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Discovering Your Freedom in Christ SESSION 1: SET FREE FROM SIN

What we want students to learn: For students to learn that in Christ, they have been set free from the penalty of their sin. They are forgiven.

Main Scripture: Romans 6:15–23

Session Snapshot: Many things burden students. But the most burdensome thing they face is sin. Apart from Christ, we are enslaved to sin. And this sin separates us from God, permanently. How awesome it is, then, that when we come to saving faith in Christ, we are set free from the chains of sin that bind us. This session will help your students understand the life-changing, soul-transforming freedom that is available to them through a saving relationship with Jesus.

BIBLE BACKGROUND

The Bible Background is a focused, brief overview of some of the background info for the main passage you will be teaching.

TEACHER PREP VIDEO

Each Small Group Leader's Guide comes with a **Teacher Prep Video**. These are simply short videos designed to help you grasp the main point of the lesson as you prepare to teach.

To access your Truly Free Lesson 1 Teacher Prep Video, simply click on the link below:

Lesson 1 Teacher Prep Video (<https://youtu.be/a1Xj968Rjcs>)

THE DETAILS

Genesis

- **Author:** Paul is the author of Romans.
- **Time frame:** Romans was probably written from Corinth in the winter of 56-57 AD.
- **Purpose:** Since the church in Rome had not received comprehensive theological teaching on salvation and other implications of following Christ, Paul wrote Romans to ensure a good understanding of such things. Also, since many Jewish Christians were rejecting some of the new Gentile converts, a level playing field needed to be given to all Believers. This is what Paul was advocating for in Romans.

THE MAIN POINT

The main point of this passage is pretty simple: apart from Christ, we are dead in our sins. In Christ, we are alive to righteousness. Paul frames this argument in vivid language. In these verses, Paul uses a metaphor of sorts. He says that we are all enslaved to something. Either we are enslaved to sin and are therefore held captive, or we are enslaved to righteousness and are therefore free. It's one of the most powerful and beautiful paradoxes of the Christian faith: by submitting to Christ, we are set free.

Paul ends this passage with a verse familiar to most Christians that captures the heart of the freedom we have in Christ. In verse 23, Paul reveals the results of the two different kinds of enslavement he set up in verses 15-22. If we are slaves to sin, we earn death for ourselves. Apart from Christ, this is the only option. But, when we come to saving faith in Jesus, we are given the blessing of eternal life in a harmonious relationship with God. By faith in the life and work of Jesus, we are set free from the penalty of sin.

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THE TAKEAWAY

The takeaway here is twofold. First, we want students who have already come to saving faith in Jesus to be both assured of their freedom in Christ and to know what that freedom ultimately means. Second, we want students who have not yet professed faith in Christ to be reminded of what is at stake. We want them to have the chance to consider what a life separated from Christ looks like, and the immeasurable joy of what it looks like to be set free from sin through saving faith in Jesus. This lesson will help facilitate both of these takeaways.

LESSON PLAN

The **Lesson Plan** contains three elements: an introductory activity called **Getting Started**; the Bible study section called **Digging In**; and an application-focused segment called **Wrapping Up**.

GETTING STARTED

- **Student Book Pages**
 - This lesson will utilize pages 5-9 in the **Truly Free** Student Book.
 - This activity will use page 5-6.
- **Additional Instructions**
 - None

FIRST, welcome students to their first Small Group Session. If need be, go over any “house rules” for your time in small group or your event in general. Also, if there are students in your group who may not know others that well, have a time where you go around and introduce each other. When you’re finished, have students turn to page 8 in their Student Books. Read or have a student read the session intro on page 5.

THEN, direct students’ attention to page 6. Explain that they’re going to get the chance to compete against each other in a trivia quiz all about heavy stuff. The team that can answer the most questions correct wins. Have students divide into teams (the number of teams will differ based on how many students you have). Read aloud each question and give students a few moments to answer within their groups. (Obviously, googling is prohibited.) Then, when you have finished, call out the questions and answers using the prompts below. Then award the team with the most correct answers as the winner. (If you have the chance ahead of time, consider getting a prize for the winning group.)

The questions (which correspond with the questions in the student book) and answers are as follows:

1. An American man named Dan Sutherland grew the heaviest tomato ever recorded. Guess how much the tomato weighed and write your response in the blank. Closest team to the actual weight gets the question right.

_____ (The tomato weighed **8.61 pounds**.)

2. In June of 1987, a guy named Blaine Sumner set a record for the bench press. How much did he bench press?

- A. **885 pounds**
- B. 575 pounds
- C. 950 pounds
- D. Do you even lift, bro?

3. Which element has the heaviest atomic weight?

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- A. Gold
- B. Uranium**
- C. Mercury
- D. Vibranium

4. In 1998 The Guinness Book of World Records stopped judging records for the heaviest animals because people were overfeeding their pets to get them in the record books. (Sad!) The last cat to ever hold the title of Fattest Cat was Himmy. How much did Himmy weigh?

- A. 11 pounds, 6 ounces
- B. 24 pounds, 3 ounces
- C. 101 pounds, 0 ounces
- D. 46 pounds, 15 ounces**

5. The heaviest deadlift using only the pinky finger is 242 pounds. True or false? Circle your answer. (**TRUE**. Suren Aghabekyan from Armenia deadlifted 242 pounds with just his pinky in March of 2013.)

6. On July 4, 2018, Joey Chesnut set a world record for eating 74 hot dogs (and buns) in 10 minutes. According to Chesnut, how much weight did he gain as a result of eating the 74 hot dogs and buns?

- A. 6 pounds
- B. 24 pounds**
- C. 45 pounds
- D. 74 pounds

7. Yamamotoyama is the heaviest Japanese-born sumo wrestler ever. Guess how much Yamamotoyama weighed. Closest team wins. _____. (At **584 pounds**, Yamamotoyama is not only the heaviest Japanese-born sumo wrestler in history, but he is also thought to be the heaviest Japanese person ever.)

NEXT, lead students in a brief discussion. Ask something like the following:

- **Out of all of these random facts, which one stands out to you the most?**
 - Answers will vary.
- **Heavy wrestlers, people lifting heavy things, dudes eating 24 pounds of hot dogs . . . all of these kind of blow our minds. Why?**
 - Answers will vary.
- **What is the heaviest thing you've ever lifted? What did it feel like afterward?**
 - Answers will vary.

FINALLY, when you've finished, say something like:

- **You may wonder why in the world we're talking about heavy things. That's a fair question. I wanted to get you thinking about heavy stuff because if we're honest, our lives are full of things that weigh us down. Heavy things. Things that are difficult for us to carry. And while it's fun and easy to talk about heavy cats and heavy tomatoes, the burdens we carry around are pretty serious. Over the next few sessions, we're going to spend some time talking about the burdens that weigh us down, and how in Jesus, we find answers to all of them. The first burden we're going to look at in this session is the most serious one. Let's jump in.**

If there are no more comments or questions, transition to the **Digging In** section of your lesson.

Source: Most of these sources came from the Guinness Book of World Records, <https://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/>

DIGGING IN

- **Student Book Pages**
 - This activity will utilize pages 7-8 in the *Truly Free* Student Book.
- **Additional Instructions**
 - You'll want to make sure students have something to write with, and a Bible or Bible app.

FIRST, have students take a moment to reflect on some of the things that bring teenagers down. Say something like:

- **What do you think about this idea? If you were to educate me on the things that weigh heavy on teenagers' hearts and minds, what would you say?**

Spend a few minutes having students call out some of the issues that teenagers struggle with. Challenge them to think in terms of internal and external issues. Supplement their responses as needed with your own ideas, or engage in a discussion to help bring any more issues to light. Then, when you're done, say something like:

- **All of us have things we struggle with. It's part of what it means to be a human being. The things you just mentioned are real. Sure, some may feel more trivial than others. But each one of them can cause us to feel broken down and overburdened. But there is one main issue that we have to deal with first before we can begin to unpack the other things that weigh us down. To do that, we're going to look at a passage from the Apostle Paul.**

THEN, have students turn to Romans 6 in their Bibles or Bible Apps. While they are finding the passage, provide some context using the Bible Background section of your leader's guide. When students have had time to find the passage, read, or have a student read verses 15-19. When you're finished, explain that this passage covers a lot, and it can be a little confusing at first. But direct their attention to the diagram on page 7. Explain that you're going to use this diagram to help them process what they've just read.

Point to the two "choices" boxes near the top of the page. Explain that in verse 16, Paul uses the metaphor of being enslaved to talk about what it means to follow after evil or good. If you feel the need, feel free to say something like:

- **Paul uses a metaphor that is maybe a little unpleasant sounding to us. Paul says that every one of us is like a slave who is owned by someone else. And there are basically only two choices of who we belong to. Before we jump in, let me explain what Paul is doing. In the Roman world, slavery was extremely common. Families would own slaves who helped around the house. Some of these slaves had very important responsibilities in running the businesses of their owners. And while slavery in the Roman world was still generally inhumane, many slaves would eventually be adopted into the family they served. While this is true, slavery in any form is unjust and against God's nature. Paul was in no way advocating slavery. He was simply using a metaphor, a powerful one, that his audience would have been very familiar with.**

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Then say something like:

- **Paul says in this passage that every one of us belongs to someone. We only have two choices. What two choices does Paul say we have as masters? We are either slaves to _____, or _____? Which is it?**
 - Answer: vs. 16: Slaves to sin, or obedience. Have students write the words "sin" and "obedience" in the two circles under "Choice A" and "Choice B."
- **What is the result of being a slave to sin?**
 - Answer: vs. 16: death. Have students write "death" in the space provided under the "sin" circle.
- **Let's pause for a moment here. When Paul says that being a slave to sin earns us death, what does he mean? I mean, is he saying that when you tell a lie [POOF!], you'll die? What do you think Paul is saying?**
 - Answer: Paul is reminding us that all sin is rebellion against God, the perfect creator of all things. The only right punishment for rebellion against a perfect God who gave us life in the first place is death. Paul is saying that when we live under the "ownership" of sin, the only right result is death. Not an immediate death, but a permanent separation from God when we die. Explain that when it comes to the stuff we have to deal with in our lives, this is by far the heaviest burden of them all.
- **But what, then, is the result of being a slave to obedience?**
 - Answer: vs. 16: righteousness. Have students write "righteousness" in the space provided under the "obedience" circle.
- **Apart from a saving relationship with Jesus, everyone is a slave to sin. We all have a sin-nature. All of us are born with a desire to go against God and to serve ourselves. That's life under Choice A, and it leads us nowhere but death. But there is a better way. What do you think Paul means when he says that Choice B is choosing obedience that leads to righteousness? What's he talking about?**
 - Answer: Paul is talking about a way of living where we are slaves to God, obeying His ways and living a good/righteous life as a result. That's what Paul means when he says in verse 17-18 that someone who was once a slave to sin can become a slave to obedience and righteousness.
- **But the question must be asked, "Obedient to who? Or what? And is obedience all that counts? Who do we need to obey?"**
 - Answer: God and His ways.
- **And so just by obeying all of God's commands, we can cross over from being slaves to sin to being slaves to God? That's pretty great! All we have to do is perfectly obey all of God's rules and ways. The only problem is, what if we don't obey all of God's commands? What happens then?**

Allow some tension here. Then, say something like:

- **Actually, that isn't exactly what Paul is talking about here. Let's keep reading.**

NEXT, read, or have a student read verses 20-23. When you're finished, say something like:

- **OK, Paul goes a little deeper into this theme. Look at the bottom of your page. For verses 20-23, Paul keeps the same two choices for who we are slaves to: Sin or God. Write "sin" in the top circle at the bottom of your page. Write "God" in the bottom circle. What does Paul say once again that being a slave to sin earns for us?**
 - Answer: Death. Have students write death in the blank out beside "sin."
- **In verse 22, what does Paul say that being a slave to God earns for us?**
 - Answer: Sanctification and eternal life.
- **Being a slave to God means that we get to experience eternal life with Him. When we die on this**

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earth, we get to spend the rest of eternity with God. That's pretty awesome. But does anyone recall having heard what sanctification means?

- o Answer: To be sanctified can mean a couple of different things. It can mean to be set apart for God's purposes, or it can mean to be made holy. This second meaning is what Paul has in mind.

Explain that when we go from being slaves to sin to being slaves to God, we not only gain the gift of eternal life with God, but God sees us as holy. He sees us as righteous. That's literally what it means to no longer be a slave to sin. The power of sin is broken. Say something like:

- **But the question remains, "how"? Again, it can't simply be by obeying God, because we can never obey God perfectly. What's missing? What is the missing key to being freed from our sin and set free to live righteous lives of purpose and meaning? The key lies in what Paul says in verse 23.**

Have students re-read verse 23. Then ask if anyone picks up on two words that unlock the key to knowing HOW to go from sin and death to righteousness and life. Say something like:

- **The key to understanding HOW to gain the freedom Paul is talking about is found in what Paul calls the "free gift" of God. Look at the top of page 8. Write the words "free gift" in the first blank. Now look back at verse 23 to see what Paul says the two aspects of this free gift are. He says the free gift of God is what?**
 - o Answer: Eternal life in Christ Jesus. Have students write "eternal life" and "in Christ" in the two blanks provided.

Explain that the free gift of God was sending His Son Jesus to live a perfect life and die on the cross as a once-and-for-all sacrifice for our sins. Explain that Jesus' death on the cross counted in our place. And if we simply believe that this is true, the Bible tells us that God willingly counts Jesus' death as payment for the sins we commit. Say:

- **By placing faith in Jesus, we are set free from our slavery to sin and death and given new, meaningful life in Christ. We are forgiven. The debt our sin earns is wiped away.**

Direct students' attention to the Romans 3 passage on page 8. Have a student read the passage. When they have finished, lead students in a brief discussion. Ask:

- **There is a powerful truth in what we have been talking about: In Christ, we are free from the burden and penalty of our sins. We are forgiven. That's what Paul was talking about. Think for a moment about the things that weigh you down, the things you mentioned in the first part of this session. How does it feel to have to deal with those things?**
 - o Allow students the chance to share their answers.
- **Can you imagine what it would feel like to KNOW that you would forever be under the burden of sin and death? How does it make you feel knowing that through faith in Christ, you can be set completely free from the penalty of your sins?**
 - o Allow students to answer.

FINALLY, close by explaining to students that there is tremendous hope in the truth of the Gospel. In Christ, there is freedom and life and forgiveness and a powerful future that is almost too good to be true. None of us have to live with the burden of guilt and shame. Through faith in Christ, we can all be TRULY free from the eternal consequences of sin.

Ask if anyone has any thoughts or questions, then transition to the **Wrapping Up** portion of your lesson.

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WRAPPING UP

- **Student Book Pages**
 - This activity will utilize page 9 in the *Truly Free* Student Book.
- **Additional Instructions**
 - Make sure students have something to write with.

FIRST, instruct students to turn to page 9 in their books. Explain that the most important thing for us to do when we encounter God is to respond to Him. Explain to them that you have encountered God in His Word, and now it's time to respond. We have to ask ourselves, "how does what I just read change my life?"

THEN, explain that the prompt on page 9 is just a way to help them think about how to apply what they have learned. Have them read the question and come up with their own answers. (This will be a repeating feature for these small group sessions.) You can have them take a moment and fill it out on their own and then share their answers with the group, or you can process the question as a group discussion. Either way, take some time to allow students to work through the question and consider how they are changed by what they learned.

FINALLY, when you have finished, make sure no one has any more questions. If you have students in your group who have expressed interest or curiosity about coming to saving faith in Jesus, or have any questions about their standing with God, engage them in conversation about questions they may have.

Inform students of the devotions located on pages 35-42 in their Student Books. Provide them with a schedule or some structure as to when you would like for them to work through them. (The first devotion is on page 35.)

If there are no more questions, close in prayer for your group.