

# DAY ONE

## PRACTICE

Many people who have abandoned their faith did so because they thought it was too restrictive—often in matters of sexuality. But as we’ve learned, abandoning God does not grant us freedom; true freedom only comes through following God’s will for our lives.

We also know that following God’s plan isn’t always easy. Paul knew this well, which is why he said, “For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Cor. 12:10). At first glance, this may seem like a contradiction. But let’s look at the verse in context.

### READ 2 CORINTHIANS 12:9-10.

*But [the Lord] said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*

Where does our power to do what is right come from?

What does this passage teach you about your own weaknesses and shortcomings?

Paul knew the power of the Christian life comes when we rely on the power of Christ to work through us. God’s grace and power carry us forward.

But letting go of our need to accomplish things our own way isn’t easy—this is why spiritual disciplines are so important. Maybe the term “spiritual disciplines” is unfamiliar to you. These are actions or daily practices that help us grow our relationship with God. Just as freedom comes to a piano player who practices on a regular basis, freedom comes to the Christian who “practices” the spiritual life.

What are the ways some Christians “practice” the spiritual life?

If you get stuck, here are some spiritual disciplines mentioned in Scripture.

- Prayer (Matt. 6:5-6)
- Fasting (Matt. 6:16-18)
- Solitude (Ps. 46:10; Mark 1:35)
- Service (Gal. 5:13-14; 1 Pet. 4:10)
- Stewardship (Matt. 25:23,29)
- Bible Study (2 Tim. 3:16)
- Fellowship (Acts 2:42)
- Confession (James 5:16; 1 John 1:9)
- Worship (1 Chron. 16:29; Rom. 12:1-2)
- Rest (Matt. 11:28-30)
- Generosity (Acts 20:35)
- Purity (Phil. 4:8; 1 Thess. 4:3-4)
- Evangelism (Matt. 28:19-20)

### TAKE A MINUTE TO LOOK UP THE SCRIPTURE REFERENCES LISTED WITH EACH DISCIPLINE TO HELP YOU UNDERSTAND IT BETTER.

Which of these disciplines do you “practice” most?

Which of these disciplines are missing in your life? Ask God to help you develop them.

Spiritual disciplines are vital for cultivating the kind of character in which our wants align with God’s. But remember that God is the One who ultimately brings transformation in our hearts through grace.

### READ PHILIPPIANS 2:12-13.

*Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.*

These verses don’t mean we have to work for our salvation. They mean we grow in our relationship with God by respecting Him, by doing things in our lives that help us know Him more (such as spiritual disciplines), and by engaging in things that please Him.

How will you “work out” your salvation today?

# DAY TWO

## NO STRINGS ATTACHED?

**What are some ways you've heard the Christian view on sex described in our culture?**

**Be honest: Do you agree with any of these things?**

You've probably listed things such as "old fashioned," "repressive," or even "unhealthy." Maybe you even agree with some of these views. But have you ever stopped to think about all of the harmful results—both for the individual and society—that come from rejecting Jesus's sexual ethic?

One of the messages our society shares about sex is that sex outside of marriage is okay as long as it's consensual. But "casual" sex has negative consequences—physical and emotional.

**What are some of the negative physical consequences to casual sex?**

Some obvious responses are sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and unwanted pregnancies. But what are the long-term consequences? An STI can impact your health for the rest of your life. When faced with an unwanted pregnancy, a woman must choose whether to keep the child, adopt, or abort. These are all extremely difficult situations, with the last one causing the death of an innocent unborn child.

Now, how many of us think about the *emotional* consequences of sex? Even if it is consensual and intended to be "no strings attached," is that ever really the case?

**What are the negative emotional consequences of casual sex?**

Even when sex is consensual, it can lead to guilt or shame. A person may feel used or even violated. Maybe a sexual encounter that was supposed to be "no strings attached" generated an emotional connection to a person who doesn't feel the same in return, leading to feelings of rejection. This means there are also relational consequences to casual sex.

**What are other negative relational consequences of casual sex?**

Casual sex can make a friendship or work environment awkward, cause emotional distress, and be seriously damaging, especially if one of the people involved is in a committed relationship or even has a family. An affair has tons of negative consequences, from emotional pain to loss of trust to feelings of inadequacy. It can tear a family apart, affecting both adults and children emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually.

Until now, we have only examined the effects of consensual sex. Unfortunately, not all sexual activity is consensual. Abusive sexual activity is a terrible thing, but it occurs all too often. As awful as these things are, we need to talk about them.

**What are the results of a person ignoring another's consent in sexual activity?**

You've probably listed things such as sexual harassment and rape. Maybe you think of the #MeToo movement. Or maybe you've even listed sexual slavery and human trafficking. These are all terrible things that happen when people reject the intrinsic value of human beings and simply use people for their own pleasure.

Many people view the Christian sexual ethic as old-fashioned or repressive. But look at all of the harmful consequences that can—and do—occur by ignoring it. God never intended for any of these things to happen.

Now let's end on a positive note. We've examined the harm that comes from ignoring Jesus's sexual ethic. Let's look at the good that results from following it.

**What are positive consequences of following Jesus's sexual ethic? Don't just think about the lack of the things listed above. Think of the positive individual and societal outcomes that result from healthy sexual activity as God intended.**

Following the Christian sexual ethic means strong, healthy families and societies; commitment, trust, security; and freedom and abundant life. There are more positive results than we can imagine, but know this: God's design is for our good.

# DAY THREE

## FREE TO LIVE

Freedom is a major theme in this week's study. We've explored how true freedom comes from following God's rules instead of rejecting them. Today, we'll talk about the importance of perspective when it comes to freedom. Look back at Genesis 2.

### READ GENESIS 2:15-17.

*The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."*

What was Adam free to do?

What was the one thing he was not permitted to do?

Which was greater: Adam's freedom or his restriction? Why?

Adam was free to eat from any tree in the entire garden—except one. Only one. But humanity fell when Satan tempted Adam and Eve to disobey God's one restriction.

### READ GENESIS 3:1.

*Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?"*

Compare this to what God said in Genesis 2:15-17.

How did God and the serpent begin each of their statements?

God: "You may \_\_\_\_\_ eat of \_\_\_\_\_ tree of the \_\_\_\_\_."

Serpent: "Did God \_\_\_\_\_ say, 'You shall \_\_\_\_\_ eat of \_\_\_\_\_ tree in the garden'?"

What did God focus on first? What did the serpent focus on? Think specifically about the way their statements relate to freedom and restrictions.

How did the serpent's description of God's one restriction compare to what God actually said?

What does this say about how we tend to view God's rules?

Satan wants us to focus on everything we aren't allowed to do rather than everything we are free to do. He wants to magnify God's restrictions so we'll think God is oppressive. Satan wants us to think God is withholding something good from us instead of protecting us from things that are bad.

Does this sound familiar? Our society is still falling for Satan's deception. We think God's rules are harsh and limiting. But disobeying God's sexual ethic causes so much harm to us and society as a whole. God's design for sex does not restrict us; it protects us.

Are you ready to trust that God knows best?