

**GOING DEEPER**  
**DISCUSSION GUIDE**

# **GREAT** **EXPECTATIONS**



**March 9, 2014**

# Discussion Guide

## **I do...alone**

*Galatians 5.13-18*

### **Connecting:**

45 minutes

(The following questions are intended to provide your group with a way of connecting with one another so that you might partner in the work God is doing in your lives.)

- In what ways did God move in your life this week? In what ways did you respond to him?
- What was your biggest challenge this week? In what ways, if any, did you invite God into this challenge?
- How honest have you been with us? (Graciously thank group members for their honesty if they answer that they have held back.)

### **Getting Started:**

10 minutes

- When you hear the phrase, "Free to be me," what comes to mind? Could you elaborate?

### **Diving Into the Text:**

60 minutes

(The following questions are intended to provide your group with a simple road map through the text. Feel free to use these questions in ways that best fit your group and the dynamics of your own meeting.)

- Use the notes to explain the context and background of Galatians 5.13-18.
- Read Galatians 5.13-18 aloud twice, slowly.

- Paul outlines his understanding of freedom as "freedom to" rather than as "freedom from." In your understanding, what is Paul stating we are "freed to" do?
- What does Paul state this free life requires of us? Does this seem contradictory to you? Would you explain?
- What would you say is the present cultural understanding of freedom? In what ways, if any, is this understanding of freedom the same or different from that presented by Paul?
- What forms might our cultural understanding of freedom take in marriage? What forms might Paul's understanding of freedom take? Which of these two might be more likely to result in the outcome described in verse 15? Would you elaborate?
- Can you describe a time in which you sought freedom within your marriage as defined by our culture? Could you describe a time in which you sought freedom as described by Paul? What difference, if any, was there in the outcomes?
- What, if anything, makes the pursuit of freedom as "free to" serve difficult or easy for you? Would you elaborate?
- What, if anything, might make it easier for you to pursue the freedom to serve within your marriage? What impact might this have upon your marriage? What steps, if any, might God be inviting you to take toward living in this freedom?

## Context and Background

### *Freedom*

For the modern person, true freedom is expressed when someone has the ability to live as they please. Freedom is the presence of unfettered self-determination. Or, as The Soup Dragons sang in their remake of a song by the Rolling Stones, “I’m free to do what I want any old time.” Such a concept of freedom would have been foreign in the ancient world. In the ancient world, the concept of freedom did include the idea of self-determination, but this self-determination was understood to be located within established boundaries. For instance, a citizen of an ancient city-state was free to participate in civic matters and to enjoy rights as a citizen but such freedom was bounded by the laws of the city-state. In the ancient world, the predominant use of freedom was within the context of slavery. A person was free when they were freed from that which bound them; that is, freedom was the removal of oppression or bondage. However, the experience of freedom was not the removal of all limits but rather an exchange of limits. The free person was freed from bondage and was therefore free to live under a different set of rules and regulations, often those determined by the one who had freed them. The New Testament picks up this concept of freedom as it presents every human as living in bondage (Romans 6.20; 1 Peter 2.16). The tragedy of this situation is that people are unable to free themselves (1 Corinthians 6.19-20). The work of Christ frees people, but this freedom does not consist of the right to direct our lives in an unfettered manner. Rather, we are free from bondage to serve God and one another (Galatians 5.13-14; Romans 6.18-22). Perhaps the clearest way of understanding freedom in Christ is to state that freedom is given so that people are free to live as God intended, not as they desire (Galatians 5.16-18).

## The Text

### *Galatians 5.13-15: Free to do what I want*

Paul’s letter to the churches which he planted in the Galatian region sought to rescue the churches from the clutches of Jewish teachers who were claiming Paul did not proclaim the full gospel. When Paul had planted these churches, he had proclaimed a gospel rooted in grace, God’s movement on behalf of people which leads to salvation. Later, Jewish teachers claimed that grace was only the first part of the message of the gospel. The second part of the message was law, specifically the Jewish Law. It seems that this group of teachers was making the argument that grace “got you in” but keeping the Jewish Law “kept you in God’s good graces.” Paul vehemently denied this teaching, arguing for a life of faith rooted solely in grace.

As Paul nears the end of his letter he must answer two questions in the minds of his audience. First, how can choosing not to follow the Jewish Law lead to anything but lawless behavior? Second, how can one please God if he does not follow the Law? Paul picks up the first question by reminding his audience of the nature of freedom. Freedom from the Jewish Law was not freedom to live a self-determined life. (See Freedom.) One was freed from the Law so that he might bind himself to the life God intended for him. Those who were freed by grace—freed from the Law and the sin which the Law brought about (Romans 7.7-25)—were free to enter a new form of bondage, the humble service of others. It is important to note that the word Paul uses for service is none other than the word “slave.” This humble, love-driven service of others is nothing short of the life God intended for people, the fulfillment of the Law itself. To live in absolute freedom—complete self-determination—is dangerous. When people live in this manner they take from one another rather than giving.

This taking results in behavior in which people annihilate one another in their efforts to act upon their self-determination.

### **Galatians 5.16-18: *Pleasing God***

Having clarified freedom as freedom to live as God intends, Paul picks up the second question about pleasing God apart from the Law. It is easy to see how the Law provides security for a person who longs to please God. This person only needs to do as instructed. However, as Jesus pointed out, it is possible to follow the letter of the Law and to miss God's true intent for the Law (Matthew 5). Paul notes that the Law was never sufficient for leading one to a life pleasing to God. Elsewhere, Paul argues that the Law simply demonstrates the full extent of one's true sinful nature (Romans 7.7-25), having no power to equip a person to live apart from his bondage to sin. If one desires to live a life pleasing to God, he must live with God and by his power, something Paul calls living by the Spirit. Paul probably has in mind Jesus' statements about abiding and the indwelling work of the Holy Spirit (John 14-17). The follower of Christ needs the power and presence of God because of the deep inner-conflict which he experiences. Every Christ-follower experiences a battle between two opposing natures, the flesh (self) and the Spirit (God). In this conflict, the Christ-follower is powerless and thus must submit to one guiding nature. Those who choose to submit to the Spirit find that they can please God apart from the works of the Law.

### **Application:**

Our culture values freedom. We want to do what we want, when we want, in the way we want. Anything that hampers our unfettered self-determination is viewed, by many in our culture, as terrible. Marriage poses an interesting dilemma for this culture moral. In marriage we freely bind ourselves to another person, choosing to live with him or her and for him or her which inherently fetters unfettered self-determination. For some time our culture has viewed this as an accepted consequence of marriage, but recently society has begun to argue that marriage poses no limit on self-determination. One can marry and continue to do as he wants, when he wants. This cultural view is rooted in a high valuation of personal freedom, but it is a misunderstanding of freedom. Absolute freedom, unfettered self-determination, is socially (and relationally!) impossible because it creates moral and social chaos. Freedom, by definition, is self-determination within established and agreed upon boundaries; that is, one is free to move within the boundaries chosen. For the person of God, freedom is unfettered self-determination within the boundaries of life as it was intended by God. Free people freely choose to live as God intends, which involves the humble, loving service of others. To live out absolute freedom is to choose to submit to others by first submitting to the guiding presence and power of God in our lives. When a person chooses to live in this manner he experiences life, real life.

Want to know how this looks in real life? Check out Blake's blog at [BlakeShipp.blogspot.com](http://BlakeShipp.blogspot.com)



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