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It's crazy to think how fast time goes. It seems like yesterday when we began the process of launching Midtown. I remember the Sunday we first announced to the church that I was stepping into the Midtown Campus Pastor role. I was on staff at our Downtown Campus, and few pastors here prayed over my wife, Bri, and me before each service that day.

I remember this particularly for a couple reasons: One, because for some reason I chose to wear this shirt. And the second is because back then we had 4 services, 2 in the morning and 2 in the evening. That means we did this 4 times. And each one was special. They prayed bold, encouraging prayers that were so powerful in that moment.

But I'll never forget getting home after that long day and saying, "What just happened?" I found myself in this particular space of my life saying, "What will I do now? God, I'm not qualified for this. I don't deserve this. Yet here I am. I've been given this incredible opportunity. What am I going to do with it?"

Have you ever been there? Have you ever found yourself in this space where it seems like all eyes are now on you, and you're trying to figure out how to move and operate in it? If so you're in good company with someone in the Bible, who found themselves in a similar place. If you have your Bibles, I'd love for you to turn with me to John chapter 8. Now for some of us this a familiar story, for others it might be relatively new. But for those who are familiar with this, I just want to encourage you to look at it with fresh eyes. Familiarity can become fatal to our spiritual growth. I once heard our Executive Pastor say, "Don't let the good news become old news." And that has motivated me to not let familiarity breed insensitivity.

What we'll see today is that regardless of where we are in your relationship Jesus, at some point we all find ourselves in this space. This space where we realize that we have been given something valuable. Something precious. Something sacred. And what we do in this space says a lot about us.

### **John 8:1-2 NLT**

**Jesus returned to the Mount of Olives, but early the next morning he was back again at the Temple. A crowd soon gathered, and he sat down and taught them.**

So to paint the backdrop here, because this is important, Jesus is in Jerusalem. There is this annual festival taking place called the Festival of Shelters, where the people of Israel would come to commemorate how God demonstrated faithfulness between the time their ancestors were freed from Egyptian slavery and when they were led into the Promise Land. During that 40 year period, the Israelites wandered in the wilderness living in shelters or booths.

Jesus is in Galilee and doesn't even want to come to Jerusalem. Because he knows the Jewish leaders were plotting his death. But he decides to go. And he shows up, and at first he's staying out of the way, being discreet. But then He takes it upon Himself to go to the Temple and begin teaching. This causes this huge debate amongst everyone there about who He is. Some are believing He's the Messiah, others are saying, "He's just a good person." (A lot like what some people think these days). The religious leaders get involved and actually try to have him arrested, but the Temple guards end up being amazed by His words and kind of believing Him. Which frustrated the religious leaders even more! It's crazy.

Everyone goes home. Now, Jesus is back the next morning, and he's at it again. He's teaching. And I don't want you to miss this, it says that a crowd gathered.

Look what happens next...

### **John 8:3 NLT**

**As he was speaking, the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in the act of adultery. They put her in front of the crowd.**

This is quite the interruption if you ask me. I know we have plenty of teachers in the room across our campuses. And you know all too well what it's like to be interrupted while teaching. I've gotten quite use to interruptions while teaching. I can do the crying babies while preaching. There was an interruption that I wasn't ready for though recently.

But what we have in this scene is a different type of interruption. Jesus didn't need to be humbled. They bring this woman caught in adultery to the middle of this large crowd as Jesus is teaching. Now, for the record, what they did was illegal.

- 1) The law required both parties who had been caught in adultery to be judged. They only brought the woman.
- 2) They didn't even give this woman a fair trial. They attempted to move straight to judgement and execution.

We'll see that they certainly had hidden motives for this. But nonetheless, they interrupted this teaching and brought her in front of this large group of people. This was intentional. They had a plan to embarrass this woman and Jesus.

### **John 8:4-6 NLT**

**"Teacher," they said to Jesus, "this woman was caught in the act of adultery. The law of Moses says to stone her. What do you say?" They were trying to trap him into saying something they could use against him, but Jesus stooped down and wrote in the dust with his finger.**

Can you imagine being this woman in this moment? Picture this with me for a second. Her very life is hanging on the response of Jesus. Whatever he says in this moment determines her fate, and Jesus decides to play a game of Pictionary in the sand!

Now it's widely debated what he was exactly writing in the dirt (OT scripture, doodling). But what he wrote isn't as significant as what was required for him to write it. In order for him to write in the dirt, he had to bend down. In other words, he purposefully got low – which is an act of humility. The symbolism here is incredible.

He got into a low posture, identifying with the humiliation of the woman. Jesus did what He could to resonate with, care for, and ease the embarrassment of this woman before ever saying a word to her or about her. This is the brilliance of Jesus. All of us, including me, need to take our cues from Jesus on how we approach people far from Him. But we'll see this brilliance continue to play out in how he finally responds...

### **John 8:7-9 NLT**

**They kept demanding an answer, so he stood up again and said, "All right, but let the one who has never sinned throw the first stone!" Then he stooped down again and wrote in the dust. When the accusers heard this, they slipped away one by one, beginning with the oldest, until only Jesus was left in the middle of the crowd with the woman.**

Fascinating. He didn't say, "Punish her." At the same time, he didn't overlook her sin by saying, "Don't punish her." He simply demanded that justice be fairly and righteously applied. He was the only one who knew the truth about this woman and the only had never sinned. So he alone could throw the first stone, no one else. And he uses this as an opportunity to demonstrate how He is full of both grace and truth.

Finally, Jesus chooses to have a conversation with this woman as they stand in the middle of all of these people, and he says some of the most liberating words we see in the New Testament.

### **John 8:10-11 NLT**

**Then Jesus stood up again and said to the woman, "Where are your accusers? Didn't even one of them condemn you?"**

**"No, Lord," she said.**

**And Jesus said, "Neither do I. Go and sin no more."**

There is so much that can be said about this. But more than anything I'm a little upset that the story ends here. As I was reading it this past week, every time I got to the end, I was like "What happens next!?" I deeply want to know what this woman's life looked like as she left and went back home. What happened after this?

I wish John would have followed up with her so that he could've written an account of how her life turned out. But then I realize that could've been a little creepy. Him just going around

Jerusalem, hanging out at bars. “So, uh....anyone know what’s going on with that adulterous woman?.....Who am I? Oh, just a follower of Jesus. Yeah, asking for a friend.”

But regardless, what we do know is that here is this woman with a checkered past who has just encountered the grace of God, and now she finds herself in this unique space:

- **Physically** | She’s in this large crowd, who just saw and heard Jesus show her grace. Not only that, they know the life that she is coming from. They know who she is and what she has done. All eyes are on her. Not just in this moment, but likely as she goes back into the city and continues to live her life. And maybe it seems like people are just waiting for her to mess up again. Ever been there?
- **Mentally** | She’s trying to process what in the world just happened. I wonder if she sometimes got in her own head – where these voices of shame and guilt continued to shout at her, reminding her of her past and what she’s done. Ever been there?
- **Emotionally** | What was the emotional day-to-day like for her? I wonder if every time she saw kids bending over playing in the dirt, or a pile of stones laying on the ground...she wept? Because it reminded her of the grace she experienced when she met Jesus.
- **Spiritually** | I have a hard time believing that she was immediately transformed. She is in the space where she’s likely saying, “Ok. I’m not condemned because of my sin, but I’ve also been told not sin anymore– how does that work?”

Ever been there?

There are all of these factors and elements in this multi-dimensional space! Have you ever been there? Are you there now? **Can I help you out....If you’re a follower of Jesus, that answer is “Yes.”** Because all of us experience the grace of God every day. Each one of us are in the position where ask ourselves: **What do we do when we’re living in this space after grace?**

Does Jesus even have a word for what this space is called? I want you to know He does. And it’s a word that changes everything...

It’s Freedom.

### **FREEDOM**

Jesus calls us to live in freedom. Now, here’s the danger as I throw a word like “freedom” out there, especially for us who live in a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Western society. It can be very subjective. Open to interpretation. Freedom to you might look very different than the person sitting next to you or around you. It can depend on so many different factors – location, financial status, or even stage of life...

- Cell Phone | Teenagers, for you maybe this is what freedom looks like. This gives you the ability to talk to who you want, pretty much when you want. Boys, let me just say, you will never know the fear of calling a girl's house and her fathering answering the phone. Anyone remember just stumbling over your words?
- Car keys | Or maybe this is what freedom looks like to you. Finally getting your own car. Not having to rely on anyone for transportation. Getting to go where you want, when you want.
- Credit card | Getting to spend however much you want with no restrictions. Your garage looks like an Amazon warehouse.
- Debt Free | Others of you, freedom is financial but in a different way. You cut up the credit card! You've been listening to Dave Ramsey, and you're getting out of debt so that you're no longer controlled by money.
- Golf club | Or maybe freedom to you looks like this. Getting away with the guys to hit the links or doing something that allows you to escape from the worries and responsibilities of life.

Freedom looks different for all of us. But the goal of freedom is usually the same. For so many of us, whether we want to admit it or not...freedom has everything to do with **independence**. Being able to do what I want, when I want, with who I want. With no restrictions. With no outside authority.

But here's my question: Does that match the freedom that Jesus talks about? When we come to Jesus, and as we continue to follow Jesus, the version of freedom that we have is often challenged by what He says freedom really is. We are in this space where, yes we are now free, but His freedom looks very different than ours. When Jesus talks about freedom, he says that are free from two things. We are free from...

**Penalty of Sin** | Because of Jesus' death and resurrection, we no longer have to fear the eternal consequences of sin. Separation from God in hell for eternity. Most of us are okay with this one. Sign me up for that. Check the salvation box. Thank You Jesus!

It's this other one that trips us up, because He not only sets us free from the penalty of sin but the power of sin.

**Power of Sin** | Because of the Selfishness, pride, independence, self-reliance, ego, sexual immorality, anger. Where we once were under submission to those things and even said, "I have a right to indulge those things." Jesus says, 'No, I'm dying to free you from them.' I want a new life for you.

In Jesus' words to the woman, he confirmed that she is free from both the penalty of her sin and the power of it.

And I don't think his words were just for this woman, but for everyone in earshot of this conversation. I think the crowd needed it. Because they needed to hear about freedom to. Could it be that in that moment – where it's him and the woman in the middle of this huge crowd - while all of these people were there for this festival to essentially celebrate independence (the freedom of their ancestors from Egypt), Jesus uses this as an opportunity to show them what true freedom looks like? To push back on their perception of freedom by telling this woman: "You're not condemned. Go and sin no more."

## THE SPIRIT

Now, this whole time I know what some of you have been thinking. "Why in the world would Jesus tell this woman not to sin anymore? That's not even possible." As humans, we have this natural propensity to do what we're told not to do.

Like if I said right now, "Don't think about barbecue," I guarantee 99% of you just thought about hot dogs, hamburgers, ribs, or chicken!

So why in the world would Jesus give her an assignment she can't carry out? True, it's impossible to live a completely sin-free life. Jesus is the only one who did that. Scripture makes that very clear. **It's not possible to be sinless, but it is possible to sin less.** But it's not in the way most of us think. Because if you're thinking Jesus was telling this woman to go try harder or to make a cussing jar – where every time she says a bad word she's gotta put money in it...you're still thinking about independence! You are thinking about how this woman, or any of us for that matter, can free ourselves and live under our own authority. And that's not what freedom is.

Here's a little secret: Whenever Scripture talks about freedom, it almost always connects our freedom to living dependently! Not on something, but someone. **The Holy Spirit.** Paul says in 2 Corinthians, "Where the *Spirit* of the Lord is...there is freedom!"

So it's the subject of our dependence that changes. And what I want you to understand is that...

### **Biblical freedom isn't independence, but a transfer of dependence.**

We transfer our dependence from ourselves and things of this world to the Holy Spirit who lives in us! What we once leaned on for security or pleasure or identity, Jesus says, "No you're now under new management. My Spirit will take up residence in you and renew you! Lean on Him, not these things that ultimately lead to emptiness."

And when Jesus told the woman to “Go and sin no more,” He was essentially saying, “Transfer your dependence to me! To my Spirit. He will guide you, empower you, and sustain you. That is the only way you’ll truly be free!”

### APPLICATION

So how do we live it out? Well, you know what’s crazy? This woman wasn’t alone. As Christianity spread, so many people found themselves in this very space where they’re trying to figure out how to live life after receiving grace. In fact, a lot of the New Testament is the apostles writing letters to Christians about what to do with this new freedom they have!

“You are free in Christ, yes – but don’t use this freedom to do this...”

“Hey, I heard that this is taking place in your church and you are being tempted to do this. You might have the ability to do it, but let me remind you about God’s grace and what freedom actually looks like...”

That’s the beauty of the Bible. It’s imperfect people being encouraged to depend on a perfect God. So, here are some takeaways. There are two questions that we all can ask as we find ourselves in this space after grace. Here’s the first one:

### **DOES MY LIFE REFLECT A DESIRE FOR INDEPENDENCE, OR DEPENDENCE ON THE SPIRIT?**

This is a hard question to ask because it confronts us with ourselves. But it’s necessary because we often find ourselves in this tension. I don’t know about you, maybe I’m just talking to myself right now, but every day I wake up I must ask the Spirit to lead me. Every day. And sometimes, it’s in the moment. “Man, I really want to do this...but Holy Spirit help me to do that instead.” I’ve adopted this saying: “Help me Holy Ghost.” With my kids, in my marriage, with what I look at, listen to, with these church folk (kidding)...

I’ve used this Scripture before, but I love how relevant it is. Paul says in Galatians 5:

#### **Galatians 5:16 NLT**

**So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won’t be doing what your sinful nature craves.**

Our sinful nature says, “Do what you want. Be free.” But God says, “No, what I want for you is so much better. Trust me.” And not only that, He gives us the power to do it! Because...

**Freedom isn’t a license to do what we want. It’s the power to do what God wants.**

As we find ourselves in this space, where we are following Jesus, we need the power of the Holy Spirit to do what He has says. Here’s the second question we can ask ourselves...

### **WHAT AM I DOING WITH WHAT I’VE BEEN GIVEN?**

How am I using the freedom that I have once experiencing God's grace? Thankfully, you don't have to think too much because God's word gives us an answer. Paul says in that same chapter...

### **Galatians 5:13 NLT**

**For you have been called to live in freedom, my brothers and sisters. But don't use your freedom to satisfy your sinful nature. Instead, use your freedom to serve one another in love.**

In other words, your freedom is not just about you. It's about others. So, what are you using it for? Are you using it to serve people and lead them to Jesus?

Singles, are you using your singleness as the gift that it is? It's not just a waiting room for marriage. It has purpose! Your friendships, your time, your relationships, choosing to abstain sexually until marriage – it all has the ability to point to Jesus and serve people in love! Where you can say, "This is who I used to be, this is what I used to do. But you know what, God has redeemed me and freed me...and now I'm living for Him!"

Seasoned believers, we have hundreds, if not thousands, of young adults and couples who are looking to be poured into. People who need to be discipled. And they're hungry for it! They're craving someone who is seasoned and a little wiser to come alongside them and not just tell them, but to be with them. If you're retired, this space is for more than just playing golf and going on trips. It's an opportunity to say, "I'm walking in the freedom of Jesus, so let me build a relationship with some younger people and show them what freedom looks like. Let me use my time to serve others in the church and outside of it."

The list goes on....no matter what season of life you're in, if you're following Jesus and have experienced his grace – this space you're in for the rest of your life is a chance to point people to Jesus with your freedom.

Have you ever heard the expression, "Hurt people hurt people?" Well, free people free people.

### **Free people free people**

God is saying, "Use this space to tell others about the freedom you've found. Don't worry about the opinions of the crowd. Don't worry about your past. I've freed you from both. Depend on my Spirit and serve others...free them!"

### **Grad School Exam**

Professor to me afterwards - "I know a thing or two about getting something you don't deserve. The question is...what will you do with it?"

He was asking me, "What will you do with what you've been given?"



God says, because of Jesus, you've been given freedom. You no longer have to live in shame, guilt, fear – all of these things that once controlled you. You no longer have to worry about the crowd....what people think about you, only what I think about you. You no longer have to worry about the penalty of your sin. That was taken care of on the cross and the moment Jesus rose from the grave. He transferred your sinfulness on to himself, dying the death you deserved.”

Now he says, “You can transfer that dependence to Me. You can live by my Spirit and be free in who I've said you are. You don't have to return the bondage you were in. You can have true freedom. Because who the Son sets free, is free indeed!

But what will you do with it? How will you live in this space after grace?  
Depend on My Spirit and free others.