

FREEWAY

JUD WILHITE | *Discovery*

PART 2: *Learning to Open My Eyes*

Welcome to week 2 of our Freeway series. ***Today we're talking about discovery and how it's a vital part of the journey to freedom.*** I made a rather startling discovery about myself this summer: I'm not in near as good a shape as I thought. It all started with my wife Lori asking me to do some exercise videos with her called the Jillian Michaels 30-day Shred. Now, I am very respectful of women, but I'm still a guy. So I look at this all-woman exercise DVD and say, "Really? Are there any guys in these videos?" I'm thinking I need Focus T25 insanity to properly challenge my muscles. I need a guy workout. But Lori kept on me and I agreed. [Props: 5 lb weights]. So she picked up the teeny, weights, I made sure all the blinds were closed, and did session 1 of Jillian Michaels 30-day shred. Friends, I need to tell you, Jillian is not a nice lady. She made sweat gush from every pore of my body. She made my lungs ache; my muscles burn. I thought I was going to die, literally die, during this workout. And Jillian lies! She yells out things like, "we're almost there!" then tells a really long story while you do like 10 more reps, and when she's done with her story she says, "just two more!" So started talking back to Jillian. Calling her a liar! And some other things. My daughter told me, 'Dad I heard some unkind words coming from your room.' I don't know what I said—I was in a daze! These weights felt like 50 lb weights. It was all I could do to stay upright. When it was over, I fell to the ground and didn't move for 10 minutes. One sentence kept rolling through my mind: that was a lot harder than I thought. Turns out, it wasn't just a workout video. It was a test. And tests are about discovery. Sometimes what you discover (in my case) is that you aren't quite as strong and fit as you thought. The same is true of the spiritual tests we face in our lives—God uses them show where our faith in Him can grow.

Here's a pattern I see in the spiritual journey: people come to God, receive forgiveness and start a brand new life. Things are amazing and we think, ***"I've made it! God is on my side. Things will be smooth sailing from now on."*** And things are great, until there is a test. Some kind of scarcity enters your life and you begin to worry. A strong desire crops up and you think, if I could just have that one thing, then I would be happy, and you feel heartsick until you get it. Or your world starts to spin out of control and desperation sets in. You feel exposed, exhausted and alone. You wonder, where is God? Is this the plan? I thought I was on a path to freedom and now it feels like I'm wandering in the wilderness. I thought things were going to get easier, but life feels harder than ever. What's the deal?

Here's some hear-won wisdom: the path to freedom often gets harder, before it gets easier. The bible calls this experience a test, and it's a very normal and natural part of life with God. Just like Jillian Michael's 30-day shred, a test reveals an area where you need to grow so you can live with greater freedom. An area of life where you can trade your worry, anger and disappointment for His love, joy and peace. So today I want to look at what the bible says about testing and temptation, and what I hope you walk away with is this: Tests reveal our weakness, so we can discover God's strength. So how do we do it? How do we find God's strength when things get hard? As always, we're going to look to scripture. If you brought your bibles with you or want to follow along on your mobile devices, we'll be in the book of Matthew chapter 4. We'll also put the verses up on the side screens. This is a story about Jesus, God himself, facing a test. At the age of 30 Jesus begins His earthly ministry by being baptized. Prior to this, we assume he lived a relatively normal, private life, but all that is about to change. Check out this amazing scene where God himself affirms Jesus and his identity.

Matthew 3:16–17 (NLT) After his baptism, as Jesus came up out of the water, the heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and settling on him. And a voice from heaven said, “This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy.”

This is an epic moment. A spiritual high. God himself shouts from the sky, “This is my son! I love him. I’m proud of him!” It’s the way many of us felt the day we accepted God’s grace and forgiveness. Our hearts felt released from a great weight. It’s a new day! But listen to what happens next.

Matthew 4:1-3 (NLT) Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted there by the devil. For forty days and forty nights he fasted and became very hungry. During that time the devil came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become loaves of bread.”

The spiritual high is over and Jesus is hungry. He’s been directed by God to fast for 40 days in the wilderness. This is most likely a desert place that is hot, dusty and desolate. No one lives there and there is no food to be seen. This is when the devil strikes saying, “Turns the stones to bread.” This would do two things: first Jesus would prove he has the power to do it (remember, this is before he did all the miracles we read about); second, it would take care of His physical needs. Seems reasonable, but here is the slippery part—by using His own power to provide for his needs, Jesus would fail at trusting God to provide for His needs. In fact, he’d be scorning God’s provision. God was not failing at providing food, he was succeeding at leading Jesus to fast. So the first thing we do when we feel tested is to...

1. TRUST GOD'S PROVISION

Speaking of tests I came across a funny list of honest kids answers. These are actual responses to test questions and while they are not correct, they are honest. Here's the first [slide: smart]. Look at question 6, it says, "Is this number even or odd?" and the answer is even. The next question asks, "How do you know?" Look what they put, "Because I am smart." How do I know... I'm not stupid! Here's another. [slide: nerd] It says, "Tony practices the piano 20 minutes every day. What is the effect?" The answer? "He is a big nerd." Not the answer the teacher was looking for. This last one says, "I earn money at home by..." and the child wrote this in the blank, "I don't. I am a freeloader." Dad liked this answer! Dad probably told the child to write this down! But here's the thing, children are meant to be freeloaders. No matter how much they help out around the house, a child's real job to trust and honor the provision of their parent. As a parent, nothing ticks me off like ingratitude, and nothing melts my heart like thankfulness—especially for simple things.

40 days earlier a voice from the clouds told Jesus, you are my son in whom I am well pleased. That means God, his father, is going to provide for his needs. But now Jesus is hungry. God hasn't provided any food or shelter for a month and there's no McDonalds in sight... just dirt and rocks. And while it seems like no big deal for Jesus to make some stones into bread, the devil was tempting him to shift his dependence off God and onto himself. Here's what Jesus said.

Matthew 4:4 (NLT) But Jesus told him, "No! The Scriptures say, 'People do not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

Jesus says there is one thing that is more vital in this world than food, shelter and clothing: trusting the God who provides all the food, shelter and clothing. Notice that Jesus uses scripture to overcome His test. He quotes a verse from the Old Testament (in Deuteronomy 8:3) that refers to the time the Israelites wandered in the desert for 40 years and were provided with a miraculous bread substance called manna that formed on the ground each day. They would have starved without it, but because of God's daily faithfulness, their needs were met. God took care of his children. They followed, they obeyed... and He provided.

It's easy to trust God when times are good, isn't it? When you have plenty of food, the home is good, the car is good, and you have a closet full of clothes. In fact, the better things are, the less we think about God being the one who provided it all. We start to think how our hard work and talent provided it all. Maybe you're working so hard to keep it all afloat you don't have time to think about God. You got your bills here, a paycheck here. It's not faith... it's math. But then you face a test or scarcity. All of sudden, you can't pay the bills. Your hard work doesn't result in more pay. The bills keep coming. The check engine light is coming on, and you put a post it on the dash to cover it up. Or maybe things are stable, but you feel God nudging you to give to your church or a charity, and you're like, "**God I don't have enough as it is!**" When things become scarce, and all you see is sand and stones, that's the test. Do you trust God's provision or your own? Is he really my provider, or am I in this alone? Here's where we need to do what Jesus did, answer with scripture. These are the words of Jesus a little while later, and now you can see he has some personal experience trusting God with scarcity.

Matthew 6:32-33 (NLT) So don't worry about these things, saying, 'What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?' These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs. Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need.

What are you worried about? What is dominating your thoughts? Chances are it's something you feel is scarce in your life. Instead, think about God and His faithfulness. Think about what He wants, work your best, and trust Him provide what you need. This doesn't mean we sit on our hands—it means we stop wringing our hands. It means we go to work, but trust God to provide. He is your father and He knows what you need. Trust God's provision and remember, tests reveal our weakness, so we can discover God's strength.

2. JUMP TOWARD GOD, NOT AWAY

I watched a video this week called bungee jump prank, and while hilarious, it's just wrong. First of all, how many think bungee jump and prank should never be in the same sentence? I'm with you. I don't like heights or pranks, and to combine them is just other. So here's what they did, right as the guy (apparently their friend) leaps off the platform, they all yell, "No, wait!" like a problem has occurred. Then they chuck out a broken bungee cord so this poor guy thinks the line has snapped. Here's a shot of it. [image] It's hard to see but there's the broken rope, and the guy is clearly beyond the point of no return. It's funny, but also mean. You don't mess with heights. In this next test, Jesus has to deal with his own kind of jump prank.

Matthew 4:5-6 (NLT) Then the devil took him to the holy city, Jerusalem, to the highest point of the Temple, and said, "If you are the Son of God, jump off! For the Scriptures say, 'He will order his angels to protect you. And they will hold you up with their hands so you won't even hurt your foot on a stone.'"

Most scholars believe this was a 45-story drop, so this no small leap. If Jesus does survive, it will be a miracle. But we have to ask the question, why? Why would this jump be at all tempting? This is the most important building in the most influential city in the land. The courts below would have been teeming with people, including the religious leaders of the day. This stunt would give Jesus instant credibility and fame. All he has to do is test out a scripture that says God will save him. All he has to do is jump. The question Jesus has to answer is this: is this a leap of faith toward God, or a leap of foolishness away from God?

Some of you are like, "I don't care what the bible says, I'm not jumping off a cliff. I'm not even going near the edge!" How many people hug the door on glass elevators? This isn't so much about fear of heights as it is about taking risks. The reason we take risks is because the payoff seems worth it. I think we all face these jump temptations in our lives, usually when something really great is set in front of you. You can make a lot of money if you just bend the rules and jump. You can reveal that hurtful secret with the push of a button, and even though you know it's hurtful, all you have to do to put that person in their place... is jump. You can have that expensive new toy you've always wanted, it feels like a stretch, but you have the credit and besides, it's your life and you it's your money, and you jump. You've heard the bible has some specific boundaries about sex before marriage, but how can it be wrong if it feels so right, and you jump. In all these instances a little voice

says ‘this isn’t a good idea,’ but then another voice comes along and says, “You deserve this. It’s a good thing. And even if it is wrong, God will forgive you and make it right.” And we leap away from God. That’s the temptation, and here is Jesus’s response.

Matthew 4:7 (NLT) Jesus responded, “The Scriptures also say, ‘You must not test the Lord your God.’”

Again Jesus refers back to the story of the Israelites in the desert where they almost go into a riot about the fact that their new campsite has no water. Water is a significant symbol in the bible. Whereas bread is a symbol for survival, water is a symbol for having something worth surviving for. So basically the complaint is, we have nothing worth living for! In saying this they tested God, because he was that thing worth living for. He was guiding them from captivity toward freedom, feeding them along the way, but their hearts were always leaping away from God, over God, toward things they thought made life worth living. This is what is in Jesus’s mind as He looks over that ledge. A little jump can bring him all the fame and credibility He needs to be seen as the messiah, but He knows it’s a prank. God is the source of His life and success. If he wants more life He needs to jump toward God, not away. I think a good scripture we can answer this temptation with is:

James 4:7-8 (N:T) So humble yourselves before God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come close to God, and God will come close to you.

If you want more joy, jump toward God not away. If want more peace, jump toward God not a way. If you want more love, jump toward God not away. This is how we handle the jump temptation: ask who is asking me to jump?

Ask, am jumping toward God or away? One is a leap of faith. The other is just a fall. Remember, tests reveal our weakness, so we can discover God's strength.

3. WORSHIP GOD ALONE

Matthew 4:8-9 (NLT) Next the devil took him to the peak of a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. "I will give it all to you," he said, "if you will kneel down and worship me."

Finally, the gloves are off and it comes down to that ultimate thing we all want: control. The devil says he will give Jesus every kingdom on Earth. Think about that—that is ultimate freedom! When you are in charge of everybody, nobody can tell you no! All Jesus has to do is one small thing: kneel and worship at the Devil's feet. It's like that scene in a movie where the villain tries to recruit the hero to his side. 'Let's stop this fighting and join forces. We can rule the world together!' And then there is usually some kind of maniacal laugh, so we all know it's a trick. Jesus sees right through this and once again quotes scripture.

Matthew 4:10-11 (NLT) Get out of here, Satan," Jesus told him. "For the Scriptures say, 'You must worship the Lord your God and serve only him.'" Then the devil went away, and angels came and took care of Jesus.

Now that is a very dramatic scene. The devil literally appears and literally says, 'worship me.' I don't know about you, but that tactic probably wouldn't work on me. I'd be terrified. I would call out to Jesus in desperation. Or I might think I was having a mental breakdown. And that's probably why the

devil is a lot more subtle with you and I. Make no mistake, we still face this temptation, it just comes to us in much more appealing packaging.

Not long about I was trying to get my son Ethan to turn off his computer and go to bed. So I say, “Okay, time to shut it down, brush your teeth and go to bed. He looks up and says, “Dad it’s the weekend,” and then this child that has eaten food from my pantry, wearing clothes that I bought, currently playing on a computer that I provided adds this, “And you’re not the boss of me.” Well, as you can imagine I had some things to say about that. I go into this rant explaining the hierarchy of his universe. I said lets get this straight—there is God, Jesus, The Holy Spirit and then your dad, got it? And he says, “No... mom is the boss of me.” I was mad because he had a point.

The truth is I often forget the hierarchy of universe. I think it goes, Me, my needs, my wants, and then everything else. I don’t come out and say it, but it’s the natural pattern I think we all settle into. There is a little rebellious voice in all of us that says, “you’re not the boss of me.” We think this is what freedom is—the ability to do whatever we want. Then God comes along and tests that theory. You face a problem that is beyond you. A rule you can’t get around. A failure you can’t undo. Here is where we face what I call the control test. Are we going force our own will or surrender to God? This really is the core issue of every temptation: will we act with God or without him? Here’s the amazing thing about Jesus’s response—worship is the answer. You don’t defeat temptation through willpower... you defeat it through worship. So often we think, if only I was stronger or had more discipline, then I could live a better life. But the real way you build your strength, is to build your relationship and daily ties to God. Stop thinking less of yourself and more of Him.

THE THING YOU WORSHIP IS THE THING YOU GIVE ULTIMATE SAY OVER YOUR LIFE. When it says ‘you’re on your own, you need to work hard or you’ll starve—turn these stones to bread...’ you do. When it says, ‘you need this thing, this person, this experience to be complete, ignore the risks!’ You jump. When it says, ‘you can have ultimate freedom, all you have to do is ignore God and reject his ways,’ you kneel. Everyone worships something. You either worship God, or something far less loving, with far less peace and far less joy. That’s what tests help us discover... who we are really worshipping. So when you are in a time of scarcity, trust your provider. When you are being tempted to leap at that weak thing you think will make your life complete, jump toward God, not away. And when it comes down to who runs this world and runs your life, choose to worship the one who always leaves you with more love, joy and peace, rather than something that promises all but steals your freedom. Tests reveal our weakness, so we can discover God’s strength.

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[Hook]

Be sure to come back next week where we’re talking about owning who you are. You can’t upgrade what you don’t own. So come on back as we continue our Freeway series.