

Introduction

You know that we've been either hearing a live testimony or seeing a video testimony of somebody testifying to God setting them free from something and the victory and freedom that He has brought them to through the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This morning we have joining us Marie Evans. She is a really active member of our College and Singles Ministry. She's been going to the church since junior high, so she's been here for a long time. Her Freedom Story is centered on kind of a dark time in her life towards the end of high school and the beginning of college. I wanted Marie to kind of give us a picture of what life was like before that, leading up to that time as well.

Marie: When I was two years old, my mom passed away unexpectedly while she was pregnant, and so I grew up with just my dad and I. My dad is not a believer. So I grew up in this environment, very early on, of just kind of negativity and depression. My dad was just very angry over losing his wife. He had no real way to direct that except towards me. So I just grew up always hearing that life would be easier if I wasn't here... I was a burden; I was a stress. He wanted his wife back, and I just was complicating things. I was not good enough. I was just difficult. So that was just kind of this environment that I was in. When I was eight years old, I attended a VBS through a daycare I was at, and I heard the Gospel for the first time. I heard that Christ loved me, He died for my sins, and that through trusting in Him by faith I could have a relationship with God, and I could have eternal life. When I heard that message, I prayed and received Christ that summer. Thankfully my best friend's family was believers and they attended church, and so they took me in and I was at church every Sunday from then on. I was able to grow up in the church even though my family was not believers.

Pastor Jeremy: So you started to experience that church life and some of that community and be around believers away from home, but home was not any different. There was a time, as you were sharing, toward the end of your senior year of high school when a lot of things started to complicate or pile up, so what happened and how did you respond to that?

Marie: During my senior year of high school, things at home kind of intensified more than they ever had before, and I think part of that was the stress for my dad of me preparing to leave for college. It became a situation where every time I was home I just heard, "you're not good enough, you're not smart enough, you are making my life difficult, I can't wait for you to go away to college, I'm looking forward to you leaving..." All of those negative thoughts directed toward me. That's all I heard at home. I really didn't get a break from that during my senior year. If I wasn't at home, I was at church. I was with my Christian friends, but they were all going through things individually: different sins, different struggles, and different seasons of darkness in their own lives. I just felt at this point that everywhere I turned it was dark. I couldn't see hope; I couldn't see any light. No matter where I was, I couldn't escape it. I just got very overwhelmed; I didn't know how to process this. I didn't feel like I had anybody to talk to because everybody in my church family was dealing with things. I didn't have anyone at home to talk to, so my outlet, my way to release all of what I was feeling was I began cutting myself and other ways of just harming myself. I always made sure to hide it. I would cut myself places where I could cover it with clothes. I didn't want anybody to know anything was going on. That just seemed like some way to release this tension I was feeling inside, but also for the first time I felt that I got to control what was hurting me. It wasn't other people hurting me; I got to decide what was causing that pain in my life. That went on through my senior year, and I just lead into this deeper depression.

Pastor Jeremy: How did that affect your relationship with God? You were a believer at this point but obviously there were going to be some complications in that relationship, and not only that but your relationship with fellow Christians as well.

Marie: During that time I had kind of essentially cut off my relationship with the Lord. I knew that He knew this about me and so I thought, "Well there's no way He can still love me; I've done too much damage. Surely He has turned His back on me." I stopped reading my Bible. I stopped praying because I thought, "What's the point? I mean, surely God has given up on me at this point." I still went to church. I was at every event because I didn't want anyone to think anything was wrong. I knew if I started missing church people would wonder what was going on. So, I was just at church every Sunday; I was at every event. I just made sure all of my relationships were surface-level. I didn't want to talk about what was going on. I tried to be there for other people that I felt like were dealing with bigger things than I was, so I just kind of cut those relationships off. I tried to keep it as simple as I could, and I removed myself from true community.

Pastor Jeremy: So, you graduated and you were going to go off to school and that disconnect from Christian community and your relationship with God got easier because you went to a new place. So explain to us what you described it as rock-bottom once you went away to college. How did that manifest itself or culminate?

Marie: When I went to college, I went out of state and I went to a school where I didn't know anybody. It was very easy to just hide. I didn't have to go seek out community. Nobody there knew what I was dealing with. When I went into it I thought that was a good thing; that's what I wanted. I wanted to keep hiding from everybody. But that only proved to deepen my depression and my sense of hopelessness because I was so alone. I wasn't in community with the Lord, and I wasn't in community with other people. When I got to college, my depression intensified. I found myself cutting myself more frequently, but it was more of a "This is all I feel like I deserve. I don't think I deserve better than this." Then I got to a point where I just couldn't see any other way out. The only logical next step for me at the time, the only thing that made sense, was to take my own life. I thought it was going to be the only sure way to end all this pain and this frustration of what I was going through and the shame and the guilt of thinking, "I'm a believer; how can I be struggling with this?" And I was, like, "I just need this to be over." I also thought, "This is going to free everybody around me" because I still had that lie in the back of my head that I was a burden and I was a stress, and their life would be easier if I wasn't here. I had a plan and I had a day picked out. I had written letters to say "Good-bye" to people. I had made a comment to somebody I did know at school. I don't even remember what I said to him, but it made him worried enough that he went to the resident director of my dorm. The next thing I know it's 11 o'clock at night, and my resident director and the counselor of our school is showing up at my dorm room. They pull me out and pull me into their office. I was there for a few hours that night. I don't think I said a single word. That was the first time I was kind of faced with everything I'd been trying to hide for so long was out in front of me, and I was so guilty and I felt so ashamed. In that moment they reminded me of the Gospel, and they reminded me that my salvation was secure because of what Christ did... not because of what I've done or haven't done. They told me they loved me, even though they had just found out the worst things about me. They prayed for me. That journey to healing started at that moment. For the first time in about a year I felt like, "Okay, maybe the Lord hadn't turned His back on me; maybe He was there and maybe there was hope for me." So from there that process to healing began for me.

Pastor Jeremy: What are some of the keys you've found to walking in that freedom, to continue that victorious living that Christ has secured for you?

Marie: For me, this period of darkness didn't happen overnight. It wasn't one big event and all of a sudden I found myself depressed and hopeless. It was the fact that I bought into a lot of little lies over many years. I let the enemy creep in and just take one step away from the Lord each day. I realized, coming out of this, that I couldn't fight the lies of the enemy because I wasn't submitting to truth. I wasn't in truth. I wasn't recognizing what He was telling me and using Scripture to fight against it. So I realized in that moment that the only way to overcome this was to walk in the Spirit, to let the Spirit lead me, to let the Spirit give me the strength to fight that and to know the truth of God's Word and to use that to fight against those attacks. I also realized that I couldn't fight this alone, that the Christian life was not meant to be done alone, and that I needed other people. I needed believers to rally around me and to support me and to pray for me and to point me to truth when my flesh was tempted to believe the lies of the enemy.

Pastor Jeremy: Awesome. Well, would you tell someone today, if there's someone sitting here or maybe listening to this later, who struggles with those things... depression or cutting or self-harm... and just not seeing themselves as Christ sees them, what would you tell them?

Marie: Well, the first thing I would say to anybody walking through anything like this is that your worth and your value comes from who you are in Christ not from what other people tell you your worth is. It took me a long time to learn that; I'm still learning that. But because Christ says you're worth it, you're worth it. The Word is true when it says, "God will never leave us or forsake us." He never left me; He pursued me relentlessly during that year, even though I tried to shut off my relationship with Him. He didn't give up on me. He's not going to give up on you; I mean, He's a faithful God, so you have to just know those truths that we are not perfect but God is and His grace is bigger than any of our sin. It's bigger than any of the darkness we face, and it can cover even the most shameful things about ourselves. You just have to know that and rest in the truth of the Gospel to be able to fight these things. You have to engage with other believers; you need community, you need support, and you need to walk alongside of other believers openly and honestly if you're going to have success in overcoming these things. There is hope and there is victory in Christ. I didn't think it was possible, and now I can't imagine a life like I had back then. There is freedom, there is joy and peace and hope on the other side of this. It's only through Christ that those things are possible. (Clapping)

Pastor Jeremy: Wait for it... Go ahead.

Marie: My name is Marie Evans and this is my "Freedom Story."

Pastor Jeremy: Thanks, Marie.

I think I can fight back the tears this hour. I have known Marie for a long time, and I got to witness her walk through that in that time of darkness. All glory to God to see where she was then and where she is now, to think back to when she was in a place where she thought, "It can't get any better, and there is no solution or end to this." And to know that today she looks back on that in freedom and victory and says, "I can't even believe that I was in that place." If you don't know Marie, she now volunteers in our student ministry and ministers to girls just like her who are going through those things. God has used that testimony, and I believe that He will use today's testimony to minister to them and to share those truths. So what the enemy meant for evil in destroying Marie, God meant for good. (Clapping) So, we praise Him; we praise Him for that. Let's pray before we jump into the Word here.

"God, thank You for the testimony that we've heard through Marie and your work and ministry in her life, God, to bring victory and light into the darkest places. God, we celebrate that You are a God that does that; that You bring victory over darkness, and You reconcile and You redeem. God, we thank You and praise You for making things new. So I just pray that, as we've heard Your Word through testimony and are about to open the Word of God, that You would use both mightily to draw us to You, God, to just shine light on those dark places in our hearts and minds. I ask, God, that your Spirit would just communicate your Truth to us. We ask these things in the name of Jesus. Amen."

We are in a series called "Freedom Story," going through the Book of Galatians. We are in chapter 5 so we're just about done with this series with Galatians. Today we are going to finish out chapter 5, starting in verse 16... we're almost going to finish it out. I'm going to leave that very last verse and not read that one. So, if Pastor Steve comes back and brings it in next week, then awesome. If not, you have a little personal devotional to devote yourself to. We're in Galatians chapter 5, starting in verse 16. Paul says, *"But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit."*

The first thing that we want to acknowledge or realize that Paul is telling us here, not in verse 16 but in verses 17 through 18, is that the struggle is real. For those who are in Christ, and he writes more extensively about this in Romans chapter 7, but he says that the Spirit desires things and the flesh desires things and they are contrary to each other. Because they desire these things that are against each other, we end up doing the things we don't want to do, or we are kept from doing the things we do want to do. It's almost a tongue-twister in Romans 7 when he says, *"The things that I want to do I don't do, and the things that I don't want to do I do, as I find this law within me that I end up doing the things that I hate and not doing the things that I love."* He doesn't understand it, but he's trying to just point out to this reality that if you are "in Christ" you are indwelt and sealed by the Holy Spirit of God, and that Spirit desires to please the Lord. It desires to do things in obedience to the will of the Father. And yet there is a remnant of our flesh still within us. There is no other explanation for it because once we get saved we don't become perfect. Right? We don't stop sinning completely... no. What we've been looking at these last several weeks is that we're free to obey God and submit to the Holy Spirit and to the will of the Father and do things that please Him in faith. We still have the ability to sin; we still have the ability to disobey. The temptation and desire to sin and disobey are coming from this thing called "the flesh"... this remnant of the flesh within us. Yet we read that we've been crucified with Christ, and the old man is gone and the flesh has been crucified. We just saw that in this passage as well. So the only way to reconcile these two things that we see working in us is that that flesh, that sinful nature, has been nailed to the cross and crucified. The death sentence has been passed down, and the fatal blow has been dealt, and yet the last breath has not been drawn. So that flesh, that sinful nature that's within us, that's nailed to the cross and bleeding out, that will be done away with... if you are in Christ, He will remove that completely, perfect you in glory for eternity; it is still gasping for breath and is still desiring and tempting and longing to do things that are disobedient to the Father. So that's why, as believers, we still find this struggle within us. That's Marie's testimony. You

heard she started off with a salvation experience when she was eight years old, and yet ten years later she found this darkness and believing these lies and giving in to them. I believe she was secure in the Spirit, sealed in the Spirit for all eternity, and her salvation was not hanging in the balance, and yet she just was walking in disobedience. Why? ... Because the flesh within her was desiring disobedience. The flesh that was in her was desiring against the desires of the Spirit which was desiring obedience to please the Father. So we have to start off with the reality that that's true for us, as believers. That's why we are tempted. That's why we think, "Well, wait a second; I'm a Christian now. Why this temptation? Why do I still do bad things? Why the sin?" ... Because of that pesky sin nature, that flesh, that "old way" is clinging to life and desiring against the things of the Spirit. So that's why Paul is going to say, "Listen; this thing is battling within you. It's raging on and on." Again, not because your eternity hangs in the balance but just because that's what the sinful nature does. It desires to sin; it desires to disobey, so we have this battle raging on. Paul is going to say, "Listen; this battle is going to continue, and so what you need to do to find victory and to walk in freedom is to submit to the Spirit and to walk by the Spirit... then you'll find freedom over the flesh. You won't gratify the desires of the flesh.

So while the struggle is real, it's not doomed. As you see, in verse 18, *"But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law."* Before we are in Christ, before we're dwelt by the Holy Spirit, all we can do is disobey. All we can do is not pleasing to God. But Paul says, "Listen, if you're alive in the Spirit, you're not under that law; that only leads to death. You're under the grace of Christ. You're covered by the blood of Jesus." Again, your eternity is secure if you're alive in the Spirit. So while there is a battle, while there is a struggle, and while it frustrates and it rages within us, eternity is secure and victory is secure and we can walk in that freedom. He reminds us that, that it's in the Spirit and if we'll walk by the Spirit.

It goes on to describe what those two lives look like, what the evidence is, in verses 19 through 23: The works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit. I'm not going to go through this exhaustive list, but I just want to give a "big picture" look at what's happening here. I think it's interesting some of the things that Paul points out. He has this list of the works of the flesh which are evident, he says; the working of them, the product is evident within us. It's not all outward; if there's envy and jealousy, those are not always outward works. So Paul is trying to tell us that these desires manifest themselves within and outside of us, but they're evident to us, whether they're external or not. He has this big list and then he says, "and things like these." I always think it's funny when Paul does that. There are other places where he has a big long list and he'll say, "... and other such things" or "things like these." So I just think it's funny that he either just got tired of listing them or knew it wasn't an exhaustive list, and just to cover his bases he said, "so that's not all but..." It's interesting to take a look at some of the things that he does list here... "and the works of the flesh" and some of the areas of our life that he emphasizes.

The first three... *"sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality..."* all address the arena of sex in our lives. If you want to understand what he's talking about there: *"Sexual immorality"* is sex outside of marriage; *"Impurity"* was relating more to unnatural sexual relations; *"Sensuality"* is an obsessive over-abundance in the wrong way to pursue sex. That's kind of a vague definition, but what I think he's trying to get at is that any pursuit of sex outside of what God has prescribed for sex is outside of the will of God, and the works of the flesh pursue those things.

The next two... *"Idolatry and sorcery."* It affects our worship and our idea of worship; a false god worshipped in a false way, or sorcery where we're trying to produce the supernatural effects of God by short-circuiting the system and not waiting on God to work in our lives but to produce the effects of God as if we are God, so our worship is affected and perverted by the works of the flesh.

"Enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy..." All about our relationships with other people and how we relate to them and how we interact with them, and so socially how we interact is affected by the works of the flesh, desiring for us to live out those things in a way contrary to what God would have us to live.

The last two are actually about alcohol... *"drunkenness and orgies..."* It's not sexual orgies but, again, an overabundant, excessive, totally indulging inappropriately in the use of alcohol, a total rager, and then drunkenness... under the influence of alcohol inappropriately.

So you can see some of these areas where God has given something good and put in us desires to use those things according to what He has given them to us for and how the flesh works to deteriorate and destroy and tear apart those things that God has given to us for good. And then he says, "...and things like these." So you know that there are things in your life that aren't on that list where you say, "That's a work of the flesh because God has written a conscience into all of our hearts to know right from wrong, and so when we give in to the flesh we know those things. I think that's what Paul means when he says, "They are evident to us."

But on the other hand, "The fruit of the Spirit is..." It's always kind of interesting. Right? There's a list of nine things there, but it says, "The fruit is..." not "The fruits are..." I think what he's trying to say is that the Spirit manifests these characteristics. The Spirit produces all of these in us. That's really important to remember when we think maybe that we are walking or producing some kind of fruit of the Spirit, like we're really good at being patient and yet we don't have a lot of kindness in us. (Those usually kind of go hand-in-hand, so it might be a bad example.) If you look at that list of nine and think, "Well, I have a zero on this one, but I have like a 30 on this one, so I'm doing okay." I think we need to reexamine that because the Spirit produces all of those. You may not have them all equally, but you will have all of them; they will all be present if it's truly the work of the Spirit in your life. Because, guess what? God has naturally made some of us more patient than others and made some of us more gentle than others, but that's just a natural thing that He's put in us. When we really start to rely on the supernatural ability of the Spirit within us, we start to see these things, and we see all of them at some point. Sometimes they might take longer to grow and to ripen in us, but they will all be there because that's what the Spirit does. Right? The Spirit always has all the characteristics of the Spirit, and so when He bears fruit in our lives we see them.

I think it's interesting... a few things of why he would go with fruit. Why compare it to fruit? For one, if you have a tree that is a certain type of tree, it will produce that type of fruit. Right? So, it's purposed to do that. It is inevitable, if the setting is correct, the environment is right, then that fruit will come forth. I think Paul is trying to tell us that if the Spirit indwells you, then the fruit of the Spirit is inevitable in your life. Another characteristic of fruit is that it is gradual; it takes some cultivating. I think Paul is trying to tell us if the fruit of the Spirit is going to show up in your life, it's not going to be just instantaneous all the time. It might be a process. It might take some cultivating for us to just provide the right environment that is conducive for the Spirit to bear fruit. The last one that I think is the most crucial is that life in fruit comes from the source within the branch. It's not just us who bear the fruit. We don't put life into that fruit. If you separate the fruit from the tree, the life no longer is going into it. Right? So the source of life comes from within; it's internal. It's the Spirit which puts real life into the fruit of the Spirit, so if we see these characteristics apart from the Spirit, they are not lasting; there is no power in them. They are not truly being brought about by the true source of life which is the Spirit within us. If you think about this, this picture will make it sound really ludicrous, but I think this is what we do often. It's almost as if you have a tree in your backyard and you've heard that it's an apple tree, and if there's no apples on it, then you say, "Well, this tree is going to have

apples on it." So you go and buy some apples, you take them out there with nails and you just start nailing them into the tree and just all over the trunk and all over the branches... (Laughter) ... and then you stand back and you go, "Yeah... apples on that tree! How do you like them apples?" Right? (Laughter) What's going to happen? They're going to be disgusting; there is no life flowing into them. They're basically dead works; they're dead fruit at this point because of what you've done, and yet we often try to reverse-engineer the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. We try to conjure up love and patience and gentleness and self-control and all these kind of things of our own efforts. Have you ever found yourself being like (with a strained voice), "I'm being very patient right now." (Laughter) "I'm exercising great self-control..." (growling) ... "You're lucky I'm so gentle this morning." We try to put the fruit of the Spirit on our lives without the life-giving fruit of the Spirit, the characteristics of the Spirit producing them in us. That obviously was a little over-the-top, but we might be able to fake it for a little bit, but you know that there's no lasting life... no lasting product in fruit when we do it that way.

Another example that I thought of... I don't know if this will resonate with you guys or not, but in the nine o'clock service we have an interpreter who does sign language, and it made me think of the Mandela interpreter who got in a lot of trouble because he wasn't using correct sign language. He had some stories or some reasons that he gave as to why but said that he was really trained. Anyway, the only way to really identify that he didn't know what he was doing was to know sign language. To anybody who doesn't know sign language, you might look at him and think, "Oh, interesting; I didn't know that was the sign for that." But someone who knows sign language looked at him and thought, "He's making that up. He's just making up motions and just doing things." Eventually that would be so much pressure because I'd start to repeat motions and then be like, "Wait a second.... I thought that was tree and now you're saying it's fountain. What's going on?" They're very similar in sign language.... No. (Laughter) I think we do that with the work of the Spirit in our lives where we try to fake it until we make it. You know? We think that "I can act patient and I can kind of exhibit some self-control in front of the right people, or I can, on the outside, make it look like I'm kind and gentle and loving, but in my heart is just anger and rage and there's really no love at all." So I think when Paul says, "The fruit of the Spirit" he is saying, "Listen; you're not creating this in your life; you're bearing this fruit." Meaning we're just kind of the branch that it hangs on. But the life that produces it, the truth, the essence of it, the sweetness of that fruit is from the Holy Spirit. So if we are dwelt by the Holy Spirit, then He produces that fruit in us. We have to walk by the Spirit to see that fruit produced in us instead of reverse-engineering the works of God in our lives. That's not the true works of God. That's not the true character of Christ.

So why is victory possible? We talked about how we can find victory. It's by walking in the Spirit and we know the effects or the produce of walking in the Spirit is the fruit of the Spirit. We see the character of Christ manifest in us. Awesome! How do we do that? How do we get there? If we're not producing the fruit and the Spirit is, how do we cultivate it? How do we make the environment right so that the Spirit works in us? I think Paul addresses that for us, in verses 24 and 25 he says, *"...those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires."* Okay; we already covered that. *"If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit."* It's a good reminder but I think it's kind of fleshed out a little more in Romans. They just go really well together, Roman and Galatians. In Romans 7, when Paul is talking about this battle between the flesh and the Spirit within us, he also talks about fruit. He's going to talk about how the fruit is something maybe we didn't really think we were pursuing which ends up being the law of God. More on that in a minute. But if he says, "Our flesh has been crucified and we've been crucified with Christ," it's the truth that we need to walk in.

In Romans 6, Paul talks about that... about how we have been crucified with Christ and raised to walk in the newness of life. He builds his case that this is what you know to be true as a believer. This is what spiritual reality is for you. Here's the case, the truth, and the evidence. So then his next encouragement, *"Because you know this is to consider yourself dead to sin, to reckon those things dead."* Remember how I said our flesh, our sin nature, was crucified... it was nailed to the cross but it hasn't breathed its last?

The true key to victory is walking in the truth that we know it will breathe it's last; the death sentence has been dealt. The final blow has occurred; it just hasn't breathed or bled out. When Paul writes in Romans 6:11, *"Consider yourselves... reckon yourselves dead to sin and alive to God,"* that's the key to walking in freedom; that's the key to walking by the Spirit. It is to realize and know, *"My flesh has been crucified. I'm not bound by that law that says, 'You can only disobey and do things that are displeasing to God.'* I have now been set free to be obedient to the Spirit. I've been set free to live a life of faith and a life of freedom and a life of victory that pleases God. All I have to do is reckon or consider myself dead to those things because, in fact, I am dead to those things." If the victory has been secured, walk like it's been secured. You know that it is true if you're reminded of it. Marie testified to that. She was a believer; she had been set free. She was no longer under the law but under grace, and her eternity was secured. She was sealed by the Spirit, and yet she wasn't walking in victory because she wasn't walking as if her old self was nailed to the cross. She wasn't walking as if it was about to die and bleed out and the victory was secure: *"To reckon or consider ourselves dead to sin and alive to God."* ...The key to walking in victory.

Now I mentioned that victory not only lies in reckoning or considering ourselves dead to sin and alive to Christ, but it also rests in keeping in step with the Spirit, as Paul says in verse 25: *"If we live by the Spirit..."* If you are indwelt by the Spirit, if you have new life by the Spirit through faith in Christ, *"...keep in step."* Your translation might say "walk," like it did at the beginning of the passage, but it's not the same term here. This term "keep in step" or "walk" here means "to get in line, to line up with and walk according to the line laid out by the Holy Spirit." So this freedom that we celebrate, this freedom to please God... what is pleasing to God? ...Doing His will. How do we know how to do His will? Well, He's given us... aw man, the Law. Wait a second... I thought we were set free from the Law. I thought we don't have to do that anymore. We couldn't get there. We're not saved by works. We are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. That is true. We're not saved by OUR works, but we are saved by the work of Jesus Christ.

So you say, "What happened to this Law?" Again, in Romans, Paul talks about this. He says, "Is the Law bad?" "No, it's not. If God gave the Law and God is good then His Law is good. His standard never changed. It makes more sense to me because sometimes we think, "Wait a second... grace, grace... it's free." It doesn't make sense, this free gift. If God has this standard, who met that standard? Jesus Christ did. Jesus did the work. Jesus lived in full obedience to the Law in the form of a man because a man had to be obedient to the Law to earn righteousness for men. So when we say that the righteousness of Christ is placed on us, and we are able to walk in freedom, guess what we're able to walk in and do now? Obedience to the Law. Wait a second! I thought we escaped that. I thought we were fleeing from that. We're not earning salvation through this obedience; we're just living a life that pleases the Father. If the Spirit indwells us and the Spirit desires the things of God, what do you think the Spirit desires to do? To obey the Law of the Father. So if you were going to walk in step and submit and follow and be led by the Spirit, guess what ends up happening? You walk in obedience to the Law of God. That's why Paul says right before this, *"Don't use your freedom as a licence to sin more and just try to heap more grace upon yourself. You have been set free for freedom. You are now able to please God. You are able to do the things you couldn't before Christ."* Without faith it's impossible to please God. So if we're in the Spirit and submitting to Him and He's producing fruit in our lives which is the character of Christ which is obedience

to the Law, we're now able to please the Father. So, again, we don't walk in that truth and that freedom as a way of "I'm trying to earn my salvation..." By no means! Christ earned your salvation. Christ did the work. Grace through faith, that's how salvation comes to us. What do you think the faith is in? It's in the finished work of Jesus. If He didn't do the work, what are we putting faith in? The free gift... yeah it's a free gift but it cost somebody something. Somebody did the work and His name is Jesus Christ. So when we walk in freedom and we surrender to the Spirit... I hope it doesn't pain you to hear that what that ends up being is obedience to the Law that God has given us. Because guess what? If the Spirit is alive in you... In Romans 7:22, Paul says, "I delight in the Law of God in my inner being." Apart from Christ, our inner being does not delight in obedience to the Father. But when Paul says this war waging within me that the things I want to do and the things I don't want to do and the Spirit and the flesh... The things He wants to do in Christ, that new creation, the desire of the Spirit, is obedience to the Law of God. So when Paul writes here in verse 17, "...the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do." He doesn't mean that they are keeping you from your dreams and your hopes and your goals and your security and your stability and your health and your prosperity. That's not what he means when he says, "They keep you from those things." He means, "They keep you from obedience to the Law of God," because that's what our innermost being wants to do if we are in Christ. It wants to obey the will of the Father, so that should be a desire within you. That's evidence of the Holy Spirit within you. If you deal with this... "I don't know if I'm really a Christian because sometimes I'm going through these motions of doing what's right, and I enjoy the effects of that." In your heart of hearts, do you delight in the Law of the Lord so that it's a struggle, it hurts you to think, "Aw, there's this raging war within me between my flesh and the Spirit." It's the Spirit that desires to do the will of the Father. It desires to be obedient to the Law of God. That's why Paul is able to say, "I delight in the Law of the Lord." That should be the struggle. Right? Not just "Man, I'm not consistent" and that's the struggle. That's not what Paul is saying. He is saying that the struggle is that deep down I want to obey the Father, but I find myself disobeying the Father because I give in to the flesh and the desires of the flesh. The key that he has found is to surrender to the Spirit, to walk in the freedom, to realize, "Look; the winner has been decided here. I need to consider and reckon my flesh, crucified and dead, and walk on the winning side." The result of that is a life that pleases God. It's a life of obedience to the will of the Father. It is pretty amazing.

So I hope it doesn't upset you to hear that. "I like my freedom; I like my freedom from the Law. I don't like the Law." That is not where that should lead you. If you like your freedom and you like your freedom in Christ it's because you've been freed to obey the Law of God and the Law that He has set before us. So then Paul says, "The Spirit has laid down a line; keep in step with that." That's the key to denying the flesh and the desires of the flesh that war against the Spirit of God within us.

So there are a couple of things to point out here, as we think about where we line up in relationship to some of these truths. Paul keeps saying, "If we are alive by the Spirit, let's walk by the Spirit." So the first question to ask yourself is, "Am I alive by the Spirit? Have I ever trusted in Christ by faith for salvation?" Or have you been trying to reverse-engineer your way to heaven by saying, "Okay, I see what the end product looks like and it's this moral, clean-cut... this is the life that God wants, and so I've changed my behavior and now I fit in and now I'm acceptable to God." That's false. You come to Christ by faith, knowing that you bring nothing into the equation, just throwing yourself on His mercy and grace. He makes you new. He brings new life, only by the power of the Spirit. At that point, the Spirit dwells within you. Then you're alive by the Spirit, and now you can be led by the Spirit and you can walk in the Spirit.

So maybe today you realize, "I've never been alive by the Spirit and never been made new. I've never trusted in Christ for salvation." Today can be the day of salvation for you. Maybe you're a believer in a similar boat to Marie, where you know "my eternity is secure. Some of the darkness and struggles I've dealt with have caused me to wonder about that, but I know that I have placed faith in Christ and that He alone is my means of salvation and His work not my works," and yet you've now started to live according to the flesh instead of the Spirit. What the Bible says is sometimes a dirty word: "Repent of that." The Bible calls us to repent of things. That means that we agree with God that what we have done is wrong and we turn to Him. Our minds and hearts are changed; the way we think is different. That's an attitude of repentance. That's what Christians do. We don't get saved again. Right? You think, "Well, I don't know. These people need Jesus. I don't need Jesus. What do I need to get right?" It's called repentance. We don't talk about it much. That's what we need. We need to cry out to God, confessing that we have strayed, and we need to step back in line with the Spirit of God, surrendering to His work and His will in our life.

We're going to have a time to respond. The band is going to play, and we will have people up here that you can come and talk to. You can always pray right where you are. You can always fill out on the response tab that you have questions or want someone to call you and contact you about something that you've heard today, whether through Marie's testimony or through the Word of God. We will followup with those and see how we can contact you. We want to allow you a time to deal with the truth of God. We pray that the Spirit works on your heart and mind in such a way that you interact and you experience what God has for you this morning. Let's pray.

"God, thank You for the Word of Christ. Thank you for the powerful testimony of Marie's victory and freedom... God, how you rescued her from a dark, dark time in her life... God, how you used your church to intervene and believers to speak truth into her life, to remind her of the Gospel and the spiritual reality of where her eternity was secure and where her victory was assured. God, I pray this morning that those who are here would respond to your Truth, whether that's someone who has never trusted by faith in Christ for salvation... God, that You would quicken their heart and draw them to Yourself. Convince and convict their heart and mind of the need for You and that You have presented the solution, the answer, in the person of Jesus Christ. God, for those who are saved and whose eternity is already sure and secure... God, remind us of Your great Gospel truth and the freedom that You have laid before us to walk in... God, that we would step back in line with the Spirit, to be led by Him like the wind that pushes the sails of a ship... That we would cultivate the fruit of the Spirit in our lives and not try to produce it or fake it but, God, just to allow You to work as our flesh is minimized, as we reckon and consider it dead and ourselves dead to sin but alive to You. God, show us how to walk in that truth. I pray, God, that You would just work and move in our hearts. We ask these things in the name of Jesus. Amen."