

So if you will turn with me to 1 Peter this morning. We're going to be in verse 16. I'm going to read a couple passages here and then we'll pray. 1 Peter 2, verse 16 says, "...live as people who are free." not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor. Let's pray this morning. Father, we thank you for your word this morning. And Father, we thank you, Lord, that freedom is not an American idea. Freedom is... which you have given us through your Son, Jesus Christ. And so, Lord, this morning as we pause and we take just a few minutes to look at your Scripture, to examine some of the freedoms that we have, and it's a very short list. You've blessed us with so much more than what we could cover on a Sunday morning. But, Lord, as we look at these freedoms that we have today, Lord, we ask that you would just speak to us. Help us understand that you offer freedom, but it's usually us who turns it down. So, Lord, this morning, I thank you for the opportunity to speak. I thank you for the opportunity to share your word. I pray that you'd help us to hear what you would have us hear. Through the power of your Holy Spirit, in Jesus' name, amen. I'm experiencing something very interesting right now. For the previous 18 months, I kind of knew where I was going and what I was doing, and it was pretty easy just to give a review of what we'd done and slide into the next passage of Scripture as we've been celebrating... I got like four hours of sleep last night, so I might say a few words that I'm going to have to correct. And so just going to have to bear with me. But it's kind of interesting not giving a typical review and kind of knowing where I was going. So it was kind of a stressful week this week thinking, Lord, what do I talk about this week? It's the first time I prayed that in a long time because I kind of knew what was happening. But Lots of people have been asking and here it is, the big reveal. The next book we're going to be doing is the book of James. Don't get so excited because if you guys thought Hebrews was tough. Yeah. And just to tell you how tough it's going to be, I've titled the series Forged in Faith. And that's kind of how the book of James hits. It's a hammer. So I do want you to start reading the book of James. We will start that in September sometime as we pick up small groups. I feel like this is going to be a very good book to do with our small groups. And as I said, I would encourage you to start reading the book because this very short book is like an anvil that we will bend to. And its purpose is to shape us into the character and image of Jesus Christ. And I'm looking forward to this study. and spending time reading and doing some study now before we get into it. This summer, I have a few small series planned for this summer to get us through July and August and really looking forward to. But today, I just want to look at some of the freedoms that we have. Because as Americans, we enjoy freedoms that most people in the world only dream of. But yet as Christians, we have even better privileges than that that we have as Americans. And we share those with everyone across the globe. As Isaac was sharing this morning, it was something that piqued my thoughts. It's like, you know, our brothers and sisters there, even though they live a different life, we share the same freedom in Christ. And that's very exciting. But I want to start by looking at a couple of ideas of freedom, and the first one I want to talk about is the gift of freedom that we have. Our passage in Peter says we should live as those who are free, and it really is a gift from God. James chapter 1 verse 7, I start off with James because I've been reading it, but James chapter 1 verse 17 says, "...every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning." So James opens up in his first chapter telling us that every good gift comes from God. And now James isn't speaking nationalistically, he of course is speaking about Jesus, but And I do think that our nation that we live in is a gift from God. Because you and I can gather here this morning, we can worship, we have the freedom to get together and to open up the Bible and to share and to talk about Jesus Christ. Isaac was sharing this morning, you can't share your testimony in Cambodia. It's illegal for him to proselytize Buddhists with Jesus. That's a freedom that you and I don't have a fear of. We have the ability to share the gospel with anyone that we want. And it might be hard to think about, but individual freedom on a national level is a relatively new concept on the world scene. It all started about 250 years ago, oddly enough, with a little experiment called America. And I'm sure that it wasn't the very first time people have tried to have a nation of freedom, but this was the first time that it succeeded in any kind of way, where there was a group of people who got

together not to draw power for themselves, but to give power to the nation of people, to elect its own leaders, to govern its own affairs, and to live what we have come to know as the American dream and the freedom that we all have. The idea that a nation would be ruled where people have the ability to be in charge of their own lives and their own livelihood with the ability to become and succeed to the level that you were willing to work to earn was a novel idea 250 years ago. Because before that, every nation or country was ruled by a king or some kind of supreme leader, and everybody worked to support that person or their idea of prosperity. The book of... Samuel teaches when they claim for a king is like, if you want a king, you have to understand they're going to take your sons and daughters. They're going to take your land. They're going to take your sheep. They're going to take your produce for themselves. And that has kind of been the concept of nations from that point. The people in that nation worked to provide the king with what he wanted. But America is not that way. So we can look at what you and I have, and it really is a gift of freedom that we experience. It's precious. And it's really wonderful not having someone that owns me or my land and tells me what I have to do with it. But the reality is freedom isn't guaranteed because it can be lost. Because there are always those who are seeking to harness power or the ability to tell you what you can and can't do. And they still exist in the world today. And unfortunately, this has been the way it's been since Adam fell in the garden. Man has always sought to find power and control over other people around them. But God has given us something different. He's given us this gift of freedom that you and I have. So I feel like my first response in understanding or knowing about this freedom that Jesus has given me, my first response should be gratitude. To be thankful for this gift. Because like I said, not many people has had it in the world history before us. Psalms talks a lot about thanksgiving. Psalm 100 starts this way. It says, Make a joyful noise. Shout to the Lord all you lands. Serve the Lord with gladness. Come before His presence with singing. Know that the Lord, He is God. It is He who has made us and not we ourselves. We are the people of His pasture. Verse 4 says, Enter into His gates with thanksgiving and with His courts with praise. Be thankful to him and bless his name for the Lord God is good. His mercy is everlasting and his truth endures to all generations. There should be this spring of thanksgiving to God for the freedoms that you and I have. Because as I thought yesterday and celebrated, the thing that kept coming to my head was being thankful for the opportunity to To be able to gather together and celebrate watching all those fireworks explode in the sky. But above that, I thought of my spiritual freedoms that God blessed me with. And that should always stir me to be thankful for it. Because I have visited countries where it's very difficult to share the gospel, where it's very oppressive. Several years ago, I had an opportunity to go to Russia to go to a pastor's conference. How many of you have ever been to Russia? I was on the western side of Russia. No. No. Eastern side of Russia. Sorry. I was on the eastern side of Russia. Extremely oppressive. Everywhere I went, I just felt like there was this oppression on top of me, and there's this fear that was surrounding me until I got to the church, and it was very exciting to be there with these people. But there was just this... This fear, this lack of freedom, this intimidation of being in this land where I understood if I was to say things about Jesus and certain people heard, I have a sister-in-law who was arrested and kicked out of Russia. And so I understand the lack of freedom that you have there. But we have this freedom in Christ that makes my heart leap. at the opportunity to express it and to live it. So what freedoms am I talking about? Well, we can start real simple. I have freedom from sin. God has forgiven me of my sin. I no longer walk with the guilt and shame of that sin. I no longer walk in condemnation. Amen. These are amazing freedoms that you and I have. And I'm also free to learn and to live like Jesus has called me to live. See, God is the one who gives and blesses us with the good and perfect gifts that James talked about. And if you have experienced the forgiveness of your sin, you have experienced the greatest gift that can ever be received by mankind. The ability that God has offered us through Jesus. to walk freely from sin. That should be enough to say, amen, we can close the book and we can go home. That's all, I mean, that freedom alone is worth its time that we've been here. So because of that, because of this gift of freedom we have, we should seek or we have the ability or we can express boldness through that freedom. We have the ability to be bold in the freedom that God has given us. Hebrews chapter four

says, for we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in the time of need. Now, I know I talked about this a little bit last week as we closed up the book of Hebrews, speaking of the ability that we can come boldly before God and we can enter into his throne room and we can have an audience with God. But I wanted to touch on this again because Americans have this sense of Entitlement? Pride, maybe? Boastfulness? Because some might read this that I can come boldly before the throne of God as I can come pridefully, or I can come before God and say, like, hey, God, look at how good I have lived my life. Look at how hard I'm trying. Look at all the advancements I have made. But I don't think I can honestly say... that at my best in life, I would ever feel like I had the ability to come before God and say, hey God, my name's Will Parsons, and I have arrived. That's not what it means to come boldly into the throne room of God. But there are people who will do that. If we read the... If we read the context... The context is, hey, when I screw up, how many of us screw up? Oh, everybody better raise their hand there. I have the understanding that I can come before God with confidence and say, hey, God, I messed up. That's the boldness that this passage talks about, because the context is Jesus says he can sympathize with us. He understands our weakness. He was tempted in all the ways that you and I were tempted. And he knows. He knows that you and I struggle. The boldness that this passage speaks of is we have the ability to say, hey, God, look, I really messed up. We don't have to crawl in. We don't have to, if you're familiar with your Bible, Jacob, whenever he was meeting Esau, he sent all these gifts ahead of him because he was afraid of how Esau would receive him. We don't have to do that with God. We don't have to pacify him as we try to enter into his presence. He understands the place that we're coming from. So I have the boldness to say, hey, God, I didn't succeed. I failed. Can you give me forgiveness? That's the boldness that we have to be able to walk into God's presence. Now, one of the ways that we do that is with the ability to humble myself in prayer. to entreat the Lord with my request for forgiveness for the needs that I see around me and for myself. So part of that boldness is the freedom to pray to God, knowing that he will hear us when we ask. Now, I've been talking about prayer a lot lately, but for me, it's become something that's really become a very vital part of my life. And it's not always been that way. So as I get older in life, as I continue to walk through life, as I continue to struggle to be a good husband, which I have demonstrated my lack thereof several times from the pulpit, As I continue to learn to be a good father as my kids are reaching ages they've never reached before and there's this new learning curve that I have to pastor this church for any other titles that I might wear, I'm learning that prayer is such a vital part of success in whatever arena I find myself in. So I thought I would just tell you what most of my life was like so that you could not feel so bad or throw a stone at me if you want, I don't care. Like many of us, my prayer life for most of my life was what I consider a very small step above something on life support. I moved to Montana in 2005. And since then I've had two jobs, no less than two jobs. I've had five kids, I have farm animals, I have a home, I have parents and outlaws, in-laws, I have debt, I have troubles. I have been working with my father-in-law in his church, which was its own fun thing. I now have this church that I pastor. I deal with struggles of being a CEO, a CFO, which I'm not amazing at finances, but I have a really amazing council. with a CBO, if you don't know what that is, it's Chief Building Officer. We have been doing a lot of construction here. And then a Chief Esso. Anybody know what a Chief Esso is? It's a chief shepherd dealing with sheep, a.k.a. people, a.k.a. you. Politely, politely. Okay. And what I say, or what I mean by saying all this is that I'm very busy. And there are often times in life when prayer is like, okay, Jesus, I'm overwhelmed. I need a hand here. That's been the extent of prayer most of my life. It was learning to function and do everything I could, and then when I reached the end of my rope, taking five minutes and being like, okay, God, I don't know what else to do here. I need your help. For most of us, that encapsulates our prayer life. And I'm not here to cast guilt or shame or condemnation because I'm telling you my story. That was my example. But over the past few years, one reason is because I am getting older and man, you just can't function the way that you used to function. I was talking to John, and I might butcher this, John, so you might have to help me,

but he said, I used to be able to spend all day doing this one thing, but now it takes me all, it takes me, no, how did you say that? I used to, I can't even repeat it. Man, I felt so, that was me. I was like, yes, I understand that. And the biggest part for me right now is my font is getting bigger and it's getting further away from my face. That's one of the hardest things I'm learning to adjust to right now. But over the past couple of years, prayer has become so much more precious to me. Not in a, oh Lord Jesus, I'm overwhelmed. But this understanding that My kids have entered into this new phase of life where... They're all in here, that's fine. My kids have entered into this new phase of life where they love the fight. They love the argument. They love the verbal going back. And I'm not going to call them out, but I ended up walking out of the house yesterday because there was this very intense argument happening about the results of a squirrel falling from the tree and hitting the ground. And one of them threw out like, well, it's this velocity and it wouldn't. I was like, oh, my word, I'm done. And I just had to I just had to walk out of the room because it was just for the love of the fight. They just were at each other. And I'm like, oh, my gosh. I think one of the reasons I'm really turning to prayer a lot more in my life is the fight has left. I'm just not willing to fight anymore. I don't have the energy to just headbutt things until they break. I just like, okay, I'm done fighting. Lord, I need you this. My body's tired. I don't want to fight this anymore. And guess what? Prayer doesn't exempt you from the fight, but boy, it gives you a good head start. It takes a lot of the struggle out of it. Understanding that I can come boldly before God and be like, God, I am struggling. God, I need help. I need to work through this problem. And taking the time, taking the freedom that we have to come to God and say, hey, God, I need some wisdom in this area of my life has become such a precious thing to me. Because life is going to continue to stay busy. And if I don't make time for prayer, I won't stop and pray. I have to be very intentional about taking time to pray. Taking time to boldly come before God. So if I won't take advantage of boldly coming to God in prayer, what typically happens is I learn or I begin to misuse the freedoms that I suppose that I have. And we're all guilty of misusing our freedoms at some point. So Galatians chapter five, verse 13 says, for you, brethren, have been called to liberty and Only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. See, one of the problems that we can experience with freedom is that it quickly devolves into a selfish husk of reality. It's all about me. We can begin to take our freedoms for granted and think that because I have this freedom, I can do whatever I want, whenever I want, however I want, at any time that I want. But that's not always true. We can, we, we become concerned with only ourselves and our needs and what I think, and it's the most important thing in the room and you just need to listen to it. I try to tell my family that all the time. It just doesn't float. They love the fight and I don't anymore. So an example of something that misuses freedom. If we can look at our nation is the pride movement that is taking place in our nation. They portray the full degradation of freedom without godly principles. This concept of selfish withdrawing into myself. And it's what I think, and it's what makes me happy. And that's all that matters. That's the misuse of freedom. They can become, and I'm not pointing them out because we all have this. This is just an example that I'm using. They become so self-focused and so self-involved that no one can speak anything negative. You can't have an opinion about anything that's happening because if you do, there's these labels for you. You have to accept and you have to love everything they're doing, even though it's not good. It's not good for them. But if you disagree with them in any way, you don't love them. Now, before you get all self-righteous, slow down. Because as Christians, we're guilty of it in our own way. We can get this air of confidence and this ability to begin to speak in what I term Christianese and say all these things and just... launch into people with no compassion and saying, how dare you this? How dare you that? But it's a misuse of freedom at its base account. Because as Christians, we have the ability to use our freedoms as Christians as a blunt force weapon, just like anybody else. We're not separate from it. I've told you the story many times. Well, I say many times. I know the story many times. I might have told you once or twice, but there was a lady in the first church that my dad pastored. She came to church one Sunday with a black eye saying, I was persecuted for sharing her faith. Well, after my dad did a little bit of investigation, come to find out she was screaming and throwing things at this man, and he punched her because she

wouldn't leave him alone. And it's like, you weren't being persecuted for your faith. You were being delivered the consequences of your stupidity. We're not immune from it. It was a misuse of freedom. See, our goal should be to use the freedoms that we have as Christians as an opportunity to love and serve one another and to walk in the Spirit. Galatians says, don't use your liberty as an opportunity to walk in the flesh. As Christians, we have the ability to sometimes slip back into the flesh, to let the old man out of the box and live by things that we don't normally do. So, what does that mean? When we use our freedoms correctly, we can live lives that Scripture commands that we love our neighbor. The age-old question, well, who is my neighbor? Jesus got asked this question. Your fellow Christians are your neighbors. It's a good place to start. Your coworkers, even the ones that drive you crazy. All right, listen guys, write this one down. Other drivers on the road. My wife chastised me for this this morning. Even though there was nobody on the road, but of course you get stuck behind that one person. Our neighbors are sinners that we run into. People shopping, just trying to get some vegetables for this week. Anyone who is within close proximity of you that can hear you talk. And this was a very personal one for me, and I'm going to, this is about as transparent as I get because I feel so guilty for this now. But for me personally, anyone who is pulling a camper anywhere on the road, I have this unholy vitriol for. And I have, it is so bad. I have come to the point where I have to physically stop myself from speaking vile and unhappy things to them. And they don't even have to be in my lane of traffic. They could be on the other side of the road. And I'm like, I hope your flat tire breaks down, rains all weekend. It's bad, guys. So bad. I don't, thankfully. Maybe that's part of the problem. I don't know. Maybe it's, I think more as I've been thinking about it the last couple of weeks, I'm like, I think it's because I don't let myself slow down enough to take the break and I'm jealous. I think it's what it boils down to is I'm jealous. I'll put my heart back in my chest now. But it's still that concept of misusing the freedoms that we have. It's not understanding what God has really given to us. And it's very easy for us to excuse our behavior. We might see something in someone else and call it out, but secretly we're like, dang, I do that too, but it's okay. I mean, I have a reason for that. It's this and this and this. It's very easy to begin to excuse our own behavior and fall into the rut of misusing our freedoms for selfish reasons. See, we construct this holier-than-thou attitude and we fall into this destructive, selfish spiraling that if we don't stop it, it ends up destroying us. It ends up destroying our Christian witness. It ends up destroying our reputation and we begin to speak things that we should not speak. We begin to say things we should not say. We begin to do things we know that we should not do. So how do we stop that from happening? Scripture teaches us very simply, is we serve one another. You serve people, you submit to them, you give them the hand of fellowship in an act of service and do what you can to love them. So if we're to take this and be thankful for this gift of freedom, We have to learn to use our freedom to pray so that we can not misuse the freedom that we have and that we can begin to serve those around us so that we can become good stewards of our freedom. The act of service puts us in a place to steward our freedom well. We won't misuse it. And if we're doing it for the right intentions, we're actually going to let the love of Jesus shine through us. So back to our first verse this morning, 1 Peter 2.16 says, "...live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but rather as servants of God." "...we become good stewards of our freedom..." When we live that freedom out well by being thankful for it, by praying for it, praying for other people, and for not misusing it. So here's a couple things that if we're stewarding our freedom well should be evidence in our lives. If we're stewarding our freedom well, we should be able to worship boldly, not being worried that our reputation has been tarnished. Because we know God and the freedom that he's given us from sin and death, we can worship like David did. Do you know how David worshiped? It was a very pure, it was a very intense, it was a very honest, without fear, without shame type of worship. He praised God in the most humble way. He laid everything on the line. There wasn't anything held back. And for all of David's faults, That is one of the main reasons that he was called a man after God's own heart. He was able to praise and worship God in a way that no one else could, along with many other areas. But we can worship boldly. If we're good stewards of our freedom, we can pray with sincerity. That means we can come before the throne of God and pray heartfelt, authentic prayers

because, as we've learned in Hebrews, God sees the intent of our heart, not the actions of our hands and mouth. He looks at the heart. I can be sitting in my car as a camper drives by and be like, Lord, bless them, but my heart's like... Guess what God sees? Guess what God hears? He doesn't hear, Lord bless them. He hears my heart going at them. And he's like, hey, Will. Yes, Lord. Check your heart. There's something wrong. There's not sincerity there. God checks our hearts. Our hearts have to be focused on him. When we do that, we can speak plainly of our issues. We can say, God, I really am struggling with this. I need your help. That's a prayer of sincerity saying, Lord, check my heart. Make sure that I'm moving in the right avenues of freedoms and using them correctly. The next thing that we can do is we can serve sacrificially. If we're good stewards of our freedom, it gives us the ability to serve sacrificially. Jesus himself said that he came to serve and to not be served. Why would you and I think we should be served if Jesus didn't? And I believe if more people would adopt the mindset of seeing who they could serve, especially in their marriages, if we learn to serve our spouses, In our workplaces, if we learn to help and to serve those who are around us, in the church, what a different world you and I would live in. If everybody had this attitude that I am free so I can serve you, we would live in a different world. And if we steward our freedom well, it gives opportunity to share the gospel. If we're doing it correctly, there will be people who will ask, what's so different about you? It opens up avenues to be able to say, well, let me tell you about Jesus. Isaac and his mission in Cambodia, that's the heartbeat of what they do. They live different so that when they develop relationships with people, they can share the gospel. But for them to do that effectively, they have to steward their freedoms well. Paul said in Romans that I am not ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ. And if we understand the freedoms that we have through Jesus Christ and steward them well, we will not be ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ either. knowing that someone can't come up and reproach us based upon our life and misuse of freedoms, saying, well, you say this, but you do this. To be good stewards of our freedom in Christ, we must understand them. And it all begins with a heart of gratitude. We have to be willing to pray. You got to give up the fight at some point. It's going to wear you down. You can't overcome it. Jesus says, come to me, all you who are weary and heavy laden. That is a task of coming to him with prayer and with our burdens and saying, I can't fight this anymore. We have to be focused. on using the freedom that God has given us to live holy lives. That doesn't mean we do everything perfect. That doesn't mean we do everything right. That doesn't mean we're not going to murmur about the next camper that drives by. But it does mean that I am going to begin to rely upon my freedoms to make better choices, to live better lives. and to take that thought captive in my mind that wants to murmur and wish ill will, I can take that captive and say, you know what, that's not what the Holy Spirit would say. And then I can correctly, out of the correct intent of the heart, actually give a blessing to them. That's hard, guys. But that's stewarding freedom well. That's stewarding freedom well. God is in his own way of being with absolute freedom. He is not subject to, nor does he owe anything to, nor does he answer to anyone but himself. He is the true picture of a supreme being. But yet with all that freedom, he willingly loved me. He willingly loved you. And let me let you in on a secret. You didn't deserve it. Because Romans says that we were his enemies at one time. But yet in his freedom, he chose to love you and I. Not only that, he acted and provided a way for us to be forgiven from our sins at his expense. He sent his son to die in my place. That is the picture of freedom being used correctly. It's where I learn to serve the people Jesus has called me to. See, the freedom that God has blessed us with is meant to create opportunities for others to discover true freedom in Jesus. That's the whole reason that God has blessed us with the freedoms he's given us. It's so that you and I can share the gospel with those who need to hear and that they can become free from their sins. It's not meant to be hidden and exercised for selfish gains. But that's what a lot of people use freedom for. But as Christians, that should not be our testimony.