoying everything the Lord has richly provided? How so?
 - Notice that sometimes we may be inclined to think of enjoyment of riches as selfish, but that is not inherently true. Especially not when we hold our wealth and possessions loosely, when we know that we are blessed in order to bless others. Consider with your group how the blessings of individuals Christians might be a mutual blessing for the whole of the community.
 - How might a life without generosity, a life impoverished in good deeds, prevent us from enjoying the provisions of the Lord?
 - What might be some snares or temptations that could prevent us from treating our earthly things as the Lord intends?
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PRAYER AND MINISTRY:

Spend time sharing prayer requests, asking God to help us in our present needs, and that the Lord will prepare us for the many things he has in store for us ahead. Invite your group to prayerfully reflect on recent moments in their lives that they've enjoyed. Invite them to think of God's delight in their enjoyment, and to be thankful for his generosity. Take time to pray a blessing over each other that the Lord would lead us in lives of true enjoyment, receiving the richness of contentment and love.

LAW & GOSPEL FREEDOM

Galatians 3:21-29

FACILITATORS:

WEEK 6

Towards the beginning of our discussion we will ask about the promises given to Abraham in Genesis. Several passages are listed that you might read with your group. Consider having those ready, or preparing your group for them ahead of time.

INTRODUCTION FOR THE GROUP:

As we conclude our Free! series, we will be examining together a passage from Paul's letter to the church in Galatia. We will hear how this faith in Christ we've been gifted sets us free from custody or guardianship of the Law. We will consider how our faith simultaneously gives us a rails to run on while also setting us free.

OPENING QUESTIONS:

- Have you ever come to the end of a season, a commitment, or event and felt like a weight was off of your shoulders? Like you were finally free?
- If there was one thing in your life—a responsibility, a task, a situation—that you could get out of immediately, what would you cut out?

OPENING PRAYER:

Pray something like: *Heavenly Father, as we hear from and study your word today, be near to us. We seek to know and encounter you in this time ahead. Bless our time together, with you and with one another, and use this time to unify us and speak your freedom over us. Amen*

SCRIPTURE:

Today's passage begins amidst a protracted instruction about what God's law means for Christians after the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. He explained that the God's grace cannot depend on the law given to Moses, because that grace was given through a promise to Abraham 450 years before Moses. So, he asks, "Why was the law given at all?" And that is the question we're hearing answered in today's passage.

Have one or two people read Galatians 3:21-29. Thank them for reading.

DISCUSSION:

Paul begins the passage by asking, “Is the law, therefore, opposed to the promises of God?”

- What are the specific promises the Lord gave Abraham?
 - You can direct the group to read the various promises given throughout Genesis, especially the final passage in Gen.22.
 - Gen. 12:1-3, 7; Gen. 13:1-17; Gen. 15:1-7; Gen. 17:1-8; **Gen. 22:15-18.**
 - Notice that the Lord promises to bless every nation through Abraham’s offspring *because of Abraham’s faithful obedience.*
- Why might someone (in this case, the Galatians) believe that the law is opposed to God’s promise to bless every nation because of Abraham’s faithful obedience?
 - We might think that this promise is dependent on our obedience to the law. We may believe that the law given to Moses is our means of salvation. And because we know that no one can fully and faithfully obey the law, it disqualifies us all from life and righteousness.
 - “*The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so.*” Romans 8:7; “*For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.*” Romans 3:23
- What might it be like to live as though life and righteousness come from the obedience of the Mosaic law? What would our faith be like? What would your relationship with God be like?
 - Consider with your group what a religion based entirely on obeying the 613 laws given to Moses. Imagine with the group what their relationship with God might be if they knew God primarily as a law-enforcer or judge.
- Have you ever known or encountered a fellow Christian who related to God primarily as a law-enforcer, or who believed being a Christian was essentially about not breaking the law? What is that like for them?
 - Instruct your group not to name names or put any individual or group to shame. Consider the different ways we’ve encountered Christianity reduced entirely to being good, rule-following rather than bad, rule-breaking.
- Why might we be tempted to make our faith out to be about rule-following?
 - First, it is worth noting that the Christian life is absolutely not lawless. Jesus in his final instructions to his disciples before he was arrested and crucified says, “If you love me, keep *my* commandments.” (John 14:15), and the New Testament letters regularly warn and instruct against lawlessness. But, we do not obey the law *because* it gives us life or righteousness.
 - That said, it might feel simpler to reduce our faith to rule-following. Especially if we compare our rule-following to other people who don’t follow rules like we do, we can believe this makes us more worthy of Heaven than others.

- What does Paul mean when he says the law was like a guardian or custodian to us before Christ’s faithfulness came?
 - Explore how the law, especially “Love God and love one another,” can serve to guard us against harming each other, ourselves, or becoming alienated from the Lord. And how it might “lock us up.”
- How is it good news that we are no longer under the guardianship of the law? In what ways does that free us?
 - Again, this does not mean that we are free to be lawless. This means, instead, that we can receive Christ’s faithfulness and grace and not live in fear that the law (which we cannot perfectly or fully keep) does not condemn us because of Jesus.
 - Thinking back to how we would live if our life and righteousness was dependent on following the rules, compare this to our lives as Christians.
- How is being “clothed in Christ” and God’s children different from relating to the Lord primarily as a law-enforcer or judge?
 - The Lord is and will be the judge of the living and the dead. But that is not all the Lord is. Discuss how our relationship with God as our Father, and our being “clothed in Christ” affects how we relate to, speak to, and love the Lord. You might think about how the nature of judgment is different when we are clothed in Christ and the Lord is our Father.
- Why does Paul write “*There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus?*” How have dichotomies like these been used to divide and exclude people in matters of faith, righteousness, or worthiness?
 - These are but a few ways that people throughout history, and recorded in the Bible, have used to justify supremacy and worthiness. Race/nationality, enslavement or oppression, and gender have all been matters used to exclude, disqualify, or minimize the worth of others. The Gospel of Jesus, that we are all equally part of God’s family in Christ, sets every one of us free from these or any other divisions. *No one* is more qualified or worthy of receiving God’s inheritance of grace, life, and righteousness.
- How might these traditional divisions, or others, threaten to cause Christians to live, or treat others, as though they are not equally set free?
 - If we are not careful, we may believe that “people like us” are more worthy of or loved by the Lord, leading us to be hateful, apathetic, or suspicious towards those unlike us. On the other hand, if we believe that Jesus’ faithfulness truly unifies all of us, we may respond to that reality by seeking, defending, and hoping for true equality and freedom for everyone.

In this series, we’ve explored how God’s words give us instruction and direction about our relationship with wealth, possessions, and treasures. And how God’s word about these things is good news—gospel.

- How does this portion of Paul’s letter to the Galatians help guide us and set us free in matters of wealth, riches, or possessions?

PRAYER AND MINISTRY:

One of the things Paul is most insistent about in today's passage is that instructions and laws are not enough to give us life or set us free. We cannot, on our own, change ourselves into good or truly free people. We need the Lord's grace and transformation.

Spend several moments quietly, prayerfully asking the Lord where he might want to set us free. Perhaps we would like to trust the Lord's provision more. Maybe we are in a season or routine of worry or fear. It might be that we would like to be more generous and open-handed with the things God has gifted us with. After a few moments, as you're comfortable, share what came to mind with the group. If it would be more comfortable, break into groups of two or three and share.

Close your time together praying that God's Spirit would meet us in our need and continue to strengthen our faith, reliance, and relationship with him.