

How To Gain Freedom Through Christ to Be Yourself

[3 STEPS TO GET YOU STARTED]



"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free."

GALATIANS 5:1A (NIV)

*Did you know: The freer you are in Christ, the more **YOU** you'll become?*

This study guide will help you explore the first three steps to gaining freedom through Christ, and thereby become your whole self.

Once you've worked your way through this guide, please continue to pursue Jesus for further freedom. **God is faithful. He will continue to work in your life, bringing you to greater levels of freedom as you learn more of his Truth for you.**

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**HOW TO GAIN
FREEDOM THROUGH
CHRIST TO BE
YOURSELF
[3 STEPS TO GET
YOU STARTED]**

*Personal or Small Group
Study Guide*

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Intro to Study Guide:

Hello, dear friends!

I'm excited to walk alongside you on this journey to ever-increasing freedom through Christ to be who God made us to be.

Did you know that gaining freedom to be yourself and finding freedom through Christ is one and the same journey?

Your path to personal freedom is a process of gaining ever-increasing freedom through Christ. **The freer you are in Christ, the more YOU you'll become!**

This study guide can be used for your own personal study or with a small group. Whichever way you choose to study, please remember this truth:

Freedom through Christ is an ever-increasing journey, not a quick fix program. Do not be discouraged if you feel your progress is moving slowly. **Every step you take brings you more freedom, so never give up!**



What Does Freedom Through Christ Look Like?

*(This is my story about how my journey to freedom through Christ to be my whole self began. The information found in the next 11 pages has been taken directly from my article **How to Gain Freedom Through Christ to Be Yourself [3 Steps to Get You Started]**, as seen on www.saralivingfree.com. It contains crucial information for you before you continue on with this study and its corresponding action steps.)*

How to Gain Freedom to Be Yourself [3 Steps to Get You Started]

Christ came to set us free, but what does that mean? I've often felt confused by the concept of freedom through Christ. I've wondered what it looks like, how to access it, and if it could also help me find the freedom to be myself.

It Is for Freedom That Christ Has Set You Free

It frustrates me when Scripture is quoted as a quick-fix to our deepest struggles. Verses such as *"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free"* (Gal. 5:1 NIV) and *"So, if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed"* (John 8:36 ESV) have become popular catchphrases. Yet, how do we reconcile these biblical promises with what we see in the world today?

If what the Bible says is true, why are Christians still bound by pain, unforgiveness, and destructive habits?

Why are there Christians wandering through life not even knowing who God made them to be, never mind finding the freedom to be that person?

I believe Christians remain bound for many reasons. Here are just a few:

- They've been deeply hurt and are bound by bitterness.
- They're hiding in shame due to past or present circumstances or sins.
- They believe lies about themselves, others, and the world.

I used to be one of those Christians. In some ways, I still am.

Why? Because true freedom isn't simply a memory verse.

It isn't instantaneous, and it's not a quick-fix program.

It's also much more than a sure path to heaven or a free pass from Old Testament laws.

Then, what does freedom in Christ look like?

I've discovered that finding true freedom through Christ is a life journey toward ever-increasing freedom.

Not only that but gaining ever-increasing freedom through Christ and finding the freedom to be yourself is an interdependent process:

- The freer Christ makes you, the more you become who He made you to be; and
- the more you become who God made you to be, the more freedom you'll gain in other areas of your life!

Today, I'm freer and more whole than I've ever been. But it took me a while to get here...

My Journey to Gaining Freedom Through Christ

I haven't always followed God.

My childhood home was loving and God-centred, and at sixteen I was baptized. I loved God as best I knew how. By the time I reached 20, however, my life was steeped in alcohol, parties, promiscuity, and selfishness.

I hardly knew who I was or what I wanted.

One day, I would get drunk at a bar, and the next, I attended church with my parents.

Why? Because there was something inside me that knew the truth and wanted to live in the light. Yet, when night came, temptation rose, and I willingly befriended darkness again.

With each year that passed, I lost more and more of who I was:

- My fun personality became less delightful and more obnoxious.
- My joy gave way to sullenness.
- My tender conscience grew jaded and hardened my heart.
- My creativity – writing, drawing, painting, singing – took a back seat to drunken revelry.
- My previous desire to know God all but disappeared.

The world convinced me that my new lifestyle equaled freedom, but feelings of discontent and restlessness revealed the truth: The more I indulged in sin, the less I resembled the person God made me to be.

God Loved Me Out of My Pit of Destruction

Throughout my rebellious years, God continually wooed me. I mostly resisted his advances. He was persistent, though – unwilling to let me go without a fight.

Over the course of several years, God softened my heart. Progress was slow. God was patient. My choice patterns shifted. More and more, I chose light over darkness.

At 23, I got married. When I became pregnant with my first child, I realized I would have to be a role model. Did I want my child to watch me straddle the fence between darkness and light?

My future suddenly became clear, and I finally made a definite decision: I wanted to be all God's.

With great fervor, I plunged into the Christian life:

- I read inspirational books written by Christians.
- I prayed, and I studied my Bible.
- I grew to love Jesus in a way I never had before.

The previous years of rebellion, however, held consequences.

Searching for Sara

Certainly, I felt loved and forgiven by God, but there were past hurts and sins I struggled to find freedom from.

Also, I didn't understand who I was, as if I'd lost pieces of myself along the way and didn't know where to find them.

I wanted to give God all of me, but who was that?

God was kind. He reminded me, here and there, just how He'd made me.

For example, one day, I was decorating the house for my son's birthday party. As I blew up several over-sized balloons, I suddenly remembered how I liked to draw when I was a teenager. Feeling inspired, I grabbed a Sharpie marker and drew cartoons on each balloon – Dora, The Cat in the Hat, Diego, etc. I felt a spark ignite inside me as I let creativity feed my soul. My son was super excited about his custom birthday balloons. My husband was surprised. He didn't even know I could draw. How would

he? I'd met him during my rebellion, at a time when I'd already abandoned these pieces of me.

I searched for myself through friendships, gardening, family time, home improvement projects, church, and books:

- I learned that I'm great at refurbishing old furniture.
- While attempting gardening, I unearthed the fact that I have a dreadful black thumb.
- I also discovered I have a passion for study and learning and writing.

It was fun to find myself. But parts of me were still bound and buried.

For instance, I've always had a loud, expressive personality. As a child, I entertained my family and friends. As a teenager, I was a hoot to have around. As a rebellious young adult, however, I became more obnoxious. So, after I'd decided to give God all of me, I thought that meant I needed to be quiet, submissive and reserved. I stuffed my big personality deep down for fear I would hurt the people around me, just as I had during my years of rebellion. This left me feeling trapped and confused.

Two Keys to Freedom

All the while, God knew my heart and understood my searching. When the time was right, He revealed to me these two key truths, which became catalysts in my progress toward freedom through Christ.

I believe these two keys apply to all Christians:

1. God was delighted that I wanted to be all his, but He also wanted Jesus to be all mine – my everything.
2. If I wanted to be my whole self, I'd have to fight for freedom through Christ.

I can't pinpoint the exact moment when these truths became clear to me. God often works that way – slowly, gently revealing truth to us until it becomes so vivid and sure that we wonder how we ever missed it.

Today, I'm freer and more whole than I've ever been. I'm also continuing to embrace Jesus – more and more – as my everything and to fight for my freedom.

As I said earlier, finding true freedom in Christ is a life journey of ever-increasing freedom that also frees you to be yourself.

Through Christ, you can be free, too!

You Can Be Free, Too!

Since God made you, He's the only One with the wisdom and power needed to set you free —

- free from the past,
- free to love Him more,
- free from bondage,
- free to love others

- free from hurts, and
- free to be who He made you to be.

Your most efficient, powerful, life-giving, soul-freeing path to gaining freedom to be yourself – the whole you – is through Jesus Christ.

When God gave me my two keys to freedom, I believe He meant them for every believer:

1. God wants you to surrender fully to Him and to embrace Jesus as your everything.
 - *"Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow me. If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it" (Matthew 16:24-45 NLT).*
 - *"Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing." (John 15:4-5 ESV).*
2. God wants you to participate by fighting for your freedom through Christ.
 - *"We are not fighting against humans. We are fighting against forces and authorities and against rulers of darkness and powers in the spiritual world" (Ephesians 6:12 CEV).*

Now is the time to be free!

Let God heal you, refresh you, reveal truth to you, speak to you, and guide you along your life journey toward ever-increasing freedom.

There are always greater levels of freedom available to you through Christ.

3 Steps to Get You Started On Your Own Journey to Freedom

Here are three steps toward freedom through Christ for you to consider today.

As you grow in faith and in your relationship with Jesus, God will continue to reveal His truth to you and show you the next step on your own journey to freedom.

I'll be sharing with you many of my own stories of freedom here on **Sara, Living Free**. These will be stories about how God speaks to me and frees me. God is always doing a new thing! He's still revealing to me who I am, which leads to exciting discoveries! My stories are intended to encourage you, to help you along your own journey.

For today, let's start with your first three steps:

Step One: Embrace Jesus as More Than Just Your Saviour.

If you want to gain freedom in your life, you must accept Jesus Christ as more than just your Saviour. He is your Counselor, Master, Guide, Lord, Teacher, Comforter, and more.

Sadly, many Christians accept Jesus as their Saviour, then leave their relationship with Jesus at that level, never knowing Him as their Confidant, Deliverer, Friend, King, Provider, etc.

Jesus wants so much more for us. He IS so much more!

Jesus Is My Husband

When I was first learning to embrace Jesus as my everything, one of the first things God showed me was that Jesus is my husband.

In every relationship, there are areas where we are left feeling alone or misunderstood. There were times when my husband couldn't fix things for me, times when he was unable to comfort my heart the way I wanted or needed.

I sensed God say to me one day, "Don't burden your husband with something only I can give you. I am your husband. Come to me."

Too many movies and novels portray soul-mate type relationships where partners are perfectly intuitive to their spouse's emotional needs. This leaves many women with unrealistic expectations in marriage.

I've learned that when my husband is unable to understand a deep emotional struggle I'm experiencing, I can bring my pain to God, who comforts me in the exact way I need.

That way, I don't burden my husband with a task he's not meant to fulfill.

At the same time, I draw closer to God by allowing Him to be more of my everything. Accepting Jesus as my husband brought a new level of freedom to both my marriage and my relationship with God!

Jesus is your everything.

The Bible is full of wisdom and encouragement. Most of us have favorite verses we go back to time and again in order to draw strength from them.

I've noticed one particular verse that many people draw motivation from when facing trials:

"I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me" (Phil.4:13 EHV).

This is a fantastic truth. It means that whatever God commands us to do – no matter how insurmountable the task may seem – we can be sure that we can accomplish it through Christ, who strengthens us.

Unfortunately, when reading this verse, we too often focus on the "I can" and miss the most important part "through Christ."

If we reverse the order of the words in this verse, its intended meaning is clearer: Through Christ who strengthens me, I can do all things.

Can you see the difference?

- Through Christ, you can heal from childhood wounds.

- Through Christ, you can transform relationships.
- Through Christ, you can embrace your big personality and not be afraid of others judging you.
- Through Christ, you can forgive those who've injured you.
- Through Christ, you can find freedom to be yourself.

Jesus is literally our everything: We were created by Him and for Him, and we live through Him.

*"But for us, [t]here is one God, the Father, by whom all things were created, and for whom we live. And there is one Lord, **Jesus Christ, through whom all things were created, and through whom we live**" (1 Corinthians 8:16 NLT).*

I encourage you today to make a decision to pursue Jesus as your everything, and especially as your Strength to find freedom.

When you're free to be who God made you to be, you bring glory to God.

Step Two: Through Christ, Take Action

It's true that *"if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed"* (John 8:36 ESV), but did you know that Jesus provides us with two types of freedom?

First, Jesus set you free from eternal death. Praise the Lord! This freedom is instantaneous upon salvation, and we are eternally grateful for it. It is a finished work, completed on our behalf by Jesus Christ our Lord.

But there's more!

Second, Jesus came to set us free here on earth during our lifetime. He wants to free us from hurt, trauma, pain, addiction, sickness, bitterness, anger... the list goes on. If we want this second type of freedom, however, we'll need to start taking action. It will require time and willingness on our part to search for truth. Jesus said, *"You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free"* (John 8:32 ESV).

What's the Truth?

The Word of God is truth. Take action by reading and studying the Bible.

Ask God to reveal His truth to you while you read it. His Word is powerful and effective to transform you.

In addition to revealing truth to you through His Word, there will also be times when God will also reveal a specific truth to you through his Holy Spirit, something that will help you along your journey to freedom.

God's Word promises that *"when the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth"* (John 16:13 ESV). The Holy Spirit can speak directly to you in many ways, but be sure to remember that His specific commands to you and your circumstance will always be in agreement with what the Word of God says.

You can trust God to reveal special truths to you, through His Word and by His Holy Spirit, *in His perfect timing*.

Remember, Jesus made you. He alone knows why you've never been able to get past what your friend did to you all those years ago. He's the One who can reveal the truth of why that hurt affected you so traumatically and how you can be free of it.

God is the Great Physician and knows best how to heal your heart.

There's a War Within You

As much as Jesus wants to set you free, Satan wants to keep you bound.

We're in a battle for freedom whether we like it or not. We'll need Jesus to fight by our side if we want to gain our freedom.

Jesus has all the power. But He still expects us to do our part.

Years ago, I suffered through a severe bout of anxiety, fear, and paranoia. I knew my thoughts weren't rational, but the oppressive fear was so strong that I couldn't shake free.

During this time, I had to learn about the fine balance between acknowledging that Jesus Christ was the only way to freedom while also doing my part.

When a wave of fear would overtake me, I remember playing praise songs and worshipping God to focus my mind on Jesus.

The Holy Spirit also revealed to me that I needed to continually focus on this truth: "Jesus came to set me free. My victory is in the blood of Christ." I repeated these words whenever I felt the fear was crushing me.

Jesus held all the power, but I had to do my part.

I had to choose to play the praise songs. I had to open my mouth and remind myself of Jesus's powerful sacrifice. These were just two of the action steps that God showed me to take at that time.

Praise the Lord! Today, I'm free from that debilitating anxiety, fear, and paranoia.

It was a hard road with many other action steps along the way, but I give all the glory to Jesus for carrying me through, showing me my next steps to freedom, and setting me fully free!

When we're willing to draw close to Jesus and let Him speak to us, He will work miracles in our lives.

God will bring us to ever-increasing levels of healing and freedom.

You Will Be Free, Too!

Before I move on to step three, I'd like to be clear about one thing:

There is no condemnation for those who have taken action steps, have brought their struggles to Christ, and still are not free.

Even Paul, one of the godliest men in the Bible, experienced the frustrating reality that freedom is a journey: *"I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection! **But I keep working toward that day when I will finally be all that Christ Jesus saved me for and wants me to be**" (Philippians 3:12 NLT).*

Only God knows what is happening behind the scenes in your particular battle. He sees the spiritual realm and knows why your journey to freedom is taking so long.

But let me assure you of this: *"And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you" (1 Peter 5:10 ESV).*

Praise the Lord that much of this restoration can happen here on earth, but we are also guaranteed that the rest of our healing will be complete when we join Jesus forever.

In the meantime, never give up!

Fight the good fight for freedom.

Never stop surrendering your struggles to Jesus Christ, and continue to do your part as the Holy Spirit leads you.

Step Three: Find a Christian Support Group

You will need Christian support on your journey to freedom.

From the beginning, God said that it's not good for us to live life alone. Certainly, taking time to be alone is healthy. Jesus did this often. There is a difference, however, between being alone for a time or being isolated – especially when it comes to your spiritual life.

Here are three of my favorite Bible verses to help us understand the benefits of a Christian support group on our journey to gain true freedom through Christ.

1. Confession is Healing (James 5:16)

*"Therefore, **confess** your sins to one another [**your false steps, your offenses**], and **pray** for one another, that you may be **healed and restored**. The heartfelt and persistent prayer of a righteous man (believer) can accomplish much [when put into action and made effective by God—it is dynamic and can have tremendous power]" (James 5:16 AMP).*

Don't be afraid of confession. It may feel uncomfortable at the moment, but it's extremely effective for gaining freedom through Christ.

Be careful, though. Don't confess your sins, faults and struggles with just anyone.

Ask God for wisdom to know who is trustworthy and safe. It takes someone special – sent by God into your life – for you to be comfortable enough to confess your sins together and pray for healing and freedom.

Years ago, God unexpectedly provided me with my own Christian support group.

When a major life event threw several women, including me, into crisis mode, we banded together for prayer and fasting. Our support group was formed due to a crisis but quickly became a spiritual lifeline, a safe place for each of us. We've been walking side by side on this journey to freedom ever since.

Do you remember that period of dark fear and paranoia I experienced?

Much of my journey to freedom out of that fear and anxiety involved my support group. Just as Aaron and Hur supported Moses's arms during the battle against the Amalekites (Exodus 17), these godly women lifted me up in prayer whenever I called them for help. They interceded for me when I was too weak or too afraid to pray for myself.

My hope is that you will receive the gift of a trustworthy Christian support group in your life, too.

2. Jesus Loves Gatherings (Matthew 18-19-20)

*"Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For **where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them**" (Matthew 18:19-20 NIV).*

This is a great mystery. I won't even pretend to understand it fully; yet, it is a promise given to us by God. When we gather with other believers and pray in accordance with God's will, we have what we ask for.

There is an extra level of power – an extra presence of Jesus Christ – available to Christians when they're willing to gather together and agree in prayer.

Your prayers in solitude are also effective. God loves your prayers. Yet, there is something special about prayer with another believer that can't be denied.

I encourage you to make good use of this promise God has given. When the opportunity arises, don't hesitate to gather in prayer with those who share your faith. God loves it, and you will benefit greatly.

And remember, if you don't have a Christian support group yet, there are always other ways to gather in prayer:

- You can talk to your pastor and pray with him.
- You can see a Christian counselor and incorporate prayer into your appointments.
- You don't need a whole group. Even one trustworthy Christian friend will do.

3. We All Need Encouragement (Hebrews 10:24-25)

*"Let us think of ways to **motivate** one another to acts of love and good works. And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but **encourage** one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near" (Hebrews 10:24-25 NLT).*

God tells us not to neglect meeting with our Christian support group, and for good reason: It's too easy for us to set personal goals for spiritual growth, for example, only to abandon our resolve for lack of encouragement, motivation, and accountability.

There's something especially energizing about having another believer spur you on to stick to your decision, or comfort you when you've made mistakes.

We need this kind of help in our lives.

A Christian support group can:

- Encourage you toward greater freedom through Christ.
- Motivate and teach you.
- Listen and comfort.
- Pick you up when you fall down.

For Those Who Already Have a Christian Support Group

If God has placed these types of people in your life already, please don't take them for granted. They are His gift to you to help you run the race of faith.

Remember, just as Moses's friends had to hold his arms up during the battle when he was tired, your support people will be there to help you finish well. Thank God for them!

For Those Who Are Searching for a Christian Support Group

If you feel alone in your walk of faith and your journey to freedom through Christ, please don't be discouraged.

God sometimes carries us through solitary times when He wants us to learn to lean on Him. Since He is our Rock and our Fortress, God doesn't want us to place other people on a pedestal that was only ever meant for Him. He is your God. He cares for you. He is enough.

However, God also loves to work through other people to help us.

When the time is right, God will provide you with the proper Christian support group. Maybe it will be a good friend. Maybe it will be a family member. Maybe it will be an unexpected group of godly people. God knows what's best for you.

Pray and ask God to prepare your heart for the right people and to draw you together with whomever He has in mind. He is faithful and will help you in this.

Let's Journey to Ever-Increasing Freedom Together

By now, I hope you are confident in these wonderful truths:

- *True freedom through Christ is a life journey toward ever-increasing freedom.*
- *Jesus loves when you surrender all of yourself to Him, but He also wants to be everything to you.*
- *Through Christ, you can find freedom to be your whole self.*
- *Christians need other Christians.*
- *Freedom is worth fighting for!*

My hope is that we can journey this road to freedom together. As I keep learning and growing, I'll share with you the lessons God teaches me.

Are You Ready?

Now that you've read about how my journey to freedom began, are you ready to learn more and grow in freedom yourself?

There are always action steps we can take to progress on our journey to freedom through Christ to be our whole selves.

This study guide is a great place to get started, so let's do this!



Step One: Embrace Jesus As More Than Just Your Savior

BY GETTING TO KNOW JESUS AS YOUR EVERYTHING

(If you're studying with a small group, please complete the personal application on your own first. Then, meet together as a group to discuss the reflection questions at the end of this section.)

Personal Application: Find a quiet place. Read through each of these verses, then turn them into a prayer. Your prayer can be praise, confession, thanksgiving, or a request. Whatever the Holy Spirit brings to mind, pray it! (I've given you examples for the first two.)

1. Jesus is your Strength.

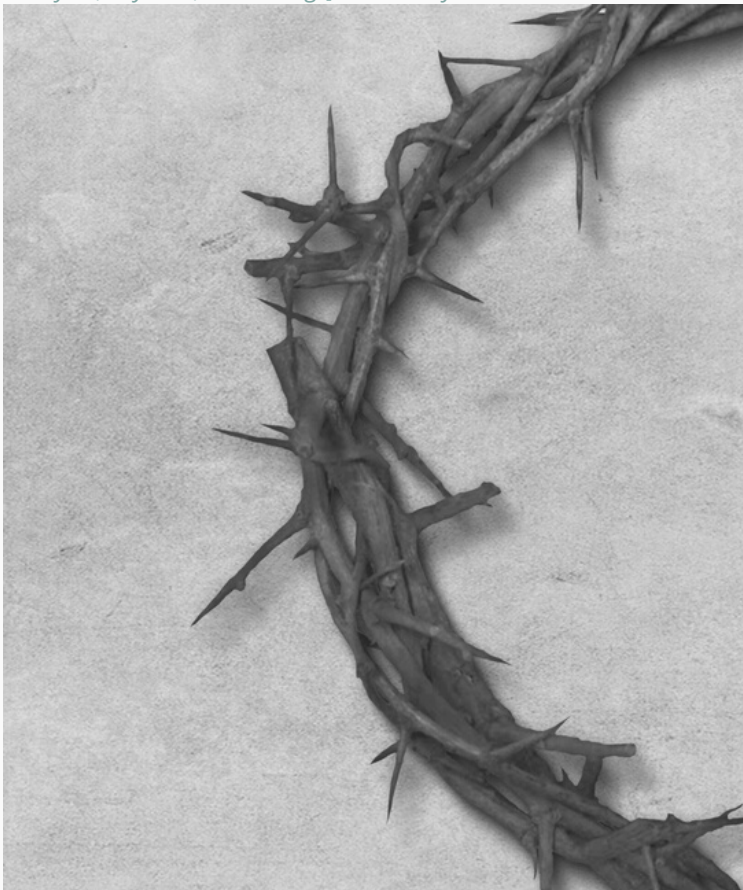
·"So you, my son, be strong [constantly

strengthened] and empowered in the grace that is [to be found only] in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 2:1 AMP).

·Prayer – Jesus, I'm sorry that I try to do so much in my own strength. And then I get so tired and discouraged. Please fill me with your strength and empower me today to do whatever needs doing.

2. Jesus is your Brother.

·"Jesus and the people he makes holy all belong to the same family. That is why he isn't ashamed to call them his brothers and sisters" (Hebrews 2:11 CEV).



"...make Jesus Christ more than just your Savior. He is your Master, Friend, Guide, Counselor, Lord, Teacher, Comforter, and more."

-- **How to Gain Freedom Through Christ to Be Yourself [3 Steps to Get You Started]**, by Sara Jane Kehler of Sara, Living Free

·**Prayer** – God, I find it hard to understand how I can be your daughter and that Jesus is my brother. Help me to feel that kind of family love for other Christians and to have fun with Jesus, just like I can have fun with my sister.

3. Jesus is your Sustainer.

·“[B]ut in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven” (Hebrews 1:2-3 NIV).

4. Jesus is your Comforter.

·“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God” (2 Corinthians 1:3-4 NIV).

5. Jesus is your Helper.

·“Because He Himself [in His humanity] has suffered in being tempted, He is able to help and provide immediate assistance to those who are being tempted and exposed to suffering” (Hebrews 2:18 AMP).

6. Jesus is your Master.

·“But Christ is the Son in charge of God’s people. And we are those people, if we keep on being brave and don’t lose hope” (Hebrews 3:6 CEV).

7. Jesus is your Prayer Partner.

·“Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that,

who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us” (Romans 8:34 ESV).

8. Jesus is your Teacher.

·“For [as a believer] you have been called for this purpose, since Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you may follow in His footsteps” (1 Peter 2:21 AMP).

9. Jesus is your Truth.

·“Jesus said to him, “I am the [only] Way [to God] and the [real] Truth and the [real] Life” (John 14:6 AMP).

10. Jesus is your Life.

·“Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life” (John 6:35 ESV).

11. Jesus is your Counselor.

·“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6 NIV).

12. Jesus is your Friend.

·“You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you” (John 15:14-15 NIV).

13. Jesus is your Deliverer.

·“The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my

stronghold" (Psalm 18:2 ESV).

14. Jesus is your King.

·*"They will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful" (Revelation 17:14 ESV).*

15. Jesus is your Provider, Refresher, and Guide.

·*"The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.
He makes me lie down in green pastures,
he leads me beside quiet waters,
he refreshes my soul.
He guides me along the right paths
for his name's sake"(Psalm 23:1-3 NIV).*

You're on your way to knowing Jesus as your EVERYTHING!

These are only some of the roles that Jesus plays in your life.

There are more!

Press on in your pursuit to embrace all of Jesus. As you know Jesus more and more, your life will reflect his glory as you become freer to be who God made you to be.

"For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1:5-8 NIV).

Group Reflection Questions:

1.Out of the above titles or roles Jesus plays in your life, which one stood out to you this week? Why?

2.Is there a title or role Jesus plays in your life that you find hard to accept or experience? Share with the group. Pray for one another about it.

3.The 15 verses listed in this section are not exhaustive. For example, in the article above, *How to Gain Freedom Through Christ to Be Yourself [3 Steps to Get You Started]*, Jesus is also mentioned as a Husband. Has Jesus revealed himself to you in ways, titles, or roles that aren't listed above? If you're comfortable, please share your experience with the group.

Step Two: Through Christ, Take Action

BY LEARNING TO HEAR AND OBEY THE PROMPTING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

(If you're studying with a small group, please read through this section on your own first, and complete the personal action steps. Then, meet together as a group to discuss the group reflection questions listed under each step.)

As discussed in the article at the start of this study guide, learning how to hear God's voice and then obey it is a critical key to gaining freedom through Christ.

Hearing God takes time and practice. It will increase in frequency and accuracy throughout your lifetime.

Here are five action steps you can take to grow

your ability to hear God and put your faith into action:

1. Practice spiritual warfare through obedience.

Every time we obey God's Word, we choose good over evil. This is spiritual warfare.

For example, when you practice self-control, you are defeating the enemy through obedience to Christ. When you are generous without expecting repayment, you are defeating the enemy through obedience to Christ. When you choose to worship God instead of dwelling on negativity, you are



**"Fight the good fight
for freedom. Never stop
surrendering
your struggles to Jesus
Christ, and continue to
do your part as the
Holy Spirit
leads you."**

-- **How to Gain Freedom Through Christ to Be Yourself [3 Steps to Get You Started]**, by Sara Jane Kehler of Sara, Living Free

defeating the enemy through obedience to Christ.

•**God's Voice:** *"So let's not allow ourselves to get fatigued doing good. At the right time we will harvest a good crop if we don't give up, or quit. Right now, therefore, every time we get the chance, let us work for the benefit of all, starting with the people closest to us in the community of faith" (Galatians 6:9 MSG).*

•**Personal Action Step:** Obey Christ's command to do good to those around you. Ask God to help you recognize opportunities to do good today, and then obey.

•**Group Reflection:** Take turns sharing one thing you feel God has asked you to do that you're having difficulty obeying or following through on.

2. Keep an open heart.

The Holy Spirit will not barge into your life uninvited. He will softly speak to you. He will gently woo you. But he will not force you to listen to him. It's up to you to decide to be soft-hearted toward the Holy Spirit.

•**God's Voice:** *"That is why the Holy Spirit says, 'Today when you hear his voice, don't harden your hearts as Israel did when they rebelled, when they tested me in the wilderness'" (Hebrews 3:7-8 NLT).*

•**Personal Action Step:** Pray this prayer, or in your own words ask God for help to be open to hearing and obeying his voice:

Dear Father, I'm often stubborn, hard-hearted, and unwilling to hear what you have to say. Please forgive me. Holy Spirit, please soften my heart. Help me to recognize your voice and be willing to obey you.

•**Group Reflection:** Share with the group whether

or not you've ever felt afraid to be entirely open to the Holy Spirit's leading. Why or why not?

3. Let God teach you.

Everyone makes mistakes. Rather than wallowing in shame or disappointment, we can ask God to show us what he wants us to learn from our mistakes.

But what if your difficult situation isn't your fault? You can still ask God to teach you through your experience. Nothing is wasted when you're willing to invite God into your pain.

•**God's Voice:** *"Consider it nothing but joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you fall into various trials. Be assured that the testing of your faith [through experience] produces endurance [leading to spiritual maturity, and inner peace]" (James 1:2-3 AMP).*

•**Personal Action Step:** Think of one trial. It can be something painful from the past or a struggle you're experiencing right now.

Tell God how you feel about it. Then ask him what you can learn from the situation and what he'd like to tell you today about your trial.

Try being still for a few minutes to see if anything comes to mind, but don't force it. God's timing is perfect. Sometimes we pray one day and the answer only comes to us much later.

•**Group Reflection:** Share one good thing you've learned through a difficult experience.

4. Be a doer.

Studying the Bible (which is sometimes referred to generally as "the law") is extremely valuable. But don't forget to put into action what you learn

and read.

Sometimes, meditating on a verse is your action step.

Sometimes, doing the thing the verse tells you to do is your action step.

•**God's Voice:** *"However, the person who continues to study God's perfect laws that make people free and who remains committed to them will be blessed. People like that don't merely listen and forget; they actually do what God's laws say" (James 1:25 GW).*

•**Personal Action Step:** Next time you sit down to read your Bible, pay attention to what it's telling you to do. Then, ask God, "Do I do this thing that you're telling me to do?" Ask him for help to live out your faith in actions.

•**Group Reflection:** Share one command you've read in the Bible, either recently or in the past, that you have a difficult time doing.

5. Discern your gut.

The world may call it a "gut feeling," but oftentimes, what they're referring to is actually the Holy Spirit directing you.

It takes time, wisdom, practice, and discernment to know if God is prompting you or if you're hearing your own random thoughts.

•**God's Voice:** *"And your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, 'This is the way, walk in it,' when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left" (Isaiah 30:21 ESV).*

•**Personal Action Step:** Take a moment to reflect on the last week, or even just today. Is there something you've felt you were supposed to do but you haven't done it yet?

Maybe calling your brother to check on him?
Maybe dropping off a coffee for your husband at work to cheer him up? Maybe spending five minutes in concentrated prayer for your daughter?

There are often things we feel we should do, but we don't do them because they're time-consuming, uncomfortable, or we simply don't feel like it.

If you already know what you ought to do, go do it! If nothing comes to mind, just pray:

Lord, help me to discern when it's you talking to me. Then, help me to do the thing! Amen.

•**Group Reflection:** In your experience, how do you discern which thoughts or feelings are your own and which thoughts or feelings are the Holy Spirit telling you to do something?



You're on your way to hearing and obeying the prompting of the Holy Spirit!

Since every person is wired differently, God will speak to you in a mixture of ways that will be very different from the next person. That's okay.

We can learn from others and through hearing about their experiences with God, but we don't have to be exactly like them.

Don't compare yourself or your experiences of hearing God's voice to others. Keep asking God who you are and how you can hear him best. Then trust him to show you.

"You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit me together in my mother's womb. Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! Your workmanship is marvelous—how well I know it" (Psalm 139:13-14 NLT).



Step Three: Find a Christian Support Group

BY STEPPING OUT OF YOUR COMFORT ZONE & THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX

*(I've separated this step into two sections for ease of use. **Whether you already have a support group or are still searching for one, however, I recommend reading both sections.** They each provide excellent support information for you as an individual and in a group setting.)*

For Those Who Already Have a Christian Support Group

Trying new things within your Christian support group is like baking. Some recipes work well. Some don't. But unless you try a new recipe once in a while, you may never discover all of God's sweet goodness that's available to you.

Here are five "recipes" to try with your godly friends. Pick one that everyone is willing to participate in, and then implement it.

1. Encourage each other.

"And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near" (Hebrews 10:24-25 ESV).

Ask each person in your support group to dedicate a small journal or notepad to words of encouragement.



"There is an extra level of power, an extra presence of Jesus Christ, available to Christians when they're willing to agree in prayer and gather with one another."

-- **How to Gain Freedom Through Christ to Be Yourself [3 Steps to Get You Started]**, by Sara Jane Kehler of Sara, Living Free

During the time at home between your support group meetings, each person will jot down messages of encouragement that can be shared at your next meeting together.

Here are a few examples of what those messages could look like:

- i. While you're prepping supper one day, you remember how gifted your friend is at hosting ladies' nights and celebrations. Write it down! Share at the next meeting that you admire your friend's gift of hospitality and encourage her to continue using her gift for good.
- ii. While reading your Bible, a verse jumps out at you. Along with the verse, you sense a small revelation of joy or hope that you want to share with the group. Write it down!
- iii. While walking at sunset, you're awed by the colors and creativity God displays daily. It reminds you of all the daily blessings you tend to take for granted. Write it down! Remind your support group that the Bible tells us to think about things that are good and lovely and encourage them to notice the blessings around them.

2. Confess your struggles.

"Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working" (James 5:16 ESV).

With discretion, and according to the wisdom God gives you, each support group member can take a turn confessing one struggle that they'd like prayer for. Then, pray for each other.

3. Share communion together.

"For I pass on to you what I received from the Lord

himself. On the night when he was betrayed, the Lord Jesus took some bread and gave thanks to God for it. Then he broke it in pieces and said, 'This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way, he took the cup of wine after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant between God and his people—an agreement confirmed with my blood. Do this in remembrance of me as often as you drink it'" (1 Corinthians 11:23-25 NLT).

Jesus instructed us to share communion as believers. There's no reason why this beautiful and renewing act must be saved for church alone.

Grab some crackers and juice, or whatever other bread and wine you'd like to use, and read a verse or sing a communion-related worship song together.

4. Read scripture.

"Until I come, devote yourself to the reading of Scripture, to encouraging, and to teaching" (1 Timothy 4:13 EHV).

Together with those in your support group, pick one book of the Bible (for example, Philippians is a great book to read aloud), and read one chapter aloud to one another each time you meet.

There is something powerful and fresh about hearing God's word read aloud.

5. Sing worship songs.

"Speak to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, [offering praise by] singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord" (Ephesians 5:19 AMP).

It may feel silly at first, but trust me, singing praise songs together does wonders.

In my own Christian support group, we sometimes march around, clap, dance, or shout, depending on our energy levels. These are things we don't generally feel the freedom to do in church.

Other times, we may sing softly in a seated position.

Each time we meet, the Holy Spirit moves differently. He's full of surprises and loves when Christians worship together.

For Those Who Are Searching for a Christian Support Group

God loves you and has not abandoned you.

Remember, God's Word says: *"God places the lonely in families; he sets the prisoners free and gives them joy" (Psalm 68:6 NLT).*

While you wait for him to provide you with the right support people, there are healthy and creative ways available for you to commune with God and others.

Go ahead, and try some of the following traditional and non-traditional ideas:

1. See a church leader.

"If you are sick, ask the church leaders to come and pray for you. Ask them to put olive oil on you in the name of the Lord" (James 5:14 CEV).

This verse refers to sickness, but, of course, you can request prayer for any reason. Is there a prayer room already set up at your church? Utilize it. Are there prayer request forms on your church website? Email a request.

Keep your eyes open for prayer and support opportunities that are already available to you.

2. Write.

"This letter is from Paul, chosen by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, and from our brother Timothy. I am writing to God's church in Corinth and to all of his holy people throughout Greece. May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace" (2 Corinthians 1:1-2 NLT).

Why not write a letter, email, or even a Twitter post to reach out to other Christians?

Often, encouraging others makes us feel less lonely. It may even open doors of opportunity that you wouldn't have imagined would become a lifeline to you.

For example, while perusing Twitter I'll sometimes stop and write a quick prayer for someone in need. I've also had other Christian Twitter users send me a quick prayer.

Christian community is everywhere!

3. Don't despise your "lonely place."

"But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed" (Luke 5:16 NIV).

Don't forget that although Jesus had family, friends, and even close followers to support him, he purposely withdrew to lonely places to be with the Father. He recognized the essential value in being alone with God, our source of Life.

Remember, other Christians are our supplemental support; but, Jesus is our number one support group.

4. Look with fresh eyes.

"There are 'friends' who destroy each other, but a real friend sticks closer than a brother" (Proverbs 18:24 NLT).

Sometimes, we have a hard time recognizing the gifts we already have.

Do you have a godly friend, family member, or acquaintance whom you already trust and feel comfortable with but have never taken your relationship to the next level?

Pray about that person. Ask God if it would be a good idea to start a regular prayer meeting with them. Don't pressure yourself about it, though.

God is good at making things clear to us once we're open to hearing his ideas. If he wants you to reach out to that person, he will let you know.

5. Love your neighbor.

"Jesus replied, 'You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.' This

is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself'" (Matthew 22:37-39 NLT).

Neighbors can be an excellent source of support.

However, maybe you've never even talked to your neighbors before. You could simply start by praying for those who live on your street.

Maybe you already know a few neighbors quite well. Would any of them be open to a regular encouragement coffee time or a prayer group?

(This idea is similar to the one above in that it should not be received with pressure to take action beyond God's will. It's something to pray about, without anxiety, and ask God if this is something that he has in store for you.)

You're on your way to stepping out of your comfort zone and finding godly Christian support!

Relationships take time and effort.

You'll find that some avenues of support will last a lifetime, yet some will last only for a season. They, too, are perfectly designed by God to help you through one aspect of freedom or healing in your life.

Keep seeking Christian support.

Also, did you know that we naturally learn more when we're teaching others? So, don't forget to look for ways to support other Christians, too.

PRAISE THE LORD!

You're on your way to ever-increasing freedom through Jesus Christ our Lord!



Ever-Increasing Freedom Awaits!

Let's pray together. (If you're meeting with a small group, have someone read this prayer aloud.)

Dear Father God,

*Thank you for all that you have done in our lives, all that you are currently working in us, and all you have in store for our futures. You are magnificent! We love you because you first loved us. I ask in Jesus's name that the seeds that have been planted in our hearts through this study will grow and flourish by the power of your Holy Spirit. We give all glory to you, Father, through Jesus Christ our Lord for the freedom that you have granted us. Please help us to walk in ever-increasing freedom through your Son, Jesus Christ.
Amen.*

Revisit www.saralivingfree.com for even more articles and freebies to help you along on your journey to freedom.

With love,

Sara Jane Kehler

***"...you
will
know the
truth
and the
truth
will set
you
free."***

***John
8:32
(ESV)***