

1. READ

Pastor Watley's Selected Scripture: Romans 8 : 1 New International Version (NIV)

1Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus

Further Reading: Psalm 51 : 1 – 6 New International Version (NIV)

1Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your unfailing love;
according to your great compassion
blot out my transgressions.
2 Wash away all my iniquity
and cleanse me from my sin.
3 For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is always before me.
4 Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight;
so you are right in your verdict
and justified when you judge.
5 Surely I was sinful at birth,
sinful from the time my mother conceived me.
6 Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb;
you taught me wisdom in that secret place.

John 15 : 1 – 8 New International Version (NIV)

1“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. 2 He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. 3 You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. 4 Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

5 “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. 6 If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. 7 If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. 8 This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.



UNLEASHED

STUDY GUIDE

2. REFLECT

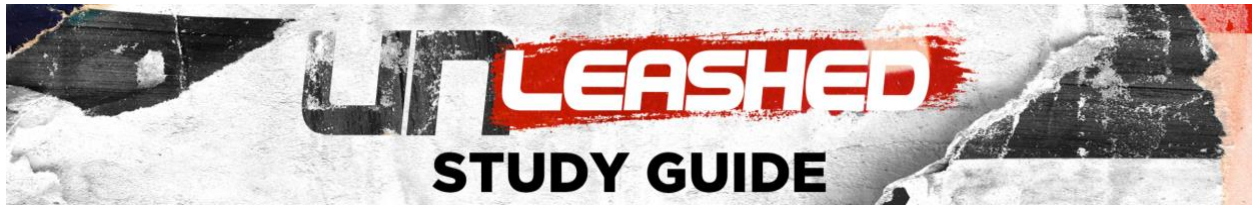
[Make sure to view this week's sermon!]



This week our Senior Pastor Rev. Matthew L. Watley started a brand-new sermon series entitled “Unleashed.” Throughout this series, we will be empowered to live our lives with the confidence and assurance that Christ has set us free. Being a Christian means that we no longer have to submit ourselves to the yolk of bondage. Instead, we can submit ourselves to Christ and know that we have been released from the wages of sin.

In our lesson for week one, Pastor Watley encourages us to live an *Unleashed* life from this moment forward. When Christ died on the cross, He set us free from eternal condemnation while demonstrating just how much He loves us. This sacrifice is a consistent reminder that through His love, we are called to live in freedom. However, as Pastor Watley mentions, if you are not careful and you don't value your freedom, the enemy can steal the joy of freedom away. Before you know it, you can find yourself shackled to things, behaviors, or situations that Christ never intended.

Thankfully, as our scripture for today (Romans 8:1) declares, “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” By Christ's blood, we have been unleashed to live free of the **Sting, Stain, and Strain** of sin!



Christ saved us from the STING of sin.

Whenever we sin or fall short of the Glory of God, it often causes a sense of discomfort in our conscience. Whether we have sinned in thought, word, or deed, many times it weighs on us and causes a “sting” that sticks with us. Our choices can have a lasting negative impact if not treated properly. However as Pastor Watley notes, “when you are stung by sin, you have to treat it with confession and repentance.” A great example of this is in Psalm 51 when David acknowledges and admits his sin, rather than justifying or rationalizing his wrongdoing. He says; “For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight.” David understands that he must face, what he wants God to fix. And thankfully, when we surrender our shortcomings, we are covered by the blood of Jesus that has the power to soothe and remove the sting of sin.

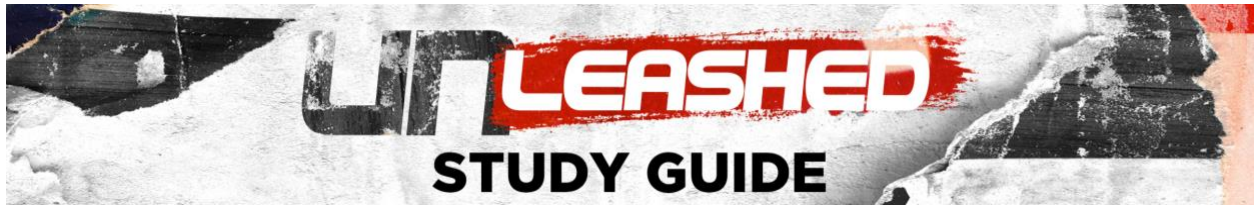
Christ saved us from the STAIN of sin.

As Pastor Watley mentions, after the *sting* of sin, we are often left with the *stain* of sin. Similar to when we suffer from a flesh wound or an injury, even when the pain is gone, we are still left with a mark. This mark of sin can be a haunting reminder of our past transgressions. And as we learned from Pastor’s sermon, “one of the most difficult things the devil can do is not to lie about your future, but to tell the truth about your past.” By holding our past shortcomings over our heads, the enemy often tries to make us feel unworthy of a relationship with God. If we are not careful, we can allow the enemy to use our mistakes and the stain of sin to rob us of a full and abundant life. However, when Jesus died on the cross, our stains were washed clean. We do not have to be defined or hindered by our sin. Instead, we can be assured that through Christ our cleansing was *Free, Full, and Final!*

Christ saved us from the STRAIN of sin.

Thirdly, in Christ we are freed from the strain that is the result of sin. Even after we get past the other obstacles that try to keep us in bondage, we often still have to face the opinions of other people. As we move forward and press towards our freedom in Christ, sometimes the criticism and judgement of our peers can be a source of tension in our lives. Instead of “spiritual condemnation,” the external stress and pressure of “social condemnation” can stunt our growth and inhibit our development as disciples. It then becomes important for us to remember that when people try to bring up our past, our strategy should not be to deny our mistakes, but our strategy should be to distinguish our past from our present. We can live our lives as a testimony of what God can do, and how God has taken us from the mistakes of our past to the victories of our present. By releasing our past to God, we no longer have to be weighed down by the strain caused by the shame of our past sin. We can find comfort in knowing that we are living testimonies and witnesses of God’s grace!





3. RESPOND

Introspective Questions

- How have you let your past mistakes define you?
- How has your life been a testimony of God's grace?

Discussion Questions

- What are these passages of scripture saying to you?
- How does David confess his sins to God? Do his words indicate that he is repentant?

