

COMPLETELY FREE

by David Miller and Carol Duerksen

KEY VERSE:

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. (Romans 8:1)

FAITH STORY:

Romans 8:1–11, John 3:17–20

FAITH FOCUS:

No matter how hard we try, we can't free ourselves of the sin in our lives. We may try to keep the law perfectly, but because we are human (in the flesh), we will fail. Only Jesus Christ living in us can free us from the condemnation of sin and death.

SESSION GOAL:

To help students understand the freedom from condemnation that persons who accept Jesus will receive.

SESSION OBJECTIVES:

By the end of this session, the students will:

- Think of examples of when they feel burdened by guilt and sin
- Hear that Jesus Christ has set us free of our sin and guilt

MATERIALS NEEDED AND ADVANCE PREPARATION:

- 1 Bibles for each student
- 2 TV & DVD player
- 3 Movie, "Les Miserables" cued to final scene with Jean Valjean and Inspector Javert
- 4 CD player
- 5 The Big Daddy Weave CD entitled "Fields of Grace," cued to song #10 – "Prelude"
- 6 Paper and pens for each student
- 7 Dictionary
- 8 Read Romans 8:1–11 and John 3:17–20 prior to class
- 9 Colorful construction paper and markers
- 10 A candle and lighter
- 11 Helium balloons –one more student
- 12 If you have time, watch the entire movie "Les Miserables"

SESSION OUTLINE

FOCUS: (7–10 minutes)

Give the following overview of the movie “Les Miserable”:

Set during the French Revolution, this film tells the story of Jean Valjean, whose theft of a loaf of bread condemns him to an unjust prison sentence and subsequent life on the run. Valjean, now an ex-convict, has recently been released from prison. An act of forgiveness and generosity on the part of a compassionate Roman Catholic Bishop turns the embittered Valjean around, changing the course of his life forever. Valjean becomes the mayor of a small town (Vigau) and as a caring businessman he struggles to forget the past. He manages to redeem his soul by becoming benevolent—giving manual and financial help to the weak, sick and poor.

After nine years, Valjean is horrified to discover that Javert – a former guard of the Quarries of Toulon, where he served almost 20 years – has arrived to be the head of Vigau’s police force. The icy chief inspector Javert, the man who tries “to live his life without breaking a single rule” is determined that Valjean has not changed and will always be a criminal. The film culminates in a final confrontation between the two in which Valjean is finally set free.

Show the movie clip.

CONNECT: (7–10 minutes)

Talk about the scene and discuss these questions:

- Why couldn’t Javert just leave Valjean alone and let him live his life?
- Why do you think Javert was so obsessed with trying to condemn Valjean, who is now a free man?
- Do you think Javert might have been jealous? Javert was living strictly by the law and was not able to extend grace or forgiveness to Valjean. Do you think Javert might have had something in his past that he tried to free himself of by keeping the law perfectly, but couldn’t?

Ask students to recall the following:

- Is there something wrong you’ve done that your parents, siblings or friends continue to throw in your face? Something they won’t let you forget, even though you’ve said you’re sorry and have changed?
- Or...Have you made someone else who is truly sorry still feel like they are guilty?
- Is there an example in your life where you were truly forgiven but you just don’t feel it and can’t accept it?

Note: If you feel your students are willing to discuss these answers with each other, lead that discussion. If not, ask them to simply think of the example.

Transition statement:

Many times we try and try but it’s just not good enough. We feel that no matter what we do, we’re never going to be free from our guilt or the condemnation of others. Let’s look at what our passage for today says about that dilemma.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE: (10–20 minutes)

Say: *The Bible teaches that, because we are sinners, we are under condemnation. We deserve judgment. But the Bible also teaches that, when we come to Christ, we are forgiven. The guilt of sin is lifted. We are now free. But knowing we are free, and walking in that freedom is difficult. Our primary difficulty is dealing with the old nature—that is the big struggle. The struggle itself causes us to feel condemned.*

Ask someone to read Romans 8:1–11.

Have someone look up the word “condemn” in the dictionary and read aloud the definition. (To pronounce guilty or sentence to punishment: to give reason to convict)

Say: *The word for condemnation in this verse is an interesting one. Not only does it have to do with judgment, it can refer to a piece of land on which there is a prior claim. Sometimes we feel like that. We feel that perhaps the title search was not thorough enough in our lives when we committed ourselves to Jesus. Maybe there is still a lien on our lives.*

Ask: *What is the point that Paul is making here?*

Break into small groups and give each group paper and pens. Ask them to read the Romans 8:1–11 and write down the two points that Paul is making.

Bring the groups together to discuss what they discovered.

Paul is saying that sin cannot claim us because Christ has set us free. The law no longer has any jurisdiction. We are free in Jesus Christ; free from the bondage to sin, free from the law of death. We are set free now to live in a dynamic relationship with Christ. We are free in Christ Jesus. But what does it mean to be in Christ?

To be in Christ means that God now sees us united to His Son Jesus. Because of what Jesus did for us on the cross, we are free from sin’s dominion and adopted into the family of God. We are now children of God. We are His sons and daughters, with all the rights, prerogatives, and privileges inherent in being in that relationship.

Read and discuss the following with the class:

Read John 1:12, “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name.”

- 1** The Apostle Paul is writing this letter to both Jewish and Gentile Christians. Jewish Christians struggled with the role of the law, and Paul struggled with that question as well. (As we seen in Romans 7:7–25) The Jewish people were used to the idea that the law was the only way to live a righteous life, even though no one was ever able to keep it perfectly except Jesus.
- 2** There are two laws mentioned – the law of the Spirit and the law of sin and death. What things could the law not do? (Rom. 8:3; see 7:7–12) It is only by accepting what Jesus has done and continues to do that people can be free from guilt and condemnation.
- 3** Read Romans 3:23 and Romans 6:23. What have we all done? (sinned) What do we all deserve? (condemnation and death).
- 4** Now read John 3:17–20. Does God desire that we be condemned? What do we need to do to escape condemnation—escape the penalty, punishment?

APPLY: (10–15 minutes)

Invite students to choose a piece of construction paper.

Say: *Using this paper, I'd like for you to create or draw a symbol of yourself, and along with it, the one thing you know for sure as a result of studying this passage today. If there isn't anything that you know for sure, that's okay—you may illustrate that as well. You can use markers to draw something, you can tear the paper, fold it—whatever. Just create a symbol of you, and what you know for sure from our study today.*

After students have completed their project, invite them to share it with the group but allow youth to pass if they don't want to share.

RESPOND: (5–10 minutes)

Light the candle, dim the lights, and play the song "Prelude". Invite students to pray silently about their projects and what they represent. **When the song is over, say:** *Here's what we know for sure from our passage today: Christ sets us free from our guilt and condemnation. That is the truth. Whether you believe it or not, whether you feel it or not, it is the truth.*

Ask students to each take a helium balloon and write whatever they want to on it that states their freedom in Christ. If they so desire, they can include a name or phone number in case someone finds the balloon and wants to know more about its message. While they are doing that, cue the CD up to "Completely Free."

Take students outside with their balloons and the CD player. Play "Completely Free" as they let their balloons go. When the song is over, give students this parting blessing from Romans 8:1–2:

"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death."

INSIGHTS FROM SCRIPTURE:

Paul writes in this passage that everyone deserves condemnation, but those who believe in Jesus Christ will not experience it. We have the most incredible privilege of having Christ as our advocate, who removes our condemnation so that God is pleased with us.

We all have two kinds of minds—the spiritual mind and the fleshly mind. Each one will take us to a different end. The mind of the Spirit leads us to life—both when we are alive on earth and when we pass from the earth to eternal life. The mind of the flesh leads to death—both in the consequences we pay for our actions on earth and the punishment of eternity apart from God.

Here is the most amazing part: The same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead dwells within us! The same Spirit who gave life to Jesus gives life to our mortal bodies. No, it doesn't save our bodies from a bodily death, but it does save us from spiritual death. Our souls will live on after our bodies die.

This Spirit of Christ does for us what the law could never do. We are free from the system of the law, and that's not because the law itself is so bad, but because on our own, we can't do it. When we give ourselves to be under the Spirit rather than the law, the Spirit helps us to do what we couldn't do on our own. Grace, not works, had made us completely free!