

YOU ASKED FOR IT

Part 5: Set Me Free from Me
Romans 8

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Words of Encouragement Days 99-105



The Bible has much to say about the issues we deal with each and every day. **YOU ASKED FOR IT** is a series that looks at a few of those issues:

- **How to deal with stress**
- **Getting over what people think about me**
- **Learning to be who God wants me to be**
- **Recognizing God's voice**
- **Discovering my true identity in Jesus**

So what does the Bible say about us? It says we are created by God as complex, multifaceted, not easy to understand, and not easy to explain people. And with good reason! Layer upon layer, God made us unique. During this series, we'll take a deeper look at those complexities and **discover a sense** of who we were **made to be**.

YOU ASKED FOR IT sermon series is based on some of the most requested "How To" answers from God's Word for some of life's most perplexing issues.

This Week's Memory Verse:

***"What, then, shall we say in response to this?
If God is for us, who can be against us?"
Romans 8:31***

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 99

"These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full. This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends." John 15:11-13

THE LOVE PRO

HERE'S a really tough question for you to vote on. Suppose you want to be a world-whipping soccer player. Who would you rather spend time with: (a) a professional horse-racing jockey? (b) a professional couch potato? or (c) a professional soccer player?

You'd choose (c), right? Of course. The very best way to sharpen your soccer skills would be to spend time with the person who plays your sport to the highest level. It wouldn't make sense for you to study the example of anyone but a pro.

Many people claim to be experts on love, but if we really want to learn how to love, we've got to get close to the person who loved best. Jesus is "the love pro." He lived a perfect life of love here on earth, and when we follow his example we can't go wrong. So the important question is this: "How did Jesus love?"

You can't help but notice that Jesus' love is sacrificial. He gave of himself in a thousand everyday ways, and his giving never stopped. For example, after Jesus' cousin, John the Baptist, was killed by an evil ruler, Jesus longed for some time alone. Yet when the crowds followed him, he didn't shoo them away. Instead, out of his great compassion he stayed and ministered to them. He taught them, healed them, and even fed a mob of more than five thousand men (see Matthew 14:13-21).

Just before Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, he was still giving. He healed the ear of one of the men who had come to arrest him and had had it cut off in the process of making the arrest. In this agonizing and sorrowful time, Jesus even took care to teach his disciples up until the very end (see Matthew 26:50-54). Jesus' death on the cross for us was the ultimate example of sacrificial love. As Jesus said, "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). Jesus gave his life willingly to rescue us, his people, from having to pay the price of our own sin—a price we never could have paid. Amazingly, Jesus commanded us to love others in the same way he loves us. Most of us won't ever be in a position where we need to give up our life for our friends, but we can be sure God will put us in places where we will be asked to sacrifice our time, money, energy, comfort, and convenience.

TODAY'S PRAYER

Dear God, Thank you that you indeed are powerful and loving and that out of your glorious riches you strengthen me through your Holy Spirit in my inner being. I ask you for the fresh filling of your Holy Spirit, and for your power and love to fill me. Thank you that as one of your believers, I know Christ dwells richly within my heart through faith. I pray you would strengthen my roots and establish my life firmly in your love. When the world shouts hate, help me to love. When the past won't let go, help me to love. When the enemy taunts with lies and surrounds with darkness, help me to love. When a relationship feels broken or I am betrayed or rejected, help me to love. Help me to love and to keep on loving by the power of your Holy Spirit even when it seems impossible and even when it doesn't make sense. May my life be filled with your goodness and power, today and every day, as I walk in your Spirit of love.

Love the way Jesus loves!

Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 100

"For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect."

1 Peter 1:18-19

A LIFE WORTH WATCHING

TEARS rolled down Kristin's cheeks as she closed her hymnal and stood to exit the church. As her family filed out of the pew at the end of her great-grandma's funeral service, she wondered how all of the people who looked up to Grandma Nelson would get along without her. Kristin's great-grandma came to America with her parents when she was even younger than Kristin. She couldn't speak a word of English, but she adapted to a new culture, married, and raised five children. She sent sons to war and buried a husband and a daughter. She arrived in poverty and always lived modestly. Through ninety-five years of life, she relied on God's strength to bring her through every trial, and she was the best example of love and obedience Kristin had ever seen. When it comes to knowing and doing right, there is no substitute for a living, breathing, right-under-your-nose example.

But Jesus Christ does one better. No, you can't see him in person, but through the Bible you can read about him in action and witness his awesome acts as the ultimate example of doing right. Jesus not only taught the moral law of God, but unlike any other human being who ever lived he also lived it to perfection.

The Bible leaves no doubt about the purity of Christ's life. Peter said, "He never sinned, and he never deceived anyone" (1 Peter 2:22). He is "the sinless, spotless Lamb of God" (1 Peter 1:19). Paul declared that Christ "never

sinned" (2 Corinthians 5:21). He "faced all of the same temptations we do, yet he did not sin" (Hebrews 4:15). John's first letter talks often about Christ's sinlessness: "There is no darkness in him at all" (1 John 1:5); "Jesus Christ, the one who pleases God completely" (1 John 2:1); "Christ is pure" (1 John 3:3); and "There is no sin in him" (1 John 3:5). Pilate said, "I find nothing wrong with this man!" (Luke 23:4). Pilate's observation has been the verdict of history. Jesus lived a truly perfect life.

Even the best human examples of obedience and purity fail at times. You may say thanks to God for the good examples you have in your family members, church leaders, and friends, but keep your main focus on the perfect example by filling your mind with the words and deeds of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

TODAY'S PRAYER

Jesus, It seems like too large of a responsibility to be an example of who you are and what you are about to all the people around me. And yet, I am glad you blazed a trail for me, showing me the right way to live and love. Help me to be faithful in all I do, in my words and actions so that others may be drawn to you as they watch me as I strive to imitate you in my life. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves!

Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 101

"Then we will no longer be immature like children. We won't be tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching. We will not be influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth. Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church. He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love." Ephesians 4:14-16 (NLT)

SEEING YOURSELF WITH 20/20 VISION

DEENA has spent her whole life trying to figure out what other people think of her. Before she goes to school each morning, she texts a few friends to check her outfit—so she can fit in without looking like a copycat. Before Deena says a word about anything, she listens to what everyone else in the room is saying—and then parrots their opinions. And when she wonders about her worth, she judges herself through the critical eyes of everyone in her life. Yet Deena knows in her head that God has the only opinion of her that really matters. Why? Because what God thinks is more than opinion. It's a fact.

So here's the question: What two things does Deena need to do to grow in how she views what God thinks about her? If you remember God's two-step plan we discussed a few days ago, you know what Deena needs to do. The problem is, Deena is stuck and not growing. Even though she wants to see herself as God's vision of herself, she doesn't want to work at it. She doesn't make time reading her Bible to soak in God's truth. Even though she goes to church, she's nervous about letting people get too close. She sounds like someone who has bad vision and wants to see more clearly but won't wear glasses.

The fact is, you can't change how you see yourself without diving into God's Word. It's his Word which helps you focus on the truth that you are:

Lovable. God loves you just as you are and wants you for his child.

Valuable. God would have sent Jesus to die for you even if you were the only person on earth.

Useful. God trusts you to reach out and help others see who he is.

God's Word is the number-one agent to renew your mind to think like he thinks and see as he sees (see Romans 12:2). But if that's what you're supposed to learn from the Bible, how do you dig out that truth? Grabbing hold of the facts God wants you to know beyond any doubt starts with opening his book, and it happens when you study the Bible with your self-portrait in mind. Whenever you sit down to read, ask God to help you see yourself as he does. As you study, quiz yourself about what the passage says about you. Chances are you will discover verses and phrases that seem just right for your situation. God will use his Word to help you know for certain you are loved, valued, and useful!

TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, Thank you for creating me in an awesome and wonderful way. Thank you for giving me worth in your eyes. As I go through this week, help me to live as the one you uniquely intended me to be and to abide in you instead of striving so hard. Help me to know I can live peacefully and joyfully as an heir in Your Kingdom and joint heir with Christ. Thank you for seeing me as someone who is loved, valuable, and has worth in your plans to reach others with your good news. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves!

Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 102

"Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever." 1 Chronicles 16:34

GIVE THANKS

THANKSGIVING. The very thought of the day brings a sense of pause. For some it is a day off work. For others, a day to celebrate football and food. Some will plan for their famed shopping trips or internet purchases on Black Friday. And for some, it will stir memories of years gone by. For Christians, however, it is another opportunity to do what we do every day - stop, remember, and thank our Creator for his abundant blessing poured out on us.

If you are struggling to think of something to be thankful for this year in the midst of Covid lockdowns and quarantines, cancelled celebrations, and unmet expectations, start by making a list of what you are grateful for. If you know Jesus as your personal Savior, that's a good place to start. Then, list the basics such as being alive, having food, a home, a car or transportation, clothing, heat, and running water. Next, begin to look around to see what fills your home. Chances are you have a few material goods that didn't just appear. God provided them to you as a blessing! Add to that a thanks for family and friends, your job or the ability to look for a job, good memories of the ways God has protected you, provided for a special need, answered a prayer. By now your list should be growing. The possibilities of things to give thanks for are really quite endless.

Next, begin to thank God out loud for his blessings. Need an easy place to start? Well, food is a great place to start. If you've never been in the practice of saying your thanks out loud, begin with a simple thanks to God just as you would speak to a friend who invited you over for a wonderful dinner. God loves to hear us thank him. And when you stop to think that millions never pause to give a word of thanks to God for the food provided, and few homes have a moment of

thanksgiving at the beginning of the meal or at any other time of the day, know that God is pleased with hearing a word of thanks!!

Making a list of things to be thankful for may be easier for some people than for others, but once we start a habit of thanking God, it really does get quite easy. All we have to do is look around or look in the mirror and realize we are so very blessed. As I make my list of thanks this year, one of the things I am most thankful for is you and being able to serve our incredible God with you. Thank you for blessing me with your presence on Zoom whenever we gather together. Thank you for encouraging me, praying for our family, and caring for our entire church family. I am truly blessed. As I thank the Lord for you, I echo the words Paul wrote in Philippians 1:3-4 that best sum up my prayer of thanks, "Every time I think of you, I give thanks to my God. Whenever I pray, I make my requests for all of you with joy." Have a blessed Thanksgiving giving thanks to our Lord for He is good!

TODAY'S PRAYER

Father, I thank you for your incredible blessings given each day. No words really can sum up how thankful I feel when I look around and see all that you have given to me and done for me, but on this day set aside for giving thanks, I want to thank you for the many ways you have demonstrated how much you love me. Thank you for loving me so much that you willingly sent you Son to die for my sins so I could know you and be in a relationship with you. Thank you that you have blessed me with family and friends who love me, a church family who cares about me, talents to use, many material blessings, and opportunities to serve others. As a way of saying thank you to you, help my life to be a continuous time of thanks back to you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves!

Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 103

"Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint." Isaiah 40:31

SOARING ABOVE THE STORM

TERRY just got a D on his report card. Carlos was cut from the team. Shannon was back-stabbed by a friend. Situations like these can be heartbreaking, and for some the pain goes even deeper—like Melinda, whose mom and dad are going through a divorce. Or Suzanne, whose best friend was killed last month in a car accident. Or Corey, who was just diagnosed with a rare form of cancer.

Have you ever noticed that no one escapes hard times? Some of those times are life-and-death situations, others are just frustrations or setbacks, but without exception, they all cause agonizing pain and make us feel like our world is caving in. At times like these there is nothing we need more than an eye-popping look at who God is. Think about this wonderful description in Isaiah 40:

- God is all-powerful. He created all of the universe—from the intricate design of the tiniest cell to the massive grandeur of the vast heavens, nothing is too big or too difficult for him. Nothing is too tiny for his attention.
- God is entirely loving. Since God created all the stars and calls each burning ball of gas by name, how do you think God feels about you, his child created in his image? Jesus answered that question: “Look at the birds,” he said. “They don’t need to plant or harvest or put food in barns because your heavenly Father feeds them. And you are far more valuable to him than they are!” (Matthew 6:26) God loves you more than you can even imagine.

- God gives strength to the weak. You might feel bogged down and beat up by difficult circumstances in your life, but you can put your trust in the Lord and not give up. He sees your needs and will give you strength to keep going—even to run, take flight, and soar high above the pressures of life.

Ponder what it means that God is both all-powerful and all-loving. If he were mighty but didn’t love, we would spend our life fearing his anger and judgment. If he were loving but weak, he couldn’t help us through our trials. The God we serve is both strong and kind, and that’s why we can trust in him!

TODAY'S PRAYER

“Lord, I praise you today for your power, your love, and your strength that you shower on me every day. I thank you that you love me enough to help me through each difficulty. Continue, Lord, to give me the strength I need in times of weakness so that I can overcome my trials and moments of chaos. Thank you for being powerful enough to help me soar with you above life's challenges. You are mighty, indeed! In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves!

Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 104

"But Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid, for am I in God's place? And as for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive." Genesis 50:19-20

DOWN BUT NOT OUT

JOSEPH was in a bad spot. He had close relationships with God and his father—a marvelous thing. Those special friendships, however, made his older brothers extremely jealous—a hazardous thing. His brothers were so jealous, in fact, that they thought about killing him, but instead they came up with a cruel plan to sell Joseph into slavery and report to their father that he had been killed by wild animals. Not only was Joseph sold as a slave, but he wound up in an Egyptian prison for refusing to do wrong.

You might not have experienced exactly what Joseph did, but maybe you've been rejected by friends. Maybe you've been punished for something you didn't do or ridiculed for doing what was right. We can only guess what Joseph felt as he wasted away in a prison cell, but he didn't let his circumstances keep him from trusting in God and doing what was right. Why? Because he still believed that God was in control.

If you read Joseph's whole story, found in Genesis 37-50, you'll discover how God eventually took Joseph out of prison and promoted him to a high position in the land. God had a special plan for Joseph, the end result of which was God using him to help save a whole country from starvation and, in a unique twist, to save the lives of his brothers. Joseph's story once again demonstrates to us how God never fails his people and, instead, turns even evil circumstances to our good.

There's a phrase woven throughout Joseph's story that tells the key to his success: "The Lord was with Joseph." This promise from God is the same for us today. He is with us, and He is working out a master plan to bring himself honor—a plan that pulls together the positive happenings in our lives with the experiences that appear downright rotten. None of us can escape being roughed up by others, but we can remember that when people poke us with evil, God will bring good out of the pain. Even when you feel ditched by others, God hasn't ditched you. He's right there with you, and He is in control.

TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, Thank you for being with me in every circumstance I face. When painful circumstances come into my life, help me to trust that you are in control and have a plan to bring good out of my pain. Help me to remember that even when things seem to be out of control, you are always there for me. Thank you for being right here with me now, for always being in control, and for bringing good out of everything, even the things I don't understand. Thank you for being the author of my hope. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves!

Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 105

"What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ--the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith." Philippians 3:8-9

NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH

AS his wide receiver flies into the air and pulls down the football in a one-handed grab, the coach of the home team leaps just as high in celebration of the game-winning touchdown. An instant later the coach of the visiting team shouts for an instant-replay review of the catch, so an official trots to the sideline and peers into a monitor. The fans hush. The players hold their breath. An announcement echoes over the loudspeaker. Like it or not, the touchdown stands.

Instant replay lets you see a sports play all over again. That won't work with the events of history, but there is still a reliable way to figure out the facts. You dig into the testimony of eyewitnesses. One real eye-popping picture of Christ's resurrection comes from the lives of the early Christians—the people alive when it happened. For decades after Jesus died on the cross, life looked grim for those who claimed to be his followers. Authorities used every imaginable method to stop them from talking. The early Christians were beaten. Stoned to death. Thrown to lions. Tortured. Even nailed to crosses.

Those Christians didn't react like we would expect. They didn't say, "Hey, we were just kidding about Jesus. He's still dead." Instead, they gave their lives as proof of their total confidence in the truth of their message. Some

people say the disciples must have made up the story about the Resurrection, but if the Resurrection were a made-up story, don't you think at least one of the twelve disciples would have admitted the so-called lie for which some of the apostles were beheaded or stoned or crucified? Or what about the dozens of Christ-followers who refused to crumble under torture? Or the thousands of first-century believers who were thrown to the lions for refusing to stop believing in Christ? If the Resurrection were a lie, somebody would have cracked, spilled the truth, sold out, and blown their cover-up plot.

Nothing less than the truth—the real-life appearances of the resurrected Christ—could have caused these people to maintain to the death that Jesus is alive and that he is Lord. Aren't you glad for their faithfulness—so that you can know the truth?

TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, Thank you that you have made all things new. I am grateful for the victory and power I have in your name and that you hold the keys over death, I appreciate the gift of your Son, Jesus, who was raised from the grave, paving the way for me to have a new life with you. Thank you that you had a plan, that you made a way. I confess, Lord, my need for you...fresh...new...again. Renew and refresh my heart, my mind, and my life, for the days ahead. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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