

Deepening your relationships by giving Freedom

1 Cor 13:1-8a; Mark 10:17-22

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Everton Hills

Video: I want to break free (Glee version at 9am/Queen version at Remix)

The year was 1984. Rock group, Queen's bass player, John Deacon, wrote the song as a male perspective of the women's liberation movement. The song itself became an anthem for the ANC in South Africa in the late '80's when Nelson Mandela was still in jail and the white government's apartheid policies were still in place. Essentially it is a cry for freedom.

We all crave freedom, don't we? In a world where our lives seems to be increasingly harassed and harangued by rules and regulations, by expectations, by compliance, or whatever, don't you just want to break free?

You see, my issue with rules and regulations, expectations and compliance, is that it drains a person's creativity. And that is an underlying theme of the song "I want to break free". And it is an underlying theme of Jesus' gospel about freedom in Christ.

Now don't get me wrong. I am not saying that we should simply run amuck over everyone and everything; that being aware of how our actions impact another is not important. That's not what freedom is... if freedom affects another's freedom then I'm still not really free – but I will get back to that later.

What I am saying though, is that underlying rules and regulations and expectations and compliance can be a desire to control, a desire to manipulate, a desire to regulate... and neither control, nor manipulation, nor regulation enables us to live with the freedom with which God intended us to live... nor does it enable us **to deepen our relationships through freedom.**

So why do we try to control, manipulate, regulate? Because ultimately, we see the world through our own eyes... and in a strange sort of way, we figure that the world would be a better place if everyone was like – me.

That's a scary thought, isn't it!

And when we see people that way, that I need to get you to conform to my way of doing things, we actually find ourselves breaking the seventh commandment – thou shalt not steal. We rob people of their God created freedom to choose. And imposing our will on another, we violate and destroy relationships. We make the thing, the task more important than the person. And deep down, what is actually going on, is a betrayal of our own insecurities... we have forgotten whose we are!

Manipulation and control kills relationships. Healthy relationships always go two ways. They give and they receive. But manipulation and control is always about taking... taking away another person's voice, devaluing another person's experiences and understandings; in essence it is theft because despite all the good intent, it tears away at the heart of relationship.

So today, as we conclude our series on deepening your relationships, I want to share some foundational principles that help us move from control to freedom, and thereby give life to those people among whom we live.

And it all starts as we **know whose we are.**

***But now, O Jacob, listen to the LORD who created you.
O Israel, the one who formed you says,***

***“Do not be afraid, for I have ransomed you.
I have called you by name; you are mine.” (Isaiah 43:1, NLT)***

God himself, the one who formed you, who created you, declares ‘you are mine!’ It’s like childhood cartoon... **“I know I am special because God don’t make no junk!”**

As we grow in our understanding of whose we are, as our **identity** and **self-worth** become shaped by who **God declares** us to be, we can live from that strength to **enable others** to find their **freedom**.

Because here is the thing... God loves you more than any person in this world. He loves you more than you love yourself. And even more amazing is that there is nothing you can do to make God love you more and there is nothing you can do that will make God love you less. So as you live in that love, and let **God’s love define you**, you have no need to build yourself up by pushing other people down; by trying to control them!

But that’s not easy, is it? Most of us have this little voice of anxiety living within us, that says ‘but I am not enough’. Maybe it comes from a comment that your parents made when you were growing up – when you heard about the importance of success, and you interpreted that as meaning that you are only of value because you succeed. Or maybe, as in my own story, your anxious voice developed, not because of your parents, but because of your friends... and you thought that you had to keep doing things in order to keep your friends.

Here is the truth. If you think you are only of value and worth, because of what you do, because of your success, you will never discover true freedom! And you will find yourself living your life trying to control yourself, or situations, or your family and friends... and the fact is, you can’t do it. To live under that sort of control, is to live under bondage.

One day, a rich young man came to see Jesus. He asked Jesus what he had to do in order to be saved. The very question reveals the bondage the young man is living under... he is looking for affirmation, he wants to know if he is enough.

And so Jesus gives him the answer the young man is after – ‘if you are looking for affirmation by what you do, then keep all the commandments’. The rich young man responds by asserting that he has obeyed all these commandments since he was young.

Note that. Even though he did everything that was expected of him, something was happening within him that made him still feel that he needed affirmation... that he was not enough!

The bible says,

‘Looking at the man, Jesus felt genuine love for him. “There is still one thing you haven’t done,” he told him. “Go and sell all your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come and follow me.”

‘At this the man’s face fell, and he went away very sad, for he had many possessions.’ (Mark 10:21-22)

What’s going on? Jesus notices that which is still controlling this young man... his stuff. This young man was ruled by his stuff – and because of that, he was never going to find freedom!

Jesus wanted him to know that **Freedom within comes as we let go, and let God be God!**

Whether you are like the rich young man, or a parent who is trying to guide and shape your kids, or a husband or wife trying to live in relationship, in the end, to encounter freedom, we need to let go of control, and let God be God! Because the bottom line is, we can do nothing to change a person’s heart. We can force, we can coerce, we can draw up lists, we can write up our five-year plan and the KPI’s that are going to help us achieve it, but the bottom line is... only God can change people’s hearts. Our role, is

build connection or relationships.

And connection is built as we learn to love.

1 Corinthians 13 says, ***'Love is patient, love is kind.'*** (1 Corinthians 13:4)

Ephesians 4 says, ***'Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.'*** (Ephesians 4:2)

Freedom is ours, as we let God be God... as we surrender our agenda for another person to God. Pray for them, by all means. Pray for yourself, certainly. But we need to let God do his work, in his time, through his Spirit.

And that is what 1 Corinthians 13 is really all about. That love passage, is all about how to build connections with others, so that we can grow deep in our relationships and live free.

Listen to some of what it says...

Love is patient and kind.

Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude.

Love does not demand its own way.

Love is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged.

Love does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. (1 Corinthians 13:4–6 NLT)

And most importantly

Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance. 1 Corinthians 13:7 (NLT)

So let me conclude. Do you want to have deep relationships with your family, your friends, your workmates? Then give them freedom. Because that is how God has created us. Jesus always gave people freedom. He never forced. He never tricked. He never coerced. He simply lived his life with integrity, authenticity, freedom and purpose, and invited people, "Follow me."

So know whose you are in Jesus.

Let his love pervade throughout your entire life.

And build connections with those who are closest to you. So that you can indeed, live free!

Confession

Father God, forgive me.

You invite to live in freedom, but I take away freedom from others.

Through my words, thoughts and actions, I discourage, coerce and manipulate.

I acknowledge that I do this, because deep down, I want to be the centre of the world.

Forgive me.

Lord, by the power of your Holy Spirit, enable me to know with clarity that I belong to you.

Through that knowledge, help me to live in freedom.

And through my living, help others to live free.

In Jesus name I pray. Amen.

Absolution

Jesus said, "You are truly my disciples if you remain faithful to my teachings. And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

Jesus taught that you are chosen and deeply loved.

Jesus taught that as you confess your sins, you are forgiven.

So take his forgiven seriously, and live as the free he has declared you to be.

Children's Talk

Rope

Drawing equipment

Bind a student (hands behind back)

Ask to draw a picture.

As they are attempting... talk about how words and actions bind people; expectations, rules, etc. Some people think of God that way. They think that God is all about binding; expectations, rules etc., Jesus talks about us being free. When you are bound, when you are told what to do, how to behave, etc., how creative can you be. That's not saying that we should always do whatever we like – because sometimes in my doing things, I am actually affecting another person's freedom. But God does want us to be free – free for a reason – to be creative.