

## Intro

Good morning! My name is Landon Paul and I serve here as Pastor of Worship. But this morning, I have the great privilege of opening God's Word to us as we continue our series the Freedom of Discipline.

We've grown accustomed to hearing folks the last few weeks with noticeable accents. That streak will only continue today if you're from north of the Mason/Dixon line, sorry to disappoint there.

But going back even farther, Mike Ford did our first several disciplines and framed this series really well for us by saying that each week we are looking together at a different practice or spiritual discipline that has been recognized throughout church history. And as we examine each one, we have to do it with the starting point that we believe that Jesus alone saves us. It's his grace alone received through the gift of faith alone in Christ alone that saves us – and save us he does! But he doesn't just save us *from a life of sin and shame*, he saves us *to a life of freedom and love*. And so to become like Jesus, it means doing as he did which is why we're examining together several different disciplines that Jesus himself modeled for us when he was here on earth. And we hope that in doing so we become more like him and live lives of freedom and service to him.<sup>1</sup>

So, this morning, we'll examine together our **freedom to worship**.

## Definition

So I wonder, what's the first thing that comes to mind when I say that word, "worship?" Is it music? Something else? In our context, worship is so often used as a synonym for musical worship but – as hard as it is to believe coming from me – this morning we're not going to talk about music at all.

The reason is because biblically defined, worship is much broader than that. Music is a part of worship, but it's not the heart of worship. Our English word for worship comes from another word meaning, "worth ship"<sup>2</sup> or the idea of attributing worth and value to something or someone. For our purposes this morning, true worship can be defined as John Piper puts it as a "valuing or treasuring of God above all things."<sup>3</sup> **(REPEAT DEF)**

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<sup>1</sup> This is an updated paraphrase from his intro on 6/22.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/what-is-worship>.

<sup>3</sup> All the Piper's are from this article: <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/what-is-worship>. Other good ones from that article: "True worship is based on a right understanding of God's nature, and it is a right valuing of God's worth." "So, here is my summary: The inner essence of worship is to know God truly and then respond from the heart to that knowledge by valuing God, treasuring God, prizing God, enjoying God, being satisfied with God above all earthly things. And then that

## Hook

That's what worship is and whether we value, treasure, or attribute that worth to God or to something else, we all will worship something. Why? Because we were made to!

We aren't simply worshipers because we worship someone or something. No, we naturally give ourselves in worship to the greatest treasure of our hearts because we ARE worshipers.

We worship because we are worshipers at our very core, in our very being, created to reflect worth.

We could prove this biblically and will seek to do that today. But this is so self-evident that it's seen clearly in things all around us if we look closely enough. Spare me just one quick thought exercise that'll be pretty easy for us in here this morning:

I want you to envision a place where people gather together to adore the object of highest value, the greatest treasure of their hearts. They come together regularly to sing corporately with one voice, to remember the past through their traditions, to lament together when things don't go well, to celebrate when they do, to be bonded together with a common interest and history and story, to devote themselves wholly to the thing that has most captivated their very being and has fundamentally shaped their identity.

Of course this has nothing to do at all with church. What I'm describing is Neyland stadium every Saturday in the fall.

[pause to let that soak]

Everyone worships – treasures something – because we were made to. So the question for the day then is, what does the freedom to **truly** worship – to value or treasure God above all things – look like? Let's go now to God's Word to answer that question for us.

Our sermon text is Deuteronomy 5:1-10 so turn with me to page 150 in your pew Bibles and let's read it together. As you turn, keep your Bibles open because we'll reference it early and often.

## Text

[Read Deut 5:1-10]

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deep, restful, joyful satisfaction in God overflows in demonstrable acts of praise from the lips and demonstrable acts of love in serving others for the sake of Christ.”

Starting with chapter 5 verse 1, “And Moses summoned all Israel and said to them, “Hear, O Israel, the statutes and the rules that I speak in your hearing today, and you shall learn them and be careful to do them. **2** The LORD our God made a covenant with us in Horeb. **3** Not with our fathers did the LORD make this covenant, but with us, who are all of us here alive today. **4** The LORD spoke with you face to face at the mountain, out of the midst of the fire, **5** while I stood between the LORD and you at that time, to declare to you the word of the LORD. For you were afraid because of the fire, and you did not go up into the mountain. He said:

**6** “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

**7** “You shall have no other gods before me.

**8** “You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. **9** You shall not bow down to them or serve them; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, **10** but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.”

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Let’s pray.

### **Prayer of Invocation**

Lord, your Word is living, active, sharper than any two-edged sword. It’s the sharpest thing in the world which is great news for us because it has to cut through the hardest thing in the world which is our own heart.<sup>4</sup> So cause it to discern our thoughts today and be our Teacher by the Spirit of Christ. Amen.

### **Context**

As a brief word of context, Deuteronomy means “Second Law.” And it’s not labeled that because somehow it’s replacing the first law given in Exodus 20. Not at all! In fact, all the events of the Exodus are well in view here, too, and we’ll reference several of them.

The reason the Law is given again here is because the generation that was given that first Law at Sinai had all passed away in the wilderness wanderings. Before this covenant people could take possession of the land of promise, they needed to be renewed in the covenant and be given the Law themselves.

Verses 1 through 5 show this to us in our text.

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<sup>4</sup> This was a beautiful quote of Mike Kruger’s at GA this year.

*Transition and preview of my three points: So, the most important thing from the context is establishing that God had acted on their behalf and had every right to define for them how they were to respond as his people – as true worshipers – now free to worship him alone.*

## Content

### Point 1: Free to Worship

Our text gives us three points that show what it means to experience the Freedom of Worship.

The first thing our text shows us is that God's covenant people are now free to do what they were made to do – to worship! (FINGERS) We're free to worship. Look with me at verse 6,

“I am the LORD your God, who *brought you out* of the land of Egypt, *out of the house of slavery*.”

This verse is so rich and could have a sermon preached on each clause but for our purposes, we'll use it to recall that back in Exodus the reason that Moses gave Pharaoh the very first time he asked him to let his people go, wasn't primarily to escape their slavery and oppression – it was to worship. Exodus 7:16,

“And you shall say to him [Pharaoh], ‘The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, sent me to you, saying, “Let my people go, *that they may serve* me in the wilderness.”’

That Hebrew word for “serve” there is עָבַד which when used later in Exodus carries with it the meaning of “to serve in the context of worship.”<sup>5</sup> The NIV even translates that verse as “Let my people go, that they may **worship** me in the wilderness.” The purpose was to free them to worship. So why, then, couldn't they worship truly in Egypt? Well, there are several reasons for that but one had to do with proximity and distractions.

### Illustrate

I know that I'm a worshiper and that my heart attributes worth and treasures whatever pulls at it the strongest. And most of the time whatever pulls the strongest is whatever is closest to me.

So, when I'm on a date with my wife, I attribute worth to that relationship by leaving my phone in my pocket. Because when it's out, it says something to her and to my own heart. It tells her and it tells me that the beautiful woman in front of me is not worthy of my undivided attention.

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<sup>5</sup> Chalot cf. Ex 10:26 also 3:12.

In order to engage most meaningfully with her, I have to be freed from the distractions and proximity of other things vying for my attention and my heart – because I’ll give to something. So in order to fully give it to her, I can’t be around other things that would so easily take it.

God took his people out of their bondage in Egypt – away from the distraction of its idols – and gave them the freedom to do the thing they were made to do – to worship.

*Transition: But in their freedom, what or who were they now to worship? Just like us, they were made to worship and would worship something. So toward what end has their freedom been given? They were now free to **worship God (FINGERS)**. And that’s our second point. They were free to worship God.*

## Point 2: Free to Worship God

Where do we see that in our text? Well, once again we see it clearly in the grounding clause of verse 6 as God reveals himself as the One who freed them and as the One whom they should now rightly worship. Look with me again at **verse 6**,

**“I am the LORD your God**, who has brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.”

Before going into the promised land, the people needed to be reminded who it was that led them there. So God uses here his personal, covenantal name that he revealed to Moses in Exodus 3 – YHWH.

Recall back to last Summer if you were here when we did the names of God series. We learned then that when we see the LORD in all caps in the Old Testament, it stands for that covenantal name of God, YHWH, the “I Am.” The one, true God, was their God. He was the One who led them out of Egypt and was giving them the land of promise. God’s people had been freed now *from slavery to worship* and to worship him.

But just like us, they needed that point to be made clearly and to be reminded of it. So just a few verses later, Moses, being the master teacher that he was, summarizes the point for them in what we now know to be the Greatest Commandment. Hop forward to look with me at **chapter 6, verses 4 and 5**.

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. **5** You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

This isn't new material. These commands are a summation of the Law that they just heard to make sure that they actually heard it. And again in all caps, we see that YHWH, the LORD was their God and they were to worship him specifically.

### Illustrate

It's been said that repetition is the mother of learning and I think there's a lot of truth to that. Sometimes, I teach it to my young children but sometimes they teach it to me.

Have you ever had a kid who was what we call in our house a "Pester-head?" They just keep going and going reminding you of the ice cream you had "allegedly" promised them 3 months ago until you finally get it for them. Perhaps that's just the nagging of a child. OR perhaps it's a brilliant pedagogical device to cause you to remember AND NEVER FORGET the promise you made to your 5 year old.

I'll let you decide: Childish menace? Brilliant teacher? Who's to say?

Nonetheless, Moses uses repetition here as a tool to bring out the core of what God was giving his people and that was the freedom to worship him.

*Recap/Transition: They were now free to worship YHWH, their covenant Lord, which brings us to point 3, that they were also freed to worship God **alone** (FINGERS)– **him alone**.*

### Point 3: Free to Worship God Alone

Recall Piper's definition that true worship is "valuing or treasuring of God above all things." And that's what **verses 7-9** teach us. Hop back to our text in chapter 5 and read with me,

"You shall have no other gods before me.

**8** "You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. **9** You shall not bow down to them or serve them,"

The context is really important to remember here as well because on both sides of the Exodus, God's people would try to claim the other gods around them. The Israelites lived in a highly polytheistic context in Egypt and were about to enter one too in Canaan which was replete with household gods. In fact, the Canaanite context they were going to was a particular kind of polytheism whereby everyone could have their own household gods while also affirming that others existed too. And they could even be integrated into each other's "pantheon" of sorts.

The people had been freed to worship and to worship YHWH, but in the land they were going, that was fine! Because the people there could worship their gods too right alongside them and even give their gods to them, right? But the commandments point to the fact that that's not possible. There is only One true, and living God and he's the One that freed the people of Israel and is the only One they were to worship.

But that's not all. Remember from point one that God said he freed them from the land of Egypt and from the house of slavery. This wasn't merely bondage to a physical place, it was also a spiritual bondage to the idols and idolatry of that place.

The people had been taken out of Egypt, but Egypt hadn't yet been taken out of them.

You see, the commandments here aren't handcuffs to keep them or us from having fun. They are the keys that undo the shackles from our hearts that so easily give themselves to things that enslave us and could never satisfy – like sin.

### Illustrate

If you know me at all, you know that Fall is by far my favorite season for so many reasons. The cool air, the colors of the trees, football, tailgates, the greatest drink of all time otherwise known as the Pumpkin Spice Latte. But one of my favorite parts of Fall is sitting with my family around the firepit. It's beautiful to just stare at and gives us warmth on those cool Fall evenings. But just like our hearts, the grass around it is ready to catch fire. So what would happen if I took the stones that form the boundary of the firepit away?

The commandments God gives here aren't handcuffs, they're boundaries to enjoy the fire of God's love and to live as he intended – worshiping him alone.

*Summary:* So, **the freedom to worship God alone** is the freedom now to give ourselves fully to the One we were made to adore – freed from the shackles of slavery to sin. **The discipline**, then, is to remember the mighty works of God, and to be resolved not to put the handcuffs of idolatry back on.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> This is Paul's exact point to the Galatians in ch. 4 of that letter.

*Transition: We know that as we continue reading, Israel didn't follow this discipline or live in light of the freedom to worship God alone. We've talked a lot about their story today. So, what does this all mean now for us? Simply, look to Christ. He's the great fulfillment of every type, shadow, and promise that we read of him in the Old Testament and we're free now to worship him alone.*

## **Consequence**

The claims of the New Testament are that Christ is God, the covenanting God, YHWH, who still acts on behalf of his people. And as we've already sung today, one of the ways he does this is as the true and better Moses who leads us out of the house of slavery and bondage to sin and idols that so easily captivate us. And as we consider Christ and everything that we are now in him – eternally loved, redeemed, adopted as sons and daughters, sustained, led as by a tender Shepherd, united together forever and ever with him – isn't he so much better than everything else we give ourselves to? He is the only thing that truly satisfies in this life and he's the only thing you'll worship in the next.

Our hearts were made to worship and will worship something – they long to give themselves to it. Why not be resolved today to give them freely to Christ who's given you everything now in him at the cost of his own blood? As Augustine said so long ago, "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you."

And you don't have to take my word or Augustine's word for it either. I'd challenge any of us today ask any of our senior saints if the love of Christ has ever failed to satisfy their hearts. She's gonna get onto me for saying this but go find Kathy Smith after this service, look her in eyes and ask her: Through the ups and downs, seasons of plenty or drought, has the well of Living Water ever run dry?

Christ is the only thing that can truly satisfy. He's the living water that in drinking will cause us never to thirst again. He's the only One worthy of our unending worship and to be first in our hearts – and we're free now to worship him alone.

## **Land the Plane**

*Transition: So, how do we do that practically?*

Throughout church history there have been many excellent answers to this question. To narrow it down, though, I'll give two very practical principles for us as a church here at Cedar Springs from Richard Foster's book *Celebration of Discipline*. The hope is that these will help us fully engage and enjoy Sundays together and to enjoy the freedom that it brings.



- The first principle is: Practice Daily Worship<sup>7</sup>
  - Let's be a people who don't wait until Sunday mornings to give God what he deserves all week long.
  - Remember, we don't earn God's love by how great we are at this. It's already fully ours in Christ.
  - BUT, what a difference it would make if we made it our daily habit to practice the presence of God and really tried our best to follow Paul's words to "Pray without ceasing? (1 Thess 5:17)"
- In regards to our hearts, if we practice giving them to God intentionally throughout the week, as hearts now freed in Christ to worship him, Sunday will be much more familiar to them.

Recap: 1) Practice Daily Worship and 2)

- Prepare for Corporate Worship.
  - Let's be a people that don't wait until we get here to prepare to worship together.
  - Just like you'd never start hydrating for a race after you got there, preparing for worship takes time to soak into our souls.
  - Foster writes, "Find ways to really prepare for the gathered experience of worship. Prepare on Saturday night by going to bed early, by having an inward experience of examination and confession, by going over the hymns and Scripture passages that will be used on Sunday, by gathering early before the actual worship service and filling the room with the presence of God, by letting go of inner distractions so that you can really participate."<sup>8</sup>
- Those are several ideas of how to prepare but at its core, what we're seeking here is to come expecting to meet with the Lord, with hearts open to what he would have for us, and freed to give ourselves in response to that message.

## Final word

This week, wherever we are, let's become aware of what our hearts are **prone** to worship – even if it means admitting that we're elevating too high the great gift of being born a Tennessee fan. And let's **practice** and **prepare** to be a people who are bent on giving God what he alone deserves and living in the freedom of doing what we were made to do – **worshipping him together as God alone**. Let's pray,

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<sup>7</sup> Foster, 171.

<sup>8</sup> Foster, 171. Undergirding this is also the Book of Worship section on preparation.

### **Prayer of Thanksgiving**

Lord, we thank you for your Word given to us in love to teach us about you, what you've done for us, and what you're calling us to – a life of freedom to worship you alone. We thank you for the truth this morning that you've saved us **from** a life of sin and shame, and saved us **to** a life of freedom and love – all in Christ. So, to him alone be the glory now and forever. Amen.