

I am going to ask for a quick show of hands. You can raise your hand once in response to one of these three choices. The three choices are: I had an OK July 4th. I had a good July 4th. I had a great July 4th. You can raise your hand for one of those.

- How many had an OK July 4th?
- How many had a good July 4th?
- How many had a great July 4th?

Good. Thank you. I just wanted to see who I wanted to spend July 4th with next year! Next year Independence Day is on a Friday so it is not too early to start planning ahead for the big weekend.

Someone has said that July 4th is about two basic freedoms. The first freedom is ***freedom from...***

- We celebrate on July 4th that we are free from being ruled by monarchs and dictators and any other form of government where the people do not have a voice in ruling.

The second freedom we celebrate on July 4th is ***freedom for...***

- We celebrate on July 4th that since we are not unfairly burdened by our government, we can now freely serve the purposes of our nation.
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Long, long before July 4th was a United States holiday, Christians around the world were celebrating this idea of “*freedom from & freedom for.*”

Paul wrote the Letter of Galatians about 20 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus. In that letter he set forth what we are free from and what we are free to become.

Under the category of ***freedom from*** Paul proclaimed that we are free from our sin. Paul said: “*Jesus gave his life for our sins... in order to rescue us from this evil world in which we live.*” [Galatians 1:4]

Corrie Ten Boom once said, “when we confess our sins, God casts our sins into the deepest ocean, gone forever. And then God places a sign out there that says, ‘No Fishing Allowed’.” As Christians we are free from our sin.

But God in his grace knows that to be free from something and have no purpose is to be like a car that is running but has no wheels; or to be like a grill that is burning but has no chicken or pork chops grilling on it; or to be all dressed up and have nowhere to go.

God in his grace knows that once we are free from sin we need to be free to become a special person. Paul talks about that in our lesson from Galatians this morning.

Paul uses three phrases in Galatians 6 to talk about what we are now free in Jesus to become. The phrases are:

1. “gently and humbly help...”
2. “share each other’s burdens...”
3. “pay careful attention...”

Let’s take a look at this person we are free in Jesus to become, beginning with:

▪ *A Person who Gently and Humbly Helps.*

Paul says: “If another believer is overcome by some sin, you who are godly should gently and humbly help that person back onto the right path.” [Galatians 6:1]

The person who needs help is someone who gets caught up in something that damages their faith life. A few examples:

- Maybe someone innocently started playing bingo and going to Mahanomen. But now it has become an unbreakable habit that is affecting church attendance and finances and family.

- Maybe someone started to go out on a Friday night and started having a cocktail or two with the meal. Then they started adding a few extra drinks at home. Now they need to drink in order to get through the day.
 - Maybe someone started visiting with a co-worker of the opposite sex. And both people are beginning to feel like they do not want to go home anymore to their spouse and family. It is getting out of hand.
 - Maybe someone has become angry and bitter, and are taking it out on co-workers or family. They are in a cycle of frustration and cannot break out of it.
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You and I get into trouble. Our trouble might not be the ones listed above, but we know what it means to be in trouble. And our family and friends and neighbors and co-workers get into trouble as well.

And God is deeply concerned about how we hurt ourselves when we go down these roads.

It has been said that the Church is the only organization which shoots their wounded. The people described above, and so many others, are wounded people. God loves them and wants them to live freely again.

The Bible tells us that we are called to gently and humbly help people back on the right path. How do we do that? We look at our own lives and think: "Who? Me? How?" How can we gently and humbly restore people?

1. Understand the situation.

Occasionally I meet with someone and the first thing they say is: "Pastor Doug, I suppose you know why I am here?" I always tell them, "I do not know your story. If you would like to, tell me what is going on in your life."

Never assume you know the story because you have heard it from someone else. Once we have been invited into another person's life and they have shared their struggle, a second step is this:

2. Avoid a blanket statement.

There is not many things worse than pouring out our failings or shortcomings and someone says, “Tsk, tsk, tsk.” Or to hear a phrase like: “God helps those who help themselves.”

If someone pours out their personal story, then our best first response is to let them now that we have heard. Authentic feelings like “I am sorry for your loss – That must have been a difficult decision – You were in a challenging place” lets a person know that we are hearing what they are sharing.

After we have come to understand as best we can where a person is at, and we have let them know that we have heard the story, then the next step to gently and humbly help someone back is:

3. Retell the Gospel.

When a woman was caught in sin, Jesus restored her to the community by saying to her: *“Neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more.”*

When Peter denied Jesus three times, Jesus restored him by inviting him three times to *“Feed my lambs.”*

Paul says that we Christians should help one another like a physician setting a broken bone. There are so many broken people in our churches. Maybe you are one of them. Maybe you know someone who is.

We are set free to gently and humbly help a person to return to an active life of faith.

We are also set free from sin so that we might become:

- *A Person who Shares Other’s Burdens*

Paul says: *“Share each other’s burdens... If you think you are too important to help someone, you are only fooling yourself. You are not that important.”* [Galatians 6:2]

Ouch! That Paul is a pretty straight shooter. *"You are not that important."* How would you like to have Paul as your counselor!

Actually, I have several people in my life who speak words like that to me on a regular basis. My wife may hear a person or two say to me after worship, "Great message!" And Jan will say, "I have heard better. Don't get a big head."

I need to hear those words. It is important to see the whole picture. That is why Paul reminds us Church people, *"If you think you are too important to help..."*

- That person who is having trouble paying their bills? They are just as important to God as you are.
 - That person who is having trials and tribulations with their teenagers? They are just as important to God as you are.
 - That new family who is looking for a church home? They are just as important to God as you are.
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We are set free to bear burdens with others. One example of that is our group who is working at the Habitat for Humanity house this morning in south Moorhead. They arrived before 8, Vicki led them in a worship service, and now they will work until 4 – with no air-conditioning.

On the screen are a few pictures of the crew who worked yesterday. There were 20 working yesterday and another 16 today. They are sharing the burden of a family who needs help. We are free from sin that we might become people who *"share each other's burdens."*

We are also set free from sin so that we may become:

- *A Person who Carries Our Own Load.*

Pau; says: *"Pay careful attention to your own work, for then you will get the satisfaction of a job well done, and you won't need to compare yourself to anyone else: for we are each responsible for our own conduct."*

Another translation says: “all must carry their own loads.”

Here is what Paul is saying. See these two backpacks? For Paul, this is our load to carry. Each of us has been given a particular burden we are responsible for...

See this other pack. This is too much for me to carry. It would crush me if I had to bear it alone. When faced with this we are to be there for one another as burden bearers.

In Jesus we are to be people who pay careful attention to what we are called to carry. Are we engaged with our spouses, supportive of our children? Do we do our best in our work, and accomplish what we are called to do?

Bill Hybels once said: “I would never want to reach out someday with a soft, uncallused hand – a hand never dirtied by serving – and shake the nail-pierced hand of Jesus.” We are free to become people who pay care attention what God has called – me – to do.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, you have set us free from sin. Help us to consider this week the person we are now free by grace to be. If we can gently and humbly help another person to grow in faith or come back home to you, then we ask you to equip us to be of help. If this week we find someone bearing a burden that is just too much for one person, and if you have equipped us to be of service, then help us to reach out and lend a hand or a heart. And Lord, teach us to look closely at what you have called us to personally carry. May we be open to living differently as you lead. We pray in your name, Lord Jesus. Amen.