



Bulletin

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Happy Birthday, USA!

AT THE HEART OF AMERICAN FREEDOM

BY JIM DALY

I'VE SEEN GOVERNMENT OVERREACH AND OPPRESSION FIRSTHAND. I WAS IN Moscow in August of 1991, when President Mikhail Gorbachev was placed under house arrest. Russian citizens were told that he was ill. In reality, he was being held hostage.

I've been in other countries whose governments tolerate only so much before cracking down on expressions of faith.

Similar oppression is emerging in the United States. Many in our government work to stamp out influence from people of faith. As long as we keep our faith private and don't rock the cultural boat, we're ignored. Otherwise, watch out.

The concept of "separation of church and state" is routinely misrepresented and used as a muzzle to force people of sincere religious faith out of the public square. The phrase isn't found in any founding document. It was written by Thomas Jefferson in a letter to the Danbury Baptists, who worried the government would interfere with their expression of religion. Jefferson assured them that the Constitution built "a wall of separation." That is, people of faith were to be protected from the government, not the other way around.

The First Amendment couldn't articulate more plainly the government's hands-off relationship to religious freedom: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

Religious freedom lies at the heart of American freedom.

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TRUE FREEDOM IN CHRIST

In the “land of the free,” we often confuse the true nature of freedom. For many of us, freedom has become synonymous with personal independence—the ability to make our own decisions and choose our own path in life, to do whatever we want, whenever we want. It’s what I call “outside freedom.” But this is not the freedom in Christ that we have been given.

When Jesus revealed Himself as the Messiah, He said that He had come to Earth to “proclaim freedom” (Luke 4:18, NIV). And on another occasion, He said, “If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed” (John 8:36).

Jesus was not setting us free to do whatever we want; He was freeing us to do what we ought to do. He was liberating us to walk in relationship with God and to be the kind of people He created us to be. This spiritual freedom in Christ is what I call “inside freedom”—the ability to obey God and choose His will for our lives.

And this is the freedom in Christ that sin had long denied us.

Jesus shocked the Pharisees, the spiritual leaders of His day, when He stated, “I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave of sin” (John 8:34, NIV). Jesus was asserting that we are all under the power and control of a natural tendency to sin; we can’t get away from it by ourselves.

Sin brings a penalty that, by ourselves, we can’t escape either. The Bible says, “The wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23).

How do we find freedom from the penalty and power of sin? That comes through accepting Jesus Christ’s death on the cross as the payment for our sin. As we submit to Christ, sin loses its power—Christ’s power takes over. As we choose to trust and follow Him, our sinful habits, thoughts and attitudes lose their control. Guilt disappears, and peace of mind dominates. That’s freedom in Christ—true freedom!

—Larry Fowler

DISCUSSING FREEDOM WITH YOUR KIDS

Kids live in a culture that says, “I want it all, and I want it now!” This cultural motto implies that freedom is doing whatever we want, whenever we want.

Discuss with your kids how this attitude might look in daily life. Could this definition of freedom ultimately lead to painful consequences?

Jesus came to set us free from a life of regretful choices and consequences. He delivers us from sin’s power, so we’re free to follow Him and live healthy, godly lives. Even as kids yearn for the power to do as they please, they need to understand that

true freedom is from the power of sin, as well as to a life of righteousness.

In 1 Corinthians 10:23, Paul writes, “‘Everything is permissible,’ but not everything is beneficial” (CSB). Discuss this verse with your kids, focusing on the fact that freedom means we get to choose God’s best for our lives every day.

Pray for your kids, trusting they will use their freedom in Christ to be all that God created them to be. Pray that they recognize the blessing of doing God’s will because it’s right, regardless of how it feels.

—Pam Woody

PRAY THE WORD FOR YOUR CHILDREN DAILY

Early on in my parenting, I struggled to be the kind of godly mom I want to be. Two important truths about God’s Word inspired me:

- “For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12).
- “It [My Word] shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it” (Isaiah 55:11).

If those two verses are true, then it made sense that there could be no better thing to pray for my children than God’s Word itself.

I began searching the Scriptures for things I wanted God to accomplish in my sons’ hearts, crafting those verses into prayers and praying them back to Him. Prayer is one of the most important, but overlooked, ingredients of Christian parenting today. If you’re not praying, start now.

—Brooke McGlottlin



LIVE IT CHALLENGE

LIVE THE ADVENTURE!

Summer vacation is an awesome time for us to have fun and enjoy time off from academics. But after the first few weeks, we can get bored with nothing to do. So why not use summer vacation to serve God and grow your faith? This month's Live It Challenge will encourage you to use this summer wisely.

Summer is one of the best times to start a new adventure and share your light with others. This year, choose to go on an adventure that will get you out of the house, make a difference in the lives of others and share the love of Jesus.

Have fun with it and invite Jesus to walk alongside you as you choose one of the five activities from this month's Live It Challenge to do. Ask His Holy Spirit to give you wisdom and guidance and make you stronger as you exercise your faith.

Remember, your walk with God is the most incredible adventure you can ever have. And what's even better is that you don't have to go on that adventure alone. You have the ultimate adventure partner in Him, and He will bring along others with whom you can share the journey.

There will be surprises, belly laughs, a few tears and stunning vistas along this adventure. Some stretches will be challenging. Others will make you crawl through canyons. But if you keep going and trust God to lead you on the right path, you will reach the summit: the ultimate place to watch the Son shine.

So jump into one of our five summer challenges in this month's Live It Challenge and make the most of your summer!

Ready to embark upon your summer adventure with God? Check out this month's Live It Challenge. Be sure to encourage your friends and church youth or children's ministries to join you! To sign up or for more information, just use this QR code.



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