

YOU
ARE
FREE
BE WHO YOU
ALREADY ARE

STUDY GUIDE
SIX SESSIONS

REBEKAH LYONS

& ANNIE F. DOWNS

 ZONDERVAN®



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This title is also available as a Zondervan ebook.

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Zondervan, 3900 Sparks Dr. SE, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49546

ISBN 978-0-310-08561-4

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Cover illustration: Dana Tanamachi

Interior design: Kait Lamphere

First Printing December 2016 / Printed in the United States of America

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Introduction



WHEN WE LOOK AT the pages of Scripture, it's clear that God intends for us to “live as free people” (1 Peter 2:16). We are assured that “where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (2 Corinthians 3:17) and that “it is for freedom that Christ has set us free” (Galatians 5:1). Furthermore, Jesus declared a “kingdom come”—a kingdom of complete freedom—“on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10), and Paul teaches this kingdom power lives in us (see Romans 8:11). This means that even in our feeble weakness, if we claim Christ and his resurrection, somehow we are God's agents who carry freedom to the world.

So, given all these passages in the Bible, why don't we see this kind of kingdom-come freedom more? Why do we hobble through our days, longing for the God who promises life “to the full” (John 10:10), but failing to truly experience this type of kingdom power in our lives? We want to see the Jesus who calms the storm, frees the oppressed, heals the sick, and raises the dead (see Luke 8:22–56). Yet here we are, living our lives one small step at a time, feeling so powerless to loosen the chains that bind us, let alone helping others live in freedom.

I know this struggle all too well. All my life I ran the hamster wheel of achievement and acceptance. As a child, I earned love by working hard to fit in. At church, I earned love by memorizing verses. At school, I earned love by pleasing teachers. The God I was striving for was rigid and lifeless and seemed far away. Although I believed he was real, I wasn't convinced he was good. So I went on trying to be the best version of myself, hoping maybe I'd catch a glimpse of his approval. Legalism shaped me, driving my performance.

If someone had asked me in my youth why I was doing all this striving, I wouldn't have had an answer. It took decades for me to peel back the layers of bondage and realize that freedom only comes *when we know God is enough—when he is our everything*. When he is our peace and our strength, joy, and rest. Our provision, healer, hope, fortress, shelter, strong tower, and Father. Freedom reveals everything good is from him and by him and for him. Every breath we take, every person we encounter, every word we utter is all an expression of a freedom where God dwells in us and loves through us!

In this study, I want to walk you through my journey into this kind of freedom and explore what the Bible says true freedom looks like for our lives. We will wrestle through tough realities, and I will ask questions—some easy to answer and others painful. My only request is that you leave nothing on the table. No stone unturned, no whispers unspoken, no secret still hidden. This freedom thing is costly but worth it.

Freedom is for everyone who wants it—the lost, the wounded, and those weary from all of the striving. It's for those who gave up trying years ago. It's for professional Christians hiding secrets. It's for the angry and hurt. I write for you, for all of you. You are the church, the people of God. You were meant to be free.

Will you join in this freedom journey with me?

—REBEKAH LYONS



How to Use This Guide



THE **YOU ARE FREE** study is designed to be experienced in a group setting such as a Bible study, Sunday school class, or any small-group gathering. Each session begins with a brief introduction followed by “icebreaker” questions to get you interacting with the others in your group. You will then watch the video with Rebekah Lyons and jump into some directed small-group discussion. Note that even though there are multiple questions available for discussion, don’t feel that you have to use them all. Your leader will focus on the ones that resonate most with your group and guide you from there.

Each session will conclude with an individual activity and closing prayer. For the activity, you and your group will engage in some hands-on practical exercises that will help you move the content of the session from your head to your heart. Think of this time as an answer to the question, “What am I supposed to *do* with this message?”

Note that this study will be what you make of it. If you choose to just go through the motions, or if you refrain from participating, there is less chance you will find what you’re looking for during this study. But if you stay open to what God is saying to you and are willing to take a gamble, you may discover what so many others have already found to be true: faith and freedom come alive when we take holy risks for God.

Following your group time, you will have several more opportunities to engage the content of *You Are Free* during the week. The first of these “between-sessions” activities is designed to help you *reflect* on the content of the session and apply it more personally to your life. The second portion will help you examine your life, open your heart to God, and *confess* any areas

that are keeping you from experiencing the freedom that he has for you. The final portion will enable you to *respond* to the message through guided journaling and prayer activities.

Beginning in session two, there will be time in your group meeting before the video to check in about the previous week's activity and process your experiences as a group. Don't worry if you are unable to do an activity one week or are just joining the study. It will still be beneficial for you to hear from the other participants in the group and learn about what they discovered during the week.

Remember that the real growth in this study will happen during your small-group time. This is where you will process the content of the message, ask questions, and learn from others as you listen to what God is doing in their lives. As you go through this study, keep in mind that the videos, discussions, and activities are simply meant to kick-start your imagination so you are not only open to what God wants you to hear but also how to apply that to your life.

So, are you ready to experience the true freedom, peace, and joy that only Jesus can bring? Then let's jump into *You Are Free*!

Note

If you are a group leader, additional instructions and resources are found in the back of this guide to help you lead your members through the study. Because some of the activities require materials and set up, make sure you read this content so you will be prepared.

SESSION 1

To Be Free



We compete, and we compare, and we strive, and we put terrible pressure on ourselves to “keep up.” But the good news is that we were not made to keep up. We were made to be free . . . to be who we already are.

REBEKAH LYONS



INTRODUCTION

Country music superstar Garth Brooks and Christian recording artist Susan Ashton recorded the same song about twenty years ago called “You Move Me.” The lyrics to the chorus read in part:

*You give me courage I didn't know I had . . .
Now I can't go with you and stay where I am,
So you move me.*

Garth's version played on the radio this morning, and as I (Annie) sat here at my computer, tears began to form in my eyes. I was singing along, the words coming right back to the front of my mind even though I hadn't heard the song in probably more than a decade. I knew Susan Ashton's version first, so I can't listen to it and not think of it as a prayer I'm singing to God.

As we embark on this journey of freedom together, the question is: are those lyrics among the prayers in your heart to God?

Freedom is just that: we can't go with God into a free place and stay where we are. But thankfully, he moves us. For me, it was a literal city move to Nashville, Tennessee. I didn't know at the time that it was a move of freedom, an invitation to walk toward a freer life, but it always was. God always knew.

He knew my heart like he knows yours. He knew I wanted to go with him, wherever that led. And that's why you're here too, right? Because you want what he wants for you—and that, my friend, is freedom.

I think freedom in Christ is less like a tightrope we are meant to carefully balance our way across and more like a wide river that we get to jump in and float down. God moves us. We may plant and we may harvest, but he is the One who grows. He is the One who calls. He is the One who makes us brave enough to face old sin patterns and worries and leave them on the riverbank.

Freedom isn't a tricky thing. It is truly and purely freedom. If you want to be free in Christ, you can. Let's learn how.

WELCOME

Welcome to the first session of You Are Free: Be Who You Already Are. If you or any of your fellow group members do not know one another, take a little time to introduce yourself. Next, to get things started, discuss either of the following questions:

- What made you decide to participate in this study?
- What does freedom mean to you?

VIDEO PRESENTATION

Play the video segment for session one. As you watch, use the following outline to record any thoughts or concepts that stand out to you.

Notes

Over time, the fear and approval of men and women can get louder than our intimacy and union with God.

We want to please God and love him, but it's easy to fall into the trap of shifting our gaze to men and women—and wanting to please *them*.

“Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us” (Hebrews 12:1). Burden and bondage are like dead weight on a runner that's limping across the finish line.

Paul writes, “Do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery” (Galatians 5:1). Often we want communion with God, but we also want to hold onto our yoke of slavery.

Meaning follows surrender. When we fully surrender ourselves and our lives to Jesus, he fills us with his higher purpose.

Our calling and purpose—the assignment that God has for us—is often informed by the thing that breaks our heart and causes us pain.

Calling is where our talents and our burdens collide.

If we are able to admit our losses in life, we will be able to reclaim the gifts we once possessed.

GROUP DISCUSSION

Take a few minutes with your group members to discuss what you just watched and explore these concepts in Scripture.

1. What's a favorite childhood memory of freedom for you? (Rebekah shared about riding her bicycle.)
2. How would you explain the idea that "meaning follows surrender"? How have you seen that truth play out in your life?
3. In what ways do you struggle with being a people pleaser?
4. Read **Galatians 5:1**. What does this verse mean to you personally when you think about freedom in Christ?

5. How do you see your burdens and your talents colliding in your life right now?

6. In what ways have you seen purpose come from pain in your life or the lives of the people around you? What did that process look like?

7. Read **2 Corinthians 3:17**. How do freedom and calling go together? Give a personal example if you can think of one.

8. Author and educator Parker Palmer says, “We arrive in this world with birthright gifts—then we spend the first half of our lives abandoning them or letting others disabuse us of them.” In what ways have you found this to be true in your life?

INDIVIDUAL ACTIVITY

For this activity, each participant will need a note card.

As you close this session, answer the following question on a note card: “What do you hope to learn and experience in this study?” On the other side of the card, answer this question: “When you think about your calling, what comes to mind?”

CLOSING PRAYER

Ask the women in the group to read aloud the first answer from their note card—what they hope to gain from this study. Take time together to pray for those requests. Ask that God would show up for each woman as she needs and that she would see him moving in a unique way to her heart and calling.

RECOMMENDED READING

As you reflect on what God is teaching you through this session, review chapters 1–3 of the book *You Are Free* by Rebekah Lyons. In preparation for your next session, read chapters 4–6.

Between-Sessions Personal Study

SESSION 1

YOU ARE INVITED TO further explore the material you've covered this week by engaging in any or all of the following between-sessions activities. *Be sure to read the reflection questions after each activity and make a few notes in your guide about the experience.* There will be a time for you to share these reflections at the beginning of the next session.

REFLECT

I (Annie) was with a friend at a local Nashville restaurant, and I couldn't decide what to have for dinner. The waiter stopped by a few times to take our order, but I couldn't make up my mind. Turkey burger with sweet potato fries? Or a kale salad with truffle oil fries? Two of my favorite meals in Nashville. I just couldn't narrow it down.

As the waiter made his third pass, I looked at my friend and said, "I don't know what I want. You just order for me."

(The turkey burger was a great choice. I appreciated her quick decision making.)

About a week or so later, I was walking through the mall and passed a discount shoe store. One of those, you know, with hundreds of pairs of shoes lined up and down shelves. In the window display I noticed a pair of camel-colored mid-calf boots.

I walked into the store, and the woman behind the counter said, "Can I help you?"

I pointed directly at the window display and said, "THOSE. Those camel boots. I want those." And the woman led me to the right aisle.

Decision making isn't hard for me when I know what I want. But isn't that usually the case? When you know *exactly* what you want—as I knew with those beautiful boots (which I am wearing right now)—you just say it.

So . . . what is it that *you* want? Deep down.

Read **Matthew 20:29–34**. How would you describe the scene (verses 29–30)?

What does Jesus ask the two men (verse 32)?

It seems like the answer would be obvious to the men, doesn't it? They aren't deciding between great options on a menu. There is one clear thing they need: sight. And yet, Jesus asks them what they want him to do for them.

Why do you think Jesus did this?

Jesus wants to hear your desires. It's like the waiter who asked me and my friend what food we wanted, because he wanted to bring us just what would satisfy. The woman at the shoe store was the same—she wanted me to have exactly what I wanted. That's why she asked.

Jesus wants to hear your desires, hear your wants, even though he can clearly see what you need. And when it comes to freedom, he wants to give it to you.

You *can* be free. You may feel that you will be bound forever, or that you will be trapped forever, but you won't. Jesus brings freedom, and he brings it just so you'll be free.

Read **Galatians 5:1** again. What is Jesus' purpose in setting you free?

Jesus' purpose is not just for his glory (though it is). It's not just as a witness to the people around you (though it is). It's not to make you indebted to him (though you are). It's just for freedom. Because he doesn't want you to be bound. That's why he offers freedom: so you can leave a life of slavery, pursue your calling, and live free.



“From the beginning of time, all God ever wanted was our union with him. He didn’t create Adam and Eve because he wanted help cultivating the earth or naming the animals. Believe me, God is capable of this all by himself! No, he created man and woman because he wanted companionship. They were the pinnacles of his creation. He delighted in them and wanted intimacy with them. His purpose for them—and us—was freedom to walk with him.”



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CONFESS

We are going to dig deeper into confession during our next session, as it is truly at the center of entering into freedom in Christ. Opening your heart to God—being willing to admit your faults and rough spots and to look at your pain, history, shame, and sins—is the step toward healthy confession that allows God to heal you and set you free.

Read **2 Corinthians 3:17** and fill in the blanks: “Where the _____ is, there is _____.”

Here’s what we know: where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. So, as you pray and confess today, start by thanking God that wherever he is, there is freedom.

Confess the ways you have . . .

- Compared yourself to others

- Strived to be someone you aren't
- Chosen bondage over freedom because it felt easier

Confess, either in written word here or out loud with your mouth, that yes, you can be free.
YOU CAN BE FREE!

On the line below, write "I can be free."

If you are feeling brave today (and I hope you are!), on the next line write "I can be free of . . ." (and mention something you feel has been holding you back).



"Many of us in the church operate from a place of wounding. Some hide their wounds in shame. Others aim to prove themselves worthy. Many seek the approval of others; they take pride in the work of their hands. Consequently, we have created a culture of inadequacy and comparison in the body of Christ, causing many believers to feel a terrible pressure to strive. I wonder if Jesus looks at all our posturing, and says, 'I didn't ask you to do that.'"



RESPOND

Do you have a journal? If not, you may want one before this study is over. This doesn't have to be fancy—just some sort of notebook from your local bookstore or even the school supply section of your grocery. It will be helpful as you process, learn, and grow through this season. If you do not have a journal, use the lines below to answer the following questions:

Write

In what areas of your life do you feel bound?

What five words describe freedom to you?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

How would freedom change your life?

What would be different about tomorrow if you believed that you could be free?

If Jesus were standing right in front of you, and he asked you the same question that he asked the two blind men in Matthew 20:29–34, how would you answer? What do you want him to do for you?

Act

Take a walk around your house or your neighborhood, or head out on a hike. Put a little music in your ears and as your feet move you forward, think, and maybe pray. But definitely think. What is this study about for you? What scares you about this study? What are your hopes? Expectations? What does freedom mean for you? Take some time, here at the start, to connect with your heart and ask some important questions. If you'd like, jot down your thoughts here.

Pray

You. Can. Be. Free. Read the prayer below or copy it in your journal. Add your own thoughts, experiences, and emotions as you write.

Dear God, I want to be free. I know I do. In all the ways I can identify and in all the ways I can't quite see yet, I want freedom. In the areas where I feel bound to sin, I want freedom. In the mind-sets from my past, I want freedom. In the places of pain that I always return to, I want freedom. Meet me in this study time, in these pages, as I watch the videos and interact with my small group. Change me from the inside out. My eyes are open to what you are doing here in my life and in the areas of confession, healing, and freedom. I'm looking to you for freedom. I want to be free, and I believe that with you, only you, I can be free.

You Are Free

Be Who You Already Are

Rebekah Lyons

Have you bought the lie? Many of us do. We measure our worth by what others think of us. We compare and strive, existing mostly for the approval of others. Pressure rises, anxiety creeps in, and we hustle to keep up.

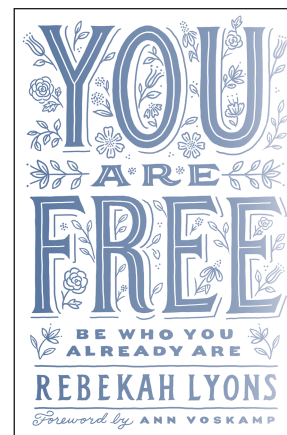
Jesus whispers, *I gave my life to set you free. I gave you purpose. I called you to live in freedom in that purpose.* Yet we still hobble through life, afraid to confess all the ways we push against this truth, because we can't even believe it. We continue to grasp for the approval of anyone that will offer it: whether strangers, friends, or community.

Christ doesn't say you *can* be or *may* be or *will* be free. He says you *are* free. Dare you believe it?

In *You Are Free*, Rebekah invites you to:

- Overcome the exhaustion of trying to meet the expectations of others and rest in the joy God's freedom brings.
- Release stress, anxiety, and worry to uncover the peace that comes from abiding in his presence.
- Find permission to grieve past experiences, confess areas of brokenness, and receive strength in your journey toward healing.
- Throw off self-condemnation, burn superficial masks, and step boldly into what our good God has for you.
- Discover the courage to begin again and use your newfound freedom to set others free.

Freedom is for everyone who wants it—the lost, the wounded, and those weary from all of the striving. It's for those who gave up trying years ago. It's for those angry and hurt, burnt by the Christian song and dance. You are the church, the people of God. You were meant to be free.



Available in stores and online!