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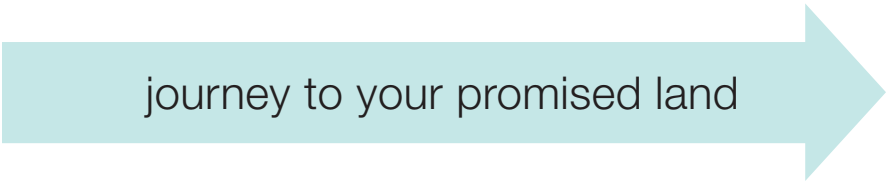
in a million

journey to your promised land

Priscilla Shirer

One

in a million



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Priscilla Shirer

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



PRISCILLA SHIRER is a Bible teacher whose ministry is focused on the expository teaching of the Word of God to women. Her desire is to see women not only know the uncompromising truths of Scripture intellectually but also experience them practically by the power of the Holy Spirit. Priscilla is a graduate of Dallas Theological Seminary with a Master's degree in Biblical Studies. For over a decade she has been a conference speaker for major corporations, organizations, and Christian audiences across the United States and the world.

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Jackson, Jerry Jr., and Jude. Jerry and

Priscilla have founded Going Beyond Ministries, where they are committed to seeing believers receive the most out of their relationships with the Lord.

A Note From Priscilla

The journey of a lifetime. That is what we're in for!

Welcome to *One in A Million: Journey to Your Promised Land*. I'm so thrilled that you are with me for this ride because having company makes any road trip more fun. The expedition began for me several years ago and is still in progress. God's call from mundane Christianity to a radical experience of Him has taken me down roads that, honestly, have been quite narrow.

Not many travelers have chosen to take this route. I can see why. It's easier to stay on the main road where there are more people and far less uncertainty. Besides, the travel ain't easy when you're headed in the direction of abundant living.

While I'd like to tell you that the sun has glistened on every leg of the trip and the cool winds of ease and convenience have brushed across my face without incident, I can't. On the contrary, there have been some days when I've had to take cover from the storms that life often brings. On occasion, I've had to whisper a prayer for help when loneliness knocks on my front door and comes in to stay a while. When I've met other travelers willing to brave these winding roads, our eyes have met and an instant heart connection made. Without having to say much, we've encouraged each other to continue.

I thought I knew where God was taking me when I first started out but each leg of this voyage has led into territory I've never seen before. Sometimes it's exciting and other times it's daunting. Either way, it's a ride I'd rather take with you.

I can't guarantee you much, but I can say with full confidence that you won't be bored. God's way is too unusual and mysterious for boredom to even be an option.

It's been quite a ride so far and I don't want to encounter what's next by myself.

In the next six weeks we'll traverse spiritual territory that will cover mountain peaks and deep valleys, grassy knolls and barren sand dunes, but the journey will be worth it. With the turn of each page you and I will round another corner. What we'll meet around one bend will bring a smile to the depths of our souls while others will create a sting of conviction that will send us straight to our knees. Let's be committed, OK? Buckle up and grab a venti size latte. Abundant living is at stake and I know for a fact that it's worth it!

Looking forward to taking the trip with you,

Priscilla

Session 1

Viewer Guide

Our God is a God of _____.

Yahweh was offering the children of Israel _____ in their lives.

John 10:10, “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.”

Of all the Jews who had the chance to experience the promised land, only _____ took God up on His offer.

Israel had been in captivity in Egypt approximately _____.

There must be deliverance to even begin the journey.

Just like Israel, we need to be delivered from:

a. A _____

b. A _____

Israel needed deliverance from Pharaoh; we need _____.

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in a million

In the Old Testament, the deliverer was _____. In the New Testament, the deliverer is _____.

The only way to have a relationship with God is through His Son, _____.

Each of us must _____ if we want to go where God is leading.

In order to get milk and honey, the Israelites had to _____
_____ from the place where Pharaoh ruled.

Galatians 5:1, “It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.”

Two questions:

1. Have you been freed from the person of the Enemy in your life?
2. Have you been freed from the places where the Enemy reigns?



To access the video teaching sessions, use the instructions in the back of your Bible study book.

WEEK ONE

SHACKLE FREE



The show was a little long for my toddler boys. They enjoyed the circus, but as the acrobats, clowns, and other acts neared their second hour, my kids started to fidget. They'd come to see one thing: elephants.

Our family left early and piled into the car to head home. That's when we noticed an elephant eating behind a circus tent. We pulled up near the enormous beast, rolled down the windows, and gawked. This sight was just what the boys wanted!

Little was said as we watched with wide-eyed curiosity as the elephant dined. One question, however, begged to be asked. In a three-year-old's broken English my youngest voiced what we were all thinking: "How come that big ole elephant doesn't tear down this fence and escape to freedom?"

I pondered that question as I noticed the elephant glance up every now and then to peer through the fence's holes. Just beyond that wire enclosure was a whole world of activity and thrills. To me the elephant seemed to long for freedom. If only he knew that his little fence was nothing compared to his innate strength.



Day 1

Chained to a Problem

My son asked a question about the elephant that might be asked of the sheep of God's pasture (Ps. 100:3). Why don't the people of God, who can tap into so much divine power, break through the barriers that keep us from experiencing an abundant relationship with Him? Why do we hesitate to push through to freedom and abundant life?

**Review the "Promised-Land Living" list on page 160.
Would you say that you are currently walking in an
abundant relationship to God? Why or why not?**

**Why do you think many believers never experience the
fullness of God?**

In the margin describe how the previous question applies to your experiences, past or present.

Jesus said He came to bring life in the fullest (John 10:10). Sadly, God's people often choose entrapment over the abundant life Jesus offers. Identifying what keeps us from entering into a powerful and life-altering relationship with God will help us determine how to overcome our bonds.

I pondered this question while looking at that elephant. As I watched, the animal shifted his weight and a clanking noise followed. Then I realized that hidden behind a tuft of grass, a shackle held his left ankle. I shook my head at the bolts and iron that really amounted to nothing more than an ankle bracelet on the massive beast. If only the elephant realized he could break that shackle with one powerful move and be free. To my boys, it seemed the fence kept the elephant at bay, but I knew better. That small shackle tied around his ankle was the true culprit. The elephant couldn't breach the weak fence line until he gained freedom from the chain.

*"A new king
arose over Egypt,
who did not
know Joseph.
He said to his
people, 'Behold
... the sons of
Israel are more
and mightier
than we. Come,
let us deal
wisely with them,
or else they will
multiply and in
the event of war,
they will also
join themselves
to those who
hate us, and
fight against us
and depart from
the land.' So
they appointed
taskmasters
over them to
afflict them with
hard labor. And
they built for
Pharaoh storage
cities, Pithom
and Raamses."
Exodus 1:8-11*

Familiarize yourself with the portion of Exodus 1 in the margin. Underline the key phrases that describe the conditions the Israelites faced in bondage.

Do any areas of your life cause you to feel like the phrases you've just underlined?

GOD'S PEOPLE IN CHAINS

For about 370 years the Israelites had faced Egyptian oppression. Intimidated by their increasing numbers, Pharaoh determined to control the Hebrews by harnessing their bodies and souls. Before God's chosen people could hope to enter the land promised to them, the shackle had to break. It held them back from finding the abundance God planned for them.

Pictures in the Old Testament often foreshadow New Testament realities. Pharaoh, Egypt, Moses, and Canaan all picture realities in Christ.

Draw a line from each picture to its corresponding New Testament principle.

Pharaoh
Egypt
Moses
Canaan

abundant life in Christ
life of bondage to sin
Jesus Christ
Satan

Pharaoh's oppression of the Jews is often used to illustrate a human's oppression by Satan and bondage to sin. Satan desires to entrap each of us in a sticky web of unrepentant rebellion against God. This shackle is too tightly locked for our own fingers to pry open; only a specifically designed and uniquely appointed instrument can free us.

Before we define that instrument, let's take a closer look at the locks that fasten Satan's chains to us: The curse of sin and the lifestyle of sin. We'll explore the first today and the other tomorrow.

THE CURSE OF SIN

How does Deuteronomy 4:20 describe the conditions of Israel's bondage in Egypt?

What adjectives would you use to describe the life of an individual living in bondage to sin?

"The LORD has taken you and brought you out of the iron furnace, from Egypt, to be a people for His own possession, as today."

Deuteronomy 4:20

Life in slavery was brutal. In ancient times slaves generally went bare-foot and their work lasted all day. In Egypt temperatures climbed to over 110 degrees. In such conditions, their kidneys suffered. Their hands were violently abused, likely torn to ribbons by the unending work. Death by dehydration, heat prostration, and heatstroke were common. To say the Israelites lived in misery is no stretch.

The harsh effects of physical slavery, however, pale in comparison to the enslaved condition of the human soul. While Israel's slavery was physical, ours originates in the depths of our hearts. Indeed, the Hebrews' hands were shredded in pain, but our souls are minced and mangled as our enemy seeks to destroy us.

The curse of sin enslaves our souls; it is a lock and chain that keeps us from finding freedom. It guarantees every human a life of separation from God.

Sin. The very word makes me cringe. Most of us prefer to use words like *indiscretion*, *slip*, or *mistake* to describe our souls' shortcomings. Fiery preachers of old would bellow out messages on the seriousness of sin without shame or compromise. Today the importance of calling "sin" "sin" falls to the wayside as our churches, ministries, and messages address lighter spiritual topics that draw crowds without stirring controversy. While we often skip around the very issue that most needs to be addressed, we remain shackled, peering through the fence wondering why we cannot experience true freedom. Until we deal with the shackle of sin, we cannot cross the boundaries that keep us from experiencing an abundant relationship with God.

“Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned.”

Romans 5:12,
HCSB

The curse of sin began in Genesis, when Adam and Eve chose to indulge in sin in the garden of Eden. Their choice affects every human. As soon as Eve sunk her teeth into the fruit and Adam joined her rebellion, the shackle was in place and our fate was sealed. (See Gen. 3.) In an instant the curse of original sin was woven into the fabric of every life.

Adam and Eve’s sin caused them to be cast from Eden, a land of endless bounty and a place where God literally walked with man in the cool of the day. Just as Adam and Eve forfeited the place of utmost fulfillment and abundance, all those who refuse to pursue freedom from the curse of sin forfeit the place of “milk and honey”—fulfillment, freedom, satisfaction, contentment, and overwhelming joy.

**The principle of original sin appears in Romans 5:12.
Describe the curse of original sin in your own words.**

THE KEY TO FREEDOM

To obtain freedom from the shackles of Egyptian bondage, the Hebrews had to trust in God-empowered Moses as their deliverer. Moses was a uniquely appointed instrument of God, sent to deliver God’s people from the rule of Pharaoh. He became a powerful symbol of God’s grace. We have no record of anyone attempting to free the Israelites from Egypt until God called Moses to challenge Pharaoh.

Likewise, only One instrument can unshackle us from the curse and consequences of original sin. Just as the Israelites had to accept a fate of slavery should they choose to ignore God’s plan to break their chains, we are bound to soul slavery should we ignore God’s ultimate deliverer: Jesus Christ.

Read Romans 5:17-19, then complete the following.

**The consequence of one transgression is _____
(v. 17).**

**The consequence of God’s gift of grace through Christ is _____
(v. 19).**

You can’t afford to ignore the fact that a pit of sin separates you from the Father. Your journey toward abundance and fullness must start at the foot of the cross.

If, like me, you are ready to experience God, not just know about Him, make certain that you are no longer under the curse of original sin.

If you have accepted reconciliation with God through the death and resurrection of Christ, write the time and circumstances surrounding your commitment. Solidify that decision through prayer.

If you aren't sure that you've ever taken this step, then why stay shackled for another day? Abundance and fullness of life are just beyond the bend! Take time to accept God's gift of Jesus Christ! It's simple. See Romans 10:9. Then consider writing the following prayer in your own words as you give your life to Christ. (Don't forget to share your decision with your group leader or another friend in your study. She'll be thrilled!)

Lord Jesus, I am a sinner in need of a Savior. I no longer want to be bound by the curse of sin. I want to be free. I believe You are the only One who can accomplish this in my life. I accept Your death on Calvary as payment for my sins. Today I place faith in You as the only way, the only truth, and the only life (John 14:6). Please, Jesus, take up residence in me through the Person of the Holy Spirit to empower me to walk fully in the abundance that You desire. In Jesus' name, amen.

"If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved."

Romans 10:9

Day 2

Chained By Choice



The image of the chained elephant haunted me long after we left the circus. A Google™ search helped answer some of my questions.

I discovered they train elephants by chaining them in infancy.

Since the babies are not strong enough to pull free, they grow tired of trying and resign themselves to a life of limitations. They adapt to living in boundaries of the chain. Soon even a small rope is sufficient to restrain an enormous elephant. The animal considers freedom a hopeless notion and therefore stops trying to experience it.

Yesterday we discovered that by God's grace through Jesus we can be free from the curse of original sin. Once a relationship with God has been established through Christ, the journey to freedom begins. Before we can travel to our personal Canaan with any effectiveness, however, we must also overcome a second lock that fastens the Enemy's chain to us: the sinful lifestyle.

In what ways do you think lifestyle sin differs from original sin?

Overcoming original sin requires that we accept God's gracious gift of His Son, who overcame sin's powerful hold over people. Overcoming a sinful lifestyle, on the other hand, requires daily relying on the Holy Spirit's power. It means that we must continually turn our backs on the temptation to rebel against God.

Underline the section of Galatians 5:1 that reveals Christ's work for us. Circle our responsibility.

"It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery."

Galatians 5:1

A difference exists between being free in Christ and living free in Him. After Pharaoh agreed to free the slaves, the children of Israel had to make a choice to pack their bags, physically leave, and follow Moses to Canaan. I remember times when I complained that my Christian life didn't seem to have any of the "milk and honey" that the Lord offered in Scripture. Thinking back, those times have corresponded to seasons when my lifestyle was not matching up with my God-given position.

What a tragedy it would be for us to be given freedom but not walk in it! For believers, the ability to walk in freedom becomes dependent on an individual's daily decision to walk in the power received at salvation.

Describe a time when you lived as a slave to sin even though you were a free believer. How did you feel?

We must change the sinful ways we've been trained to live and by the Holy Spirit's power within us, we can. The only way to deprogram an elephant so that he no longer enjoys captivity but experiences and enjoys freedom is to unfetter him and gently guide him into the wild. Since our tendency as humans is to err in a direction away from God, we must retrain ourselves to walk in the ways of freedom.

Prepare to brainstorm in your group practical ways we can reprogram our thinking to fully enjoy God's freedom.

LIVING FREE

The Enemy wants to keep us from living free. God gives believers in Christ positional sanctification. That means we have a position of "set-apartness," holiness and righteousness that cannot be altered or manipulated. Nothing can be done to remove a true believer from her positional standing of righteousness before the Father. Being positionally sanctified, however, cannot be the end goal of a believer determined to live in Christ's freedom.

After our standing before the Father is secured, we must turn our attention to the business of lifestyle sanctification, leaving Egypt behind us. Since we still live in the flesh, which has sinful tendencies, and since we have an enemy who is working against us, we must work through a process that requires obedience and yieldedness to God. Being declared free gives us eternal freedom but walking in it gives us daily freedom. Although salvation is definitely by faith and not works, daily living in that freedom takes work as we cooperate with God's Spirit.

It's important to note that Pharaoh had difficulty managing the abundant number of Israelites. He acknowledged this by appointing taskmasters over them. These taskmasters served a sinister purpose.

Look carefully at Exodus 1:11-14, and in the margin list words or phrases that reveal the taskmasters' role.

Verse 12 uses the word afflict. The Hebrew word used here is *anah*, the same word used in Genesis 15:13 to describe the oppression God's people would face.¹ This word means "to thwart, to frustrate, to be made low, to be bowed down and made submissive."² In other words, the goal of Egyptian slavery was not merely physical. Egyptian rulers intended to demolish the spirit of the Hebrew people, thereby lessening any threat of rebellion or escape. This kind of abuse undoubtedly helped to dissuade the children of God from desiring to live like the people of God.

We must recognize that the Devil has assigned taskmasters to us too. The Enemy of our souls knows our strengths and weaknesses, and he has the goal of contriving ways to keep us under his thumb. He wants to burden each of us to the point that we no longer feel passionate about being people of God. He does it by convincing us that freedom in Christ is a dream. He encourages us to keep returning to the very sins from which Christ freed us. The writer of Hebrews warns of this: "Let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us" (12:1). Notice the passage says "the" sin—it's a specific and personal affliction that is unique to you.

With what specific "affliction" is the Devil plaguing you right now?

THE MIND GAME

In part living in freedom depends on our response to the Devil's mind games. A mind game of sorts holds the elephant at the circus captive: Feel the chain around your leg? No freedom for you! The Enemy plays a similar trick on us. He causes us to think that freedom is impossible. By getting us mired in a lifestyle of sin, he makes us feel hopeless. It's not long before we give up on the idea of really experiencing God in our lives. We begin to think that liberty from life's messes is more fiction than fact.

One key method Satan uses to keep us captive is by causing us to gradually step further and further into our rebellion. Eventually we are deeper than we ever thought we'd be.

Sin is progressive. What once satisfied us loses its power. Before we know it we are more and more entangled in a web that is slowly taking the life out of us. The situation the Hebrews faced illustrates the progression. The moment Moses breathed the freedom concept over their lives, Pharaoh upped the ante. (See Ex. 5:7-11.)

What is it like to have your sin snowball out of control?

Are you caught in a lifestyle of sin you just can't seem to shake? The Enemy's goal is to keep you in his web so you can never journey toward the soul-cleansing freedom the Lord has for you. End today's lesson by offering yourself to the Lord and honestly exposing your rebellion, discouragement, and fatigue to Him. Ask the Lord to help you share your struggle with another believer who can keep you accountable on the journey to living free.

Day 3

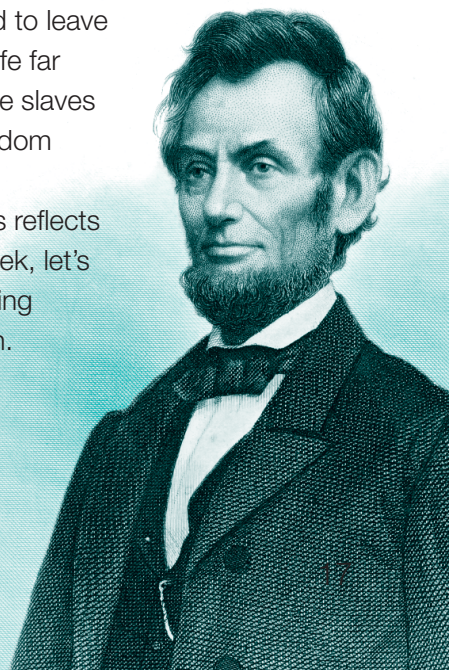
Bound to a Memory

In 1863 President Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation. The document consisted of two executive orders leading to freedom for four million slaves who lived on American soil. The news of legal freedom was met with unbridled joy by those inflicted by inhumane treatment under slavery. Not all slaves, though, rejoiced at the announcement.

The problem was that many slaves had come to enjoy their lifestyles compared to the ominous alternatives. "House slaves," for example, worked directly with their master's families. They were often granted far superior treatment to that experienced by field slaves. Relatively speaking, a house slave's life was simple and fairly convenient. It came with certain perks that some weren't certain they wanted to leave behind. To some, experiencing freedom would mean losing a life far from ideal but at least less risky than the unknown. Many house slaves willingly chose slavery over freedom to avoid the risks that freedom entailed. This begs the question: Were they really free?

Far too often the decision made by some post-war slaves reflects the choices of modern Christians. For the remainder of this week, let's turn our consideration to another potential barrier to experiencing promised-land living in Christ: an addiction to the "perks" of sin.

What are some of the perks you've seen the Enemy attach to sin to make it more appealing?



“The rabble who were among them had greedy desires; and also the sons of Israel wept again and said, ‘Who will give us meat to eat? We remember the fish which we used to eat free in Egypt, the cucumbers and the melons and the leeks and the onions and the garlic, but now our appetite is gone. There is nothing at all to look at except this manna.’

Now the manna was like coriander seed, and its appearance like that of bdellium.”

Numbers 11:4-7

CLINGING TO THE CHAINS

Much like the 1800s slaves who balked at leaving behind relative comforts, the Israelites grumbled at their loss of perceived “privileges.” After they were freed and followed Moses into the wilderness toward the promised land, they began longing for some of the comforts of Egypt.

Read Numbers 11:4-7. What did the Israelites leave behind and what had God given them instead?

The Israelites had to leave behind a few slavery “perks”—not the least of which was the assurance of nourishment. Freedom was risky. It meant daily trusting in God to provide what they needed. In Egypt they knew where their bread and butter ... ummm ... fish and garlic were coming from; even better, they knew they were indeed coming. As the Hebrews followed Moses through the desert they had no such assurance.

For the Hebrews, security and comfort came from knowing how their next meal was going to be provided and that it was going to consist of familiar flavors. As they longed for that security and wanted to return to the very place from where they’d just been freed, Pharaoh ceased to be their worst enemy. They became their own!

Recall a time when you became your own worst enemy. What did you say or think that impeded your spiritual progress?

Sometimes the adversary is no longer our worst enemy. Neither the curse nor the lifestyle of sin holds us back. Instead, our own fear of walking in freedom begins to cripple us. In a sense, we start to partner with our captor in his attempt to keep us enslaved and away from abundance and fullness in God.

Describe in the margin how the strong flavors and smells of Egypt’s food contributed to Israel’s bondage and how this tendency might apply to you.

College was not a good time in my spiritual life. Although the Lord has graciously used much of my rebellion to teach me valuable lessons, I admit those days were filled with staunch stubbornness against Him. Some of the activities I participated in and relationships I indulged in repulse me

now. Yet frequently the Enemy attempts to remind me of the “perks” of my Egypt. The bold flavor of freedom and strong spice of a lack of responsibility associated with college days often lurk in my mind. If I’m not careful I can easily wallow in a longing for the “fish and garlic” of my Egypt, neglecting the current nourishment God provides.

EATING AT THE ENEMY’S TABLE

Let’s be honest: Life estranged from God has fleshly perks. The Enemy of our soul always ensures that we enjoy at least a portion of our sin. He makes certain the enjoyment is addictive. The onions, leeks, garlic, fish, and melon that satisfied and gratified our flesh for so long were nice at the time. We enjoyed them; in fact, they helped content us with slavery. But to accept God’s call to journey onward means some things must also be left behind, even the things that tempt us to return to the old ways.

Interesting how just a few perks could make an entire group of people forget the hardships of slavery. Our Enemy is crafty. He allows us just enough nourishment to blind us to the brutality of spiritual slavery. The Egyptians fed the Hebrews to give them strength to build for Pharaoh (Ex. 1:11). We can be sure that any good things the Enemy gives us are only intended to keep us nourished enough to continue under the yoke of his bondage.

One thing worse than slavery is slavery with addictive perks.

Why do you think we get so attached to the perks the Enemy gives while developing spiritual amnesia about the hardship involved?

Think of an “Egypt” time when you were living in rebellion against God. On the left side of the chart write one of those circumstances. On the right, write the corresponding “perk” the Enemy gave you. I’ve given you an example.

Egypt’s hardships	Egyptian perk
fear of being caught in an affair	spontaneity, fun, little responsibility

Do you think more of the hardship or the perk when you consider your time there? Why?

The lure of eating at Pharaoh's table often stands in the way of a believer fully engaging in a journey to live abundantly in Christ. Our Enemy aspires to keep our minds on Egypt instead of the destination God has for us—the land flowing with milk and honey.

*“We remember
the fish which
we used to eat
free in Egypt,
the cucumbers
and the melons
and the leeks
and the onions
and the garlic.”*
Numbers 11:5

Look carefully at Numbers 11:5 As the children of Israel complained they mentioned the fish. Though this fish might not have cost them earned wages, why was it certainly not free?

“Perks” are not necessarily ungodly things. They can be, but nothing is inherently wrong with the desire to taste the foods that tickled their memories. The problem was they wanted those things more than they wanted the new thing God was providing for them. This tendency revealed their continued attachment to the very things from which Yahweh had freed them.

My Sister, if you want to experience the fullness of all that God has to offer you, you must make a tough decision. Will you let go of sin's perks in order to follow the Holy Spirit to spiritual abundance? The initial separation might be difficult, but not making the choice will ensure that you never live in true freedom and experience abundant life.

What specific things is God asking you to leave behind so you can more closely follow Him?

Take time to honestly admit your heart's longing for anything the Enemy uses to keep you chained to sin. Offer those things to the Lord. Ask God to give you holy boldness and courage by His Spirit to break the hold those “perks” have on you. Commit to God's new menu for you.

Rest assured, God's meal will be better suited to your palate than anything your time in Egypt could provide.

Day 4

A Little of This; A Little of That

My heart has a soft spot for the food my South American mother prepares. Growing up, I had an aversion to it. It was spicy and soupy. Everything was made in gravy filled with a variety of Caribbean flavors. My young taste buds couldn't handle it. Now things are different. After years of feasting on the treats of my mother's home, I'm not only used to them but long for them. When the holidays roll around, I sit on the edge of my seat waiting for the delectable curried meats, spicy vegetables, and steamy peas and rice. I even spoon on hot sauce for more pepper action! Anything less than these intense flavors piled together now falls short of my idea of holiday eating.

The Hebrews longed for the tastes of Egypt. What about those foods seemed so appealing? We can't answer that question without first acknowledging the dramatic diet change that followed the exodus. The days of plentiful and varied diets of international fare were gone. God whittled the menu down to one dish.



How would you feel if your diet were suddenly limited to one unfamiliar dish?

Using Numbers 11:6, summarize the Israelites' feelings about their new menu.

"Now our appetite is gone. There is nothing at all to look at except this manna."

Numbers 11:6

Manna, apparently a bread-like substance, was the foundation of the Israelites' menu for 40 years! Numbers 11:8-9 explains that when the dew fell on the camp at night, the manna fell with it. Daily the people would pick it up and prepare it. Baked manna. Fried manna. Sautéed manna. Manna soufflé, manna casserole. Manna in the morning. Manna in the evening. The sameness of the situation is most assuredly what led the children of Israel, long fed on pagan bounty, to turn up their noses at this seemingly dull display of heavenly provision.

I want to give the children of Israel the benefit of the doubt. I can understand how it may have been difficult for Hebrew taste buds not to long for the varying foods to which they had become accustomed. I'm a woman who appreciates variety in my diet. For goodness sake, eating is my favorite hobby! But we must understand that their desire for Egyptian variety is symbolic of our longing for the variety of foreign behaviors to which we have become accustomed. Far too many Christians turn away from the narrow road of abundant living to temporarily enjoy the Enemy's worldly variety.

Yesterday, I turned on a top-rated show to find the day's discussion being led by a self-proclaimed spiritual guru. He offered the captive studio audience a variety of options they could use to tap into "God." "Come to God any way you want and through any means" was his bold declaration. "Jesus Christ is only a way to connect to God, certainly not the way." The crowd nodded, smiled, applauded, and received the "food" of Egypt on a silver platter. Christianity's foundational principle that only our Savior, Jesus Christ, connects us with God seems a bit limited in a world flooded with colorful, aromatic options like "you can be your own God" and "God is a relative concept."

List ways the Enemy's offer of variety works against God's simple gift of Christ in our culture. Which most affects you? your family? your church?

Brainstorm ways to guard yourself and your family from these trends. Plan to discuss them with your group.

Like the Egyptians, we fall prey to the idea that Egypt's table overflows with delectable treats. The truth, however, is that we can enjoy true spiritual freedom only when we commit to accepting the pure, daily bread God provides.

The simplicity and singleness of the manna in the wilderness symbolized the Christ who was to come. When presenting Himself as the true Messiah to the Jews Jesus clearly said, "I am the bread of life" (John 6:35). While the manna of the wilderness could not provide eternal life, Christ did and will to anyone who will receive it.

Heaven's manna was God's miraculous portion given to the children of Israel, not to bore them but to show them a new dimension of Him. This portion is given to us just as freely as He gave it the Israelites.

CLEANSING OUR PALATES

Egypt's variety wasn't Israel's only problem. They had trouble adapting to manna's simplicity as well. To the Hebrew children Egypt's food seemed far more exciting than God's, and this distortion of God's goodness always results in grumbling and complaining. It emphasizes the meager benefits of Egypt over the grand and thrilling blessings of God. Consider the intense flavors of the six food options they mentioned in Numbers 11:5. Most of them have flavors so pungent that their odor lingers for hours! A mixture of different Egyptian spices, flavors, and meal choices no doubt altered the Hebrews' taste buds.

Read Exodus 16:31 and Numbers 11:8. How do these passages describe manna?

Manna was really anything but boring. "It looked like bdellium (v. 7), a prized substance that was one of the products of the area immediately surrounding the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:12)."³ The Holman Christian Standard Bible gives a more realistic description of manna: "It tasted like a pastry cooked with the finest oil" (Num. 11:8). It may have looked somewhat like porridge, but it actually tasted more like Krispy Kreme® donuts.

Manna was "the bread of heaven" (Ps. 78:24, NKJV), the original angel-food cake! Their grumbling caused them to overlook the tasty treasure they'd been given.

What do you complain about most in the journey God has you on? List five good things about your journey that complaining has caused you to overlook.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

The contrast between Egypt's food and God's gift of manna is stark, isn't it? The purity of the manna stands out against Egypt's menu. God gave this meal as a gift to His people, not only to sustain them in their journey but also to wean the Hebrews off their accustomed tastes. God seemed eager, didn't He, to begin the process of taking the desire for Egypt out of the mouths of the ones He loves? To start living like free men and women, His people have to start eating like them.

"The house of Israel named it manna, and it was like coriander seed, white, and its taste was like wafers with honey."

Exodus 16:31

"The people would go about and gather it and grind it between two millstones or beat it in the mortar; and boil it in the pot and make cakes with it; and its taste was as the taste of cakes baked with oil."

Numbers 11:8

“Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst.’”

John 6:35

“Daniel made up his mind that he would not defile himself with the king’s choice food or with the wine which he drank; so he sought permission from the commander of the officials that he might not defile himself.”

Daniel 1:8

**Consider the last sentence in the preceding paragraph.
How might John 6:35 impact how we see the manna?**

FOREIGN FOODS

The Enemy wants us to feed on things that will cause our stomachs to turn at the thought of pure devotion to Christ. He wants us to miss the variety and spice that a life bound in sin offers. He wants us to long for it even after we’ve made a decision to journey with God. As long as we keep complaining about what we have now and longing for what the Devil once “gave” us, our journey with the Lord will be stop-and-go at best.

I believe this principle was foremost in Daniel’s mind when he refused the rich food of Babylon. King Nebuchadnezzar brought in the finest of Israel’s youth, Daniel among them, so he could indoctrinate them in the pagan ways of Babylon. The king did everything to get Israel and Israel’s God off the minds of these young men. To reprogram them, Nebuchadnezzar had his servants teach the literature and languages of the Chaldeans. He made them drink wines and eat foods prepared with signature Babylonian spices. He even had their names changed so they would be continually reminded of their new connection with Babylon and of the expected change in their devotion to Yahweh. Daniel 1:8 records his response to the king’s order that he eat the rich food of Babylon.

Why do you think Daniel chose to rebel on what surely seemed to some a minor issue given his circumstances?

Nebuchadnezzar’s advisors feared Daniel’s refusal would be easily evidenced in his lack of strength and physical prowess, but Daniel challenged them. He requested simple meals of vegetables and water while other men continued to feast on the flavorful meals of the culture. God honored Daniel and his friends’ integrity not only physically but mentally and spiritually. He “gave them knowledge and intelligence in every branch of literature and wisdom; Daniel even understood all kinds of visions and dreams” (Dan. 1:17).

When we accept Christ and lean on Him to help us move past the lifestyle sins that entrap us, you and I are free of Egypt. We must, however, be on the alert for the Enemy’s continual attempts to rename us, to retrain us, and to readapt us to his way of thinking, speaking, acting, and living. Like Daniel, we must adapt a strong resolve and a firm stand against Satan’s attempts to serve us food from his table.

Consider in which of your activities you can see the Enemy's attempt to fill you with his ideas, philosophies, and ideologies. In the margin note specific things you can do to thwart his efforts.

May we desire God's ways above all else. May our hearts ring with the song of David in Psalm 84:1-2: "How lovely are Your dwelling places, O LORD of hosts! My soul longed and even yearned for the courts of the LORD; My heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God."

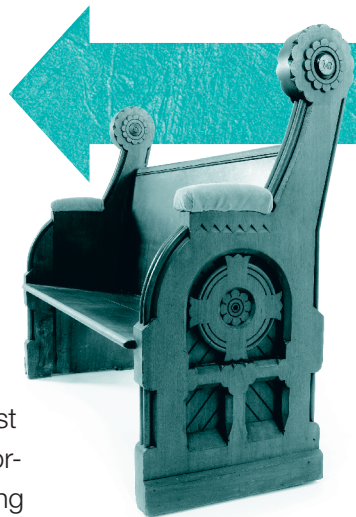
Day 5

God In a Box

I sat across from a woman I'd only just met and almost instantly the Spirit drew us together. Our conversation turned to deep spiritual matters only moments after our first "hello." We had the same sound background of theological training and had both learned from Bible teachers who taught with clarity the principles of Scripture that were now well ingrained into our personal lives and ministries. Yet we were both parched—thirsty for more and it was this thirst that brought us to our knees in a hotel room. With deeply moving worship music playing in the background, she began to share the gripping story of how God had placed in her a holy hunger for more than just a simple knowledge of Him but an experience with Him through the Spirit of God. She told me that this hunger had gotten her into trouble as she began to experience things that were outside of the box.

I could relate. I've attended a Bible-based church my entire life. The teaching I receive is unbelievably edifying, and I credit it with any foundational knowledge I have about the Scriptures. Yet just like my new friend, the Lord had whetted my spiritual appetite for a more personal relationship with Him.

Through a series of events, God has invited me to expect and anticipate more out of my walk with Him. My journey to promised land living began because He placed a gnawing hunger in my heart to encounter the God I knew so much about. With each divine interruption in my life and in my theology, I received a golden sealed invitation to see God outside of the box. He wants



God's work in us thus far isn't a box into which He will fit, but a slab upon which He will build.

me to expect to see His power in supernatural ways, anticipate miracles in my everyday existence and hear His voice with startling clarity.

As I consider what we've studied this week, it occurs to me that one more thing keeps us from journeying with God into a life that flows with the Holy Spirit's power—a narrow view of God creates a boundary that limits our experience of Him. For me, the comforts of my upbringing, church, and scholastic training began to create a wall between me and abundant living.

The teaching I received was not biblically incorrect; on the contrary, it was solid and effective. But what I was given in knowledge, God wanted to expand through experience. He wanted the Word to become “spirit and life” to me (John 6:63). I asked God for an open heart and courage to receive whatever He had for me. He graciously responded by supplementing my membership at my home church with a Bible study group filled with people from completely different backgrounds. This group hungered to experience the truths of Scripture. They expected God's supernatural activity and seeing it was a normal part of their fellowship and personal lives.

I believe the failure to be open to a larger view of God often hinders church-going, Bible-study-doing women like you and me. We must be willing to move out of our comfort zones and church routines if we are to break through to the abundant life Christ offers. By no means am I suggesting that you discontinue fellowship with the church God has you in now. I merely want you to consider that there may be others the Lord might want to use to assist you on your journey. The following three case studies consider God-fearing women at a crossroads of faith. To move past stalemates in their relationships with the Lord, each of the ladies needs to make some changes.

Read each scenario, and then in the margin write what you think each woman should do to move ahead in her relationship with God.

Case 1: Leslie is a young businesswoman. As she has matured spiritually, she has realized that many of the traditions taught by her strict, legalistic denomination and well-meaning parents don't coincide with the truth of Scripture. What should Leslie do to make sure she keeps moving ahead in her relationship with the Lord?

Case 2: Mrs. Gonzales is a stay-at-home grandma. In the past three years God has shown her some miraculous evidence of His activity in her life. Her home church condemns supernatural activity as unconventional or even fanatical. She senses that the teaching of her church is generally theologically sound but narrow. She cannot deny what God is doing in her life. How can Michelle continue to advance in her walk with God?

Case 3: Kylie is an aspiring model. She was raised to embrace the supernatural and to believe that prosperity belongs to every believer. Her walk with God allows her to see that the teaching she receives sometimes emphasizes experience and emotion over truth. What steps can Kylie take to make sure her relationship with the Lord is on the right track?

With which woman's story do you most relate? Why?

"Don't let church obscure your view of God."
Tommy Tenny,
The God Catchers Workbook

Leslie, Michelle, and Kylie recognize that God offers them something different in their relationship with Him than what they've previously known. If your advice to the ladies revolved around digging in the Word, developing a deeper prayer life, or even searching for a supplemental body of believers with which to grow, you are on the right track. In all cases, the women must step out of the cozy comfort zones of their pasts to accept God's invitation to journey onward. When we sense the unmistakable stirring of the Holy Spirit beckoning us to a deeper walk, we have to make decisions that stretch us.

Has church/ministry ever obscured your view of God? If so, explain.

Where do you sense God leading you that is different from where you have been up until this point?

Fear of change and the desire to avoid challenge often stand in the way of a believer's growing into an experiential relationship with God. This, in fact, is what caused the vast majority of those led out of Egypt to die in the desert instead of the promised land. Out of the original multitude who fled Pharaoh, only two remained faithful to obeying God, willingly accepting what God laid before them. Joshua and Caleb were willing to leave the comfortable majority for a chance to draw closer to God.

Fear of change and the desire to avoid challenge often stand in the way of a believer's growth.

RABBLE ROUSING

I believe one key to moving forward efficiently in our journey with God rests in the company we keep (and yes, that includes "church company"). Those who want to grow with God need to deeply search the Word and have an openness to experience Him in new ways, but Numbers 11 suggests that

those with whom we share fellowship can easily become a stumbling block to us in our desire to walk with the Lord.

Read Numbers 11:1-4 and answer the following questions.

What group of people seemed to stir dissension in the Israelite camp?

What caused them to complain?

How did their actions affect the Jews?

Israel's frustration with desert life was inflamed by their affiliation with a group of people the Scriptures call "the rabble." These were the "riff-raff" who lived on the outskirts of the camp. They were a "mixed multitude of all nationalities who came out of Egypt with God's people but had never fully assimilated and taken on Israel's values and standards."⁵ These people were free from all of the bondage of Egypt but were not fully engaged in God's calling on His people to follow after Him. Their halfheartedness swept like a forest fire through the camp, infecting God's people with indifference toward God. The grumbling was contagious.

According to Numbers 11:10, the complaints had a ripple effect. Check all that apply.

- ☒ God's anger was roused.
- ☒ Scorpions and vipers attacked the camp.
- ☒ Moses' displeasure grew.
- ☒ Return to Egypt became inevitable.
- ☒ General contentment reigned throughout the camp.

What type of company do you keep? Do your closest relationships consist of "the rabble," those who are saved and freed from the Enemy's hold but who only halfheartedly pursue God's fullness? Or are they men and women who passionately pursue God's heart, even at the expense of encountering unmapped territory? Do your friends' presence arouse in you a pursuit for more of God? Do their experiences with God excite your passion to have encounters of your own?

On the left side of the chart list the names of the five people (other than your spouse and children) with whom you spend the most time. On the right side describe the effect each person's spiritual life has on yours.

1	
2	
3	
4	
5	

One of the most gracious things the Lord has done for me is to strategically place individuals in my life who help me on my journey into Canaan. My connection with associates who aren't serious about experiencing God have waned, and I am carefully holding fast to those whose pursuit of God encourages my own. I call them my "wild women." These are ladies who pray and then believe. They ask and then expect. When my questions need answers, these women provide a safe place where I will not be judged as I explore the depths of God and His work in me. Using the truth of God's Word and the maturity gained in their own experiences, they guide me.

Maybe in your Bible study group there are women whose hearts are burning just like yours is. Together you can encourage each other to fully pursue God's work.

Write a prayer asking the Lord to help you make wise decisions regarding your relationships. Ask Him to bring people into your life who will encourage you and foster your pursuit of God as you press onward to abundant life.

1. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 1:55.
2. Francis Brown et. al. *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (electronic ed.) (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 2000), xiii.
3. Iain M. Duguid. *Numbers: God's Presence in the Wilderness* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2006), 150.
4. Tommy Tenney. *The God Catchers Workbook: Experiencing the Manifest Presence of God* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 56.
5. Duguid, 148.