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## Reflection questions

*“What is waiting inside of you? Do you find yourself becoming more hopeful or increasingly frustrated? What are you holding onto freely which might be diminishing your freedom?”*

*“What are some of the hopeful opportunities that are presently before you? If it’s true that God longs for us to experience more than we can “ask or think” (Ephesians 3:20), what am I asking for? How is my present way of thinking effecting my experience of freedom?”*

*“What in your life do you consider loss? What do you consider gain? How do you know? What if loss meant gain? What if releasing something meant renewed freedom to embrace Christ and be embraced by him?” (Philippians 3)*

*“If you are free to forgive, why are you still keeping the list? If you are freely loved, why are you so demanding? If you are free from condemnation, why are you so afraid to fail?”*

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## Teaching notes

**“The Truman Show”**: Jim Carrey plays Truman Burbank, an orphan raised by a corporation inside a simulated television show. His entire life has taken place within a giant dome in Hollywood (“Seahaven”) where everything is a “construct”: relationships, circumstances--- all orchestrated to create a reality that wasn’t real.

Truman eventually becomes suspicious about his life. He longs for a life that he is not experiencing but that is somehow beckoning him. The producer creates an artificial storm which Truman manages to survive. He continues to sail until his boat punctures the horizon--- the wall of the dome. Exploring the wall, he finds a set of stairs leading to an exit door.

The author is betting on the fact that Truman, when presented with the option, would opt for this pseudo-freedom (comfortable, predictable, manageable) versus the anxiety of the unknown. The scene ends with a signature comment and Truman kicking open the door to a whole new world.

This scene in Deuteronomy 8 is the children of Israel standing at the brink of a new world. Deuteronomy 8:2 is this telling little passage which is easily overlooked: *“Normally, it takes only eleven days to travel from Mount Sinai to Kadesh-barnea, but forty years after the Israelites left Egypt...”*

It took forty years for the children to get over a mountain pass and into the land promised to them.

They were a wandering people at the borders of freedom. Intrigued, but not convinced. Curious, but not committed. Optimistic, but full of fear. Comfortable, but miserable. Free, but enslaved. A people who were Israelites by birth, but whose lives had been shaped by an Egyptian culture.

As much as we try to suppress this innate God-longing, like a beach ball shoved under the water, it keeps resurfacing at the first lapse in resistance.

**Our journey has always been offered to us within the imagery of this movement from bondage to liberty; from slavery to freedom. What becomes apparent is that our struggle is not always in the “breaking free”, but in “living freely.”**

Freedom is always a movement out of something old and dysfunctional and strangely comfortable, to what is new and healing and risky and liberating [from \_\_\_\_\_ (insert the addiction du jour) to restoration: shame to worth, addiction to sobriety, from self-determination to trust]

**God will always remain limited in his capacity to restore us as we continue to make room in our lives for that which proves to be ‘self-destructive’.**

There is a conditionality to freedom. It is always an “if/then” proposition. “If you... but if you...”. Freedom, as a position, is always secured for us in Christ (Galatians 5:1), but living freely is not always inevitable.

God seems to consistently awaken within us these desires and then allow for or lead us into places and situations where our hearts are put to the test. How will we attempt to satisfy those desires?

“live, increase, enter, possess”... these are all ‘expansive’ words which underscore God’s intention to broaden our experience of his goodness--- our experience of life. He desires that we flourish.

**Whatever God is stirring in your soul must become more compelling than the comfort of your present dysfunctionality.**

Here’s how he often seems to accomplish this: he must first create the frustration and dissatisfaction and then attempt to lead us toward himself for restoration.

There are so many “paradoxes” associated with freedom:

- No matter what the present conditions, the freedom we desire seems to always be accessible, but just out of our reach (next car, job, relationship, city).
- You can be free and assume that you are in bondage, and you can actually be in bondage and be convinced that you are free.
- We speak of freedom as ‘life without restraint’; the Bible speaks of freedom as ‘life constrained by love’.

Casting off restraint sounds like a really good idea until you realize the consequences of living in such an environment [e.g. oppressive regimes overthrowing].

If left to ourselves, we will actually create the very circumstances which enslave us. “Don’t use your freedom as an excuse to do whatever you want to do and destroy your freedom...” Galatians 5:13

Deuteronomy is preparation for the complexities of living freely. Moses says we've got some choices to make; we have some allegiances to affirm before we can say we "*know freedom*". In this passage, we also encounter some **enemies of living freely...**

**Revisionism:** re-writing the story in order to put a more favorable spin on our infidelity.

As we re-write our stories, we're responsible for our own recovery. Success is a reward for all of our own ingenuity and self-determination. In that revision, we have no one else to thank but ourselves. We forgot.

We want tidy outcomes and happy endings, but they are infrequent in the Story. Instead, we find God, present with his people in their pain, in their waywardness, convicting and convincing, compelling them toward a better vision. "...400 years your descendants will be enslaved, but in the end, they will come away with great wealth..." (Genesis 15:13).

We're tempted to edit out all of the painful episodes, especially the ones that are self-inflicted. We photo-shop and airbrush our lives at our own discretion. God so artfully tells our story in a way that incorporates our suffering into his restoration. Adversity is not edited out, but grace is woven in!

We are reminded, early and often that that bondage is not a weakness that we overcome, but a condition from which we must be saved. It always begins with a 'cry', and in this instance, results in God's compassionate and liberating movement toward them [*"I have seen the oppression, I have heard their cries... and I have come down to rescue them."* Exodus 3:7-8]

**Victimization:** with the possibilities of the new life laid out before them, with all of its hopes and uncertainties, the Israelites would find plenty of opportunity for rehearsing all of the reasons that "*it could never happen for them*".

Victimization strips us of our ability to live well because it is forever projecting the responsibility/blame for our circumstances on someone else. Consequently, we not only have to deal with all that was taken from us, but all that we forfeit through our self-imposed helplessness. "Owning it", living free of other's damaging responses (not ignoring or excusing it), prevents us from feeling of powerless or hopeless.

**Entitlement:** forgetting that what we are experiencing is a result of the freedom and fidelity of God and not something that we earned/merited.

Canaan would now provide everything that they were once dependent upon God for in the desert. No more hitting the rocks with a stick to get a glass of water. No more manna, but "*Jimmy John's*" at our discretion.

Historically, we haven't manage blessing well. The danger of success is not only in pride and arrogance, but in the ways that our capacity for trust and obedience are jeopardized once we realize some measure of success.

**Independence:** to acknowledge my dependency is to be free, in the broadest sense.

In context, the God who creates us to need him is the same God who desires to “fill us”, not “deplete us”. Who anticipates an overflowing and abundant experience of himself and of life. Therefore, I am able to work and steward what God has entrusted to me, but my efforts are free of the panicked-striving associated with independence.

### **Don't let your sin be wasted on you.**

We fail to learn the lessons that sin was meant to teach us and when this happens, the warnings of the Bible become explanations.

With all of the “props” kicked out from underneath us, without the illusion of control or the sense that we are managing our own rescue, we are finally free to choose God. We feel powerless: therein lies our strength. It provides us with the most authentic opportunity to act in “faith”.

### **Sometimes the greater tragedy is not the sins that we commit, but the life that we fail to live.**

We assume that the pinnacle of independence is found in the declaration, “*I don't need you!*” To the contrary, authentic freedom requires an awareness of our insufficiency and need for the other.

### **Know that with love, our freedoms become limitless.**

“...use your freedom to serve others out of love” Galatians 5:13

If you attempt to establish your identity by demeaning others, that's not freedom. If you leverage others and abuse your authority to achieve your own goals and success, that's not freedom. If you hoard your blessings while others suffer without, that's not freedom.

True freedom is found in “us for the sake of others”.

### **“I'm free!”... “Free to what?”**

... to be the “beloved of God”, even when others reject or hurt you.

... to be content even when you're barely making it financially.

... to be secure in your God-identity, even when people demand that you perform.

... to be joyful even when people disappoint you.

... to be gracious even when others judge you.

... to go the extra mile, to keep your promise when it's easier to excuse your failure, to give the shirt, to not be satisfied with simply meeting the “*daily-God-requirements*”. Living freely!