

LESSON 1: THE FREEDOM FACTOR

This includes:

- 1. LEADER PREPARATION**
- 2. LESSON GUIDE**

1. LEADER PREPARATION**LESSON OVERVIEW**

When we believe Jesus is the truth and begin the journey of following him, we can experience freedom—freedom that comes from being Jesus’ disciple, knowing truth, and following a Jesus-centered path. This lesson will help teenagers discover that their true identity is found in knowing that Jesus is the truth and he can set them free from guilt, brokenness, judgment, shame, hurt, and pain.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

- 1. WHAT:** Our sin and struggles don’t define who we are; turning to Jesus and opening our hearts to him opens the door to discovering our true identity.
- 2. WHY:** Teenagers can discover the spiritual truth about their identity when they choose to believe in what Jesus said and follow him.
- 3. HOW:** Students will be encouraged to pursue a life that is centered on Jesus, who promises to deliver them from the guilt, shame, and condemnation of their sins.

PRIMARY SCRIPTURE

John 8:31-32

SECONDARY SCRIPTURES

John 14:6; 15:4-8; Romans 8:1

TEACHING PREP

**LEADER
TIP**

Use this short overview to prepare for your lesson. While you may not want to convey this information word-for-word with your group, you’ll want to absorb it as you prepare to lead.

Read John 8:31-32; you may want to read the entire passage of John 8:31-59 during your preparation to gain a clearer understanding of the context.

In this particular passage, Jesus offers a promise and reassurance for those who believe in him. He said that if we are truly his disciples, we will know the truth, and the truth will set us free. Jesus’ point is simple, focused, and all-encompassing. It leaves no room for questioning or compromising. Remaining connected to or “dwelling” in Jesus and his teachings is the true measure of discipleship. It is what separates people who are really free from those who merely appear to be free. It also speaks to how our identity is found in Jesus and not in the ways of the world. Jesus is the pathway to truth and the only way to experience freedom.

What is truth? In this Gospel, “truth” does not refer to a logical ideal or the opposite of falsehood; it refers to knowing God and understanding God made present in Jesus, who is the “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). In today’s culture, many teenagers believe truth is rooted solely in what they can see, touch, or hear—or that truth is relative, varying from person to person. In this text, Jesus is not presenting himself as a self-evident truth. He is not expecting people to grasp the full understanding of who he is through logic or research. He is stating that to “know” him as “the truth,” we must live with him and remain connected to him and obey his teachings.

What is freedom? This passage is the only place in the book of John where “freedom” language appears. Jesus reassures those who believe in him that they will experience freedom from the guilt, shame, and condemnation of their sins. Believing Jesus is the truth and remaining in his Word by obeying his teaching are essentials of the Christian faith.

THE BEFORE & AFTER [OPTIONAL]

TEXTS OR TWEETS

Send one or both of these messages to your students prior to your meeting. As with the rest of the curriculum, edit these questions to fit the needs of your ministry.

- Ever felt like you’ve messed up so much in your life that there’s NO WAY God could love you? Come out tonight; you won’t regret it!
- Are you ready to be freed from all the guilt and shame that has haunted you for so long? Get ready for great conversation this week.

PARENT EMAIL

Send this email to parents following the lesson to encourage them to continue the conversation at home. Feel free to edit and customize the email to fit your ministry needs.

Dear parents,

We’ve launched a new series called “Identity,” and each week, students are examining a different passage of Scripture to discover truths and insights about what it means to find their identity in Jesus.

Jesus offers a promise and reassurance for those who believe in him. He said that if we are truly his disciples, we will know the truth, and the truth will set us free. Jesus’ point is simple, focused, and all-encompassing. It leaves no room for questioning or compromising. Remaining connected to or “dwelling” in Jesus and his teachings is the true measure of discipleship. It is what separates people who are really free from those who merely appear to be free. It also speaks to how our identity is found in Jesus and not in the ways of the world. Jesus is the pathway to truth and the only way to experience freedom.

This week, I encourage you to spend a few minutes talking with your teenager about our lesson. Consider building your conversation around these questions:

- Do you find it difficult to believe Jesus’ love for you is unconditional? Why or why not?
- What does it mean to you to remain faithful to Jesus’ teachings?

- Have you ever felt like your relationship with Jesus was based on your behavior or how good or bad you were? If so, why have you felt that way? If not, how might you help a friend who feels that way?

Thanks for all your prayers for our students and our ministry. Have an amazing week!

LESSON 1: THE FREEDOM FACTOR**2. LESSON GUIDE****GETTING THINGS STARTED [OPTIONAL]****LEADER
TIP**

To prepare for the opening activity, review a YouTube clip of the “Bound in Sin” activity (youtu.be/MkQRj_lqenU) to see how one youth leader conducted this activity. You’ll need a pair of scissors and a few rolls of plastic wrap if you choose to do the activity as demonstrated in the video. However, if you have concerns about the safety of using plastic wrap, replace it with another material, such as towels, bandanas, clothing, bungee cords, or large rubber bands.

If you use the same meeting area each time and can leave items on the wall, consider writing various issues teenagers struggle with on paper, with one struggle on each sheet. Some examples might include: Guilt, Shame, Brokenness, Hurt, Pain, Forgiveness, Family Issues, Identity Issues, Drugs, Pornography, Selfishness, Lust, Failure, Addictions, Greed, Hatred, Sin, Materialism, and so on. Post the struggles up on the wall and keep them there for the entirety of this series.

Welcome your students and invite them into your meeting area. Open in prayer, and then lead students in this opening activity.

Ask for three or four volunteers, and proceed with the activity found in the YouTube clip. Make sure that you wrap up the students in a variety of different ways and that at least one student “appears” to be tightly wrapped but has the ability to escape. Once the participants are bound up, lead a group discussion.

- *What adjectives—descriptive words—illustrate what it feels like to be bound and trapped by sin?*
- *When have you felt bound and trapped by your sins like these students are right now?*
- *What are some of the most common sins and struggles that seem to entrap teenagers?* [NOTE: If you posted issues and struggles on the wall of your meeting area, direct students’ attention to them and see which ones your teenagers believe are most common.]

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *At some point in our lives, we’ve all probably felt wrapped up and trapped in the bondage of our sin. Sometimes the guilt and shame of our sin have us wrapped up so tight, we can’t move or see any way of escape. Too many people stay wrapped up in their sins because they don’t know the truth about who God says they are—and because they won’t allow Jesus to free them from their bondage.*

If possible, have one adult leader with a pair of scissors represent Jesus and stand on one side of your meeting area.

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *The only way you can be completely free from sin is to find the one person who has the ability to free you from your bondage. [NOTE: Either use scissors to “free” the students, or direct them to the adult leader with the scissors.] This new series is dedicated to discovering how to be free from the guilt, shame, and bondage of sin.*

TEACHING POINTS



Use the Teaching Points to help students capture the essence of each lesson with more discussion and less lecture-style teaching. Remember: All throughout these lessons, it's up to you to choose (1) how many questions you use and (2) the wording of the main points—keep ours, or change the wording to make it clearer for your audience.

Read John 8:31-32 together as a group. Because this passage is so brief, consider having students read the verses several times, from different translations of the Bible.

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *Let's spend a few minutes digging into this passage to explore the promise and reassurance that our destiny and identity are found completely in Jesus.*

1. REMAINING FAITHFUL TO JESUS' TEACHINGS MEANS REMAINING FAITHFUL TO JESUS HIMSELF

ASK:

- *What's your immediate reaction to this passage—particularly if you've never heard or read these verses before?*
- *Describe a time when you felt trapped, alone, guilty, or in bondage. How did you handle that situation?*
- *How does following Jesus' teachings help you get to know Jesus better?*
- *What's the difference between following Jesus' teachings because of love for him, and following those teachings because of religious duty?*

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *Remaining connected to or “dwelling” in Jesus and his teachings is the true measure of discipleship. It is what separates people who are really free from those who merely appear to be free. It also speaks to how our identity is found in Jesus and not in the ways of the world. Jesus is the pathway to truth and the only way to experience freedom.*

2. REMAINING FAITHFUL TO JESUS IS A LIFESTYLE, NOT A TRENDING TOPIC

ASK:

- *Name three trends, fads, or topics that were popular three years ago but aren't popular today. Why do trends and fads normally not last very long?*
- *When do you find it most difficult to remain faithful to Jesus' teachings?*
- *How can you make sure your faith in Jesus is a lifestyle and not a trend or fad?*

- Most of us know people who say one thing but do something else, right? How is that behavior similar to us when we say one thing about our faith but live another way?

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *Talk is cheap! Just like we want people in our lives to be honest with us and follow through on the things they say they're going to do, Jesus wants the same from us. Jesus doesn't want lip service. He wants us to be committed to living for him.*

3. JESUS OPENS THE DOOR TO EXPERIENCING FREEDOM AND FINDING YOUR TRUE IDENTITY

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *When you choose to follow Jesus, you will experience a freedom like you've never experienced before. But experiencing that type of freedom begins with a choice—a choice to believe Jesus is “the way” and not “a way.” When you believe Jesus is “the way,” you will pursue him with everything within you.*

ASK:

- When do you struggle most with believing that your identity is rooted in Jesus?
- What can keep you from believing Jesus is “THE way” instead of just “a way”?
- What are some good, Christlike ways to respond to our culture's belief that there are many ways to God?

EXTRA DISCUSSION [OPTIONAL]

Ask students to form groups of two or three to discuss these questions.



ASK:

- Read John 15:4-8. Why is it important to stay connected to Jesus? What happens when we are apart from Jesus?
- Have you ever experienced a time in your life when you felt like a vine that wasn't producing any fruit? What was that like?
- What does it take to remain connected to Jesus?

Bring everyone back together, and ask for volunteers to share answers to the previous questions, as time permits.

LIVING IT OUT

ASK:

- What idea or truth from today's conversation stood out to you the most, and why?
- Have people's responses to you when you've failed or sinned contributed to the sense of feeling condemned and not worthy of Jesus' love? If so, how do you feel now that you've read and discussed John 8:31-32?
- What habits could help you remain in Jesus' presence and remember his truths? How can you put these habits into place?

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *If you're feeling guilt and shame from sins you've committed, allow Jesus to fill you with the hope, reassurance, and promise that if you believe in him and live for him, you are free. Offer thanks for Jesus freeing you from the penalty of sin. As Romans 8:1 tells us, "So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus."*

Ask students to each find a quiet spot in your meeting area for a few minutes of prayer and reflection. Consider praying together as a group or asking if any students would like prayer from the rest of the group.

SUMMARY



Provide a quick summary or take-home challenge based on (1) this lesson's content, (2) the dialogue that took place today, (3) your understanding of the issues and struggles your teenagers are facing, and (4) the big picture of your youth ministry and what your leadership team wants accomplished with the teaching and discussion time.

FOR KEEPS [MEMORY VERSE]

Encourage and/or challenge your teenagers to memorize the Scripture below.

"Jesus told him, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me' "
(John 14:6).