

FREEWAY

JUD WILHITE | *Step 6: Freedom*
CENTRAL CHRISTIAN

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[Jud]

Alright, well welcome everybody, it's great to have you. I want to welcome all of our campuses. We're so thankful that you're all with us today. And I thought I would start by asking just a really basic question: How many of you are good in the kitchen? You're good cooks. If you're a good cook, just raise your hand. Don't be shy, come on, you know you can handle it. Now those of us that are cooking challenged like myself, we appreciate you. We're thankful for you because we like to eat. And you know, I'm not very good in the kitchen even though there are a few things I can do. I can make a mean grilled cheese sandwich. I can even do pancakes and scrambled eggs. but it's a long slide after that. And you know, I think sometimes no matter how much I may try to make something and the few times that I actually do, it never comes out like I thought it would. Apparently, I'm not alone. I found some pictures of some pretty bad cooking fails. I thought I'd share a few of these with you. First one is this, check out this guy: [Shows picture on slideshow] this one is the minion from Despicable Me, nice little dessert, well put-together, it seems like such a great idea, right? Now here's what happened when this individual actually tried to do it. Looks like his face got melted off, doesn't it? [Shows picture on slideshow] Here's another one: maybe an idea for a baby shower or something, a nice little baby

carve from a watermelon. Wow, you know, a little fruit around it and you know, that's nice and all the ladies say, "That's so cute." Well here's what happened when this person tried to do that. That looks like an alien baby that just landed. You know, sometimes it doesn't work like the recipe says it should work. And I think in our lives, you know, we try certain recipes for life and faith and the journey of life. We've been in this series called Freedom for the last several weeks, we've been talking about how we can experience a personal and spiritual and life freedom with God. And I think sometimes if you just look at our culture, we have a certain recipe for what freedom is really all about. A lot of people, if you ask them what freedom is, it looks like this: I've got some pancake mix here, just says, "I can", meaning "I can do whatever I want." Freedom means I can do whatever I want, whenever I want, however I want to do it and you've got no say whatsoever. Ha! A lot of people think that's freedom, right? I mean if you ask any kid, "What's freedom?" they'll tell you probably something like, "Freedom is me being able to do whatever you say I can't do." So a lot of us think, "Man I can, if I can just do whatever I want to do then I'm totally free. Then I'd be happy, then I'd be fulfilled, then life would come together. Things would happen, it'd be awesome." And then you mix that in with the other ingredient, we've got some milk here that says, "I won't" on it. I won't. I won't change, I won't adjust my behavior, I won't forgive, we're getting a little close to our home: I won't do my homework, I won't brush my teeth, I won't do my chores. And we think if we could just mix together a little bit of I can do whatever I want with I won't do what you expect me to do, then we'll have freedom. Then our life would look like this independence day cake. Check this cake out.

[Shows picture on slideshow] It's like all the sudden we'd be free, we'd be happy, and we'd have lots of sugar to go along with it. It'd be awesome. Except most of us, we mix I can do whatever I want in this bowl of life with I won't do whatever anybody else expects of me, and this is what we end up with, something that looks like this, an absolute mess. [Shows picture on slideshow] A lot of people think if they could just do whatever they want, I mean, you can drink whatever and whenever and however you want to drink. But if you do it consistently enough and long enough, you're going to have an issue with addiction. You can party whenever you want to, you're free, but if you do it long enough and consistent enough, the party isn't going to be what you thought it was going to be. You can run up all kinds of things on your credit card, you're free to do that. But if you do it you're going to find yourself a slave to debt. You can be free to just follow your every whim and your every desire and everything that you think will bring you happiness in life. But here's what I've learned: if you just live for yourself and you live for your own pleasure, then in the end you're not going to have anybody to share your life with. See, freedom, real freedom isn't freedom from responsibility. Real freedom is freedom to responsibility under God's grace. Real freedom is to responsibility under God's grace. In fact, I would say this: Real freedom trades I can do whatever I want for this : God can do whatever He wants with me. That's where freedom really lies. And we've been in this series Freeway, we've looked at several different steps. Week 1, we talked about awareness and how important it was for us to pause and look at our lives and think about the things that we need to deal with. Week 2 was discovery. We talked about self-discover and God discovery and what that really looked like. Week 3 we talked about owning our problems and finding healing from the things that are weighing us

down. Week 4 we looked at forgiveness and the power of forgiveness. And I want to talk about how all of this can work together in our lives so that we can continue to experience real freedom under God and His grace.

If you want to follow along in your Bibles, we are going to be in Matthew Chapter 18 today and we're going to pick it up in Verse 28. Matthew Chapter 18 and we're going to pick up Verse 28. Actually Matthew Chapter 28, I'm sorry, Matthew 28, Verse 18. Now let me set this up: Jesus has already risen from the dead, He's about to ascend into Heaven, and He gives what His disciples and followers heard what we would sort of later term the great commission. And here's what Jesus says, Matthew 28:18. "Jesus came and told his disciples, 'I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth.'" Look at that word 'all'. You know what 'all' means in the original language? It means 'all', right? All authority in heaven and earth. How big is all? All is total and complete and absolute authority. Jesus is saying, "Let me just tee this up for you guys: I am large and in charge." And that's important for us to just pause and sit with for a minute, because you turn on the news and it doesn't feel like Jesus is large and in charge. It feels like Ebola is running crazy. It feels like ISIS and terrorist acts are going on all over the place and racial tension and discrimination. We turn on the news and we see all of these stories but Jesus says, "Listen, I want you to know this before I ascend into Heaven. I have all authority and all means all. I'm Lord over Las Vegas Boulevard, I'm Lord over Hollywood Boulevard, I'm Lord over Wall Street, Main Street, I'm Lord over all of it." He is the Lord and He says, "I have authority." Then He says this, look at this: "Therefore" - anytime you see the word 'therefore', it's asking you to go and back in light of this, because of

this, therefore because I have been given all of this authority, He tells this to us: "Go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you and be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age'" [Matthew 28:18]. So Jesus gives us this awesome recipe for life and a recipe to share with others so that they too can experience His freedom. One of the first principles we see is a challenge to live free under God's authority. Live free under God's authority in your life.

You know, when I was a kid growing up, I always wanted a motorcycle. My older brother, who was quite older than me, he was in high school, he got to have a motorcycle. My parents let him have a motorcycle. What could be cooler than being a 16-year-old kid riding your motorcycle up to high school? Come on. And so I had it all planned out: the day I turned 16, I sat down with my parents and I said, "Alright, it's on. I want my motorcycle. I'll save my money, I'll buy it myself, but I'm getting a motorcycle." And my parents looked at me and they said, "You cannot have a motorcycle." And I said, "Well, my brother got to have a motorcycle, he rode a motorcycle to high school. Everybody thought he was the coolest thing since sliced bread. I need to have a motorcycle. This is what I need in my life." My parents looked at me and said, "You can't have a motorcycle." I said, "Why not?" and they said, "Because your brother could handle a motorcycle, and you'll go 100 miles per hour and kill yourself before the end of the week. You cannot ever have a motorcycle." I looked at my parents and said, "It's not fair." You know what my parents said? Classic line: "Life's not fair." And in the moment, I thought man this is so wrong that my brother got to ride a motorcycle everyday and I never got to own a motorcycle.

So later, I went to college, went to graduate school, did the graduate school thing. I actually went home to the church that I came to faith in and was serving in that church as a pastor. And I remember I met this beautiful young girl named Lori and we started dating, and then we were in love and we were talking about marriage and I asked her to marry me and she said yes and in the back of my mind I was thinking, 'It's going to be amazing, I'm going to get married, I'm going to have a motorcycle. My life is finally coming together.' And I kid you not, just before we got married, my wife said to me, "There's something I've been wanting to say to you. I only have two requests of you in this marriage: number one, I'm scared of planes and flying and heights. No flying in a private aircraft." That's never been an issue, but in case it was, there it is. Second was this: no motorcycle. And what could I say? I was in love, I was smitten, here she was. And so I guess I'll never own a motorcycle. But you know, when it comes to that question - I was thinking about it today - no matter how much I tried to convince my parents that I was okay to ride a motorcycle, they weren't going to let it happen. And I look back now and I'm actually very grateful. My brother is very laid back, he's always cool, always calm, he respects the bike, and I surely would have killed myself. But I look back to that statement by my dad, because after they said, "We know it's not fair", here's something else they said: "As long as you're living under this roof, as long as you're living in this house, there will be no motorcycle." Why? Because I was under his authority. And because I was under his authority, I had to abide by his rules. I was free, meaning I could go do what I wanted to do when I wanted to do it, but I wasn't free from all responsibility. If I was going to be in a

relationship with my dad, if I was going to live in that house and experience all the benefits of that house, then it came with certain stipulations because I was under authority. Now think about this: in our lives spiritually, sometimes we just think, "Man, we just want to be free." But the truth is, if you're going to be in a relationship with God, then you come under His authority. If you're going to be in His house, if you're going to relate with Him and have all the benefits of that - joy, forgiveness, love, community, hope, faith - it comes with certain responsibilities because freedom isn't from responsibility, it's freedom to responsibility under God's grace. And so friends, all of us have to face this issue in our lives where we eventually have to lay down the claim that I can do whatever I want. When I become a follower of Jesus, that shifts to God, I'll do whatever you want to do with me and through me. God I'll serve you, I will follow you, I will surrender to you. And that's where the joy is, friends. That's where the freedom comes. That's where, you know, the Bible says this: It says be anxious, for what? Be anxious for nothing. How big is the scope of nothing, right? Nothing. You know, sometimes when I'm frustrated in my life I'll look around and I'll say, "It is what it is." You ever say this? You're frustrated, you know, you walk in, the house is dirty, you wish it was clean. What do you say? "It is what it is." A construction project goes longer than you thought it would or you're having some remodeling done, it's not going like you thought. It is what it is. Your team loses in a football game or a baseball game and what are you going to do? It is what it is. But you know by faith, what we learn in our lives when we're surrendered is, it isn't just what it is, it's ultimately what it isn't. It isn't something that's going to paralyze me, it isn't something that's going to destroy me, it isn't something that's going to weigh me down with fear, it isn't something that's going to break my heart and crush me.

Ultimately, why? Because I am under the authority of somebody else and because I'm under His authority, because He's large and in charge, ultimately I step back and I say, "Be anxious for nothing." It is what it is, but it isn't going to kill me. It is what it is, but it isn't going to wear me down. It is what it is, but it will not win because God is still on His throne and He's still in control. You don't experience that kind of joy and - here's the word - freedom until you come to a place in your life where you're willing to surrender. You're willing to surrender, step back and say, "You know, I can do whatever I want, but it will lead to a lot of painful things. God, I want to do what you want so that I can be a person filled with love and joy and kindness and goodness and gentleness and self control." Louie Giglio once wrote some words that have really stayed with me about Moses. And he was talking about how when God revealed His name to Moses, He revealed His name as, "I am". Literally, God said His name is, "I am that I am", which is kind of a bizarre name. You know, God was calling Moses, Moses says, "What's your name?", God says, "I am that I am." Okay.. and I think that "okay" is the point. God says, 'I'm bigger than your categories. I'm bigger than your framework, I'm bigger than you could ever comprehend. You can't just reduce me down to a name. I am. I always have been, I always will be, I am that I am.' And Louie Giglio writes these words, he says, "God was telling Moses, "I am the center of everything. I am running the show. I am the save everyday forever. I am the owner of everything. I am the Lord, I am creator and sustainer of life. I am the savior. I am more than enough. I am inexhaustible and immeasurable. I am God." And in a heartbeat Moses knew God's name but he knew something more: he finally knew HIs name. Think about this: if God's name is "I am", then Moses' name must be

- are you ready? - "I am not." If God's I am, then I am not. I'm not the center of everything, I'm not in control, I'm not the solution, I'm not all powerful, I'm not calling the shots, I'm not the owner of anything, I'm not the Lord. And we in our lives can acknowledge today as we surrender, "Look, I'm not. But I know the one who is. I'm not, be He pursued me in His love. I'm not, but I've been purchased and redeemed. I'm not, but I've been invited into His story. I'm not, but I know the creator of the universe. I'm not, but I've been forgiven. I'm not, but I've been redeemed. I'm not, but I've been restored. I'm not, but I know I am." And that changes everything in our lives. And so friends, we have an opportunity each day to live under God's authority. Is there something in your life that you know God's calling you to surrender? And you've been saying in your own heart and your own life - and I've done this and do this and still struggle with it - you say, "You know what, I can do whatever I want." Some people say, "Well, Jesus died on the cross, He forgives me, I prayed for forgiveness. So I'll just do whatever I want and God will forgive me anyway." And what we miss in that sometimes is the joy that God offers us. The joy of following Him and surrendering to Him and walking in His love and in His grace. So live free under God's authority. Go home today with the realization that Jesus is large and in charge. "I have all authority in Heaven and earth," He says. No matter what you see on the news, no matter what you see in your own life, you may say, "Hey it is what it is", but it isn't going to kill you and destroy you because God's on the throne. He's overseeing your life, He watches over your back, He covers the details of your life. I believe fully I'm not going to die until my time's up. I'm not going to be done until God allows me to be done. I believe I'm in His hands,

in His control, in His strength, in His power and I can rest in that today. I'm not, but I know I am, and I'm His.

Secondly we can then engage in God's plan. Engage in God's plan in your life. You know, if you're a pet owner - how many of you love pets? Dogs, cats, birds, hamsters, fish. If you have pets, pets come with responsibilities, right? If you're going to be in a relationship with a pet, there are responsibilities. First responsibility is to feed them. Now, we have a bulldog around our house and I always know when it's time for her to eat because she will systematically go around the family and growl at us if she does not have food in the bowl. And if she doesn't get a response from one person, she'll cruise over to the next person. You know, she's a big softie but she gets real testy when she doesn't get her food. So eventually one of us makes our way over, gives her her food, and then she eats. The problem is the other responsibility is what she does with all that food and it comes out the other end. So she's got a little doggie door, you know, she goes out of our house, we have this little run that's just sort of rocks and a cinderblock wall and I'm going to say it's a yard wide, it's not very wide from our house to the wall. And so she goes over there on the rocks and that's where she takes care of her business. Takes care of her stuff. Now it's my responsibility to clean that up. My kids are getting older, you know where I'm going with this, right? But for now it's still my responsibility, so I walked out there recently, turned the corner, and looked down the side of our house. Let me just put it this way, I forgot about my responsibility for let's say 6 to 9 months. You kind of lose all respect for me as a pastor, don't you? I mean, I knew it was out there and yeah I need to do that, but time just sort of got

away from me. Who wants to go do that and it's hot outside, and I'll do it next time, I'll do it tomorrow. Finally I walk over there and I look, and it was other, man, it was nuclear bomb kind of other going on down the side of our house and it was so bad I thought, 'I'll go get all my kids and my wife and we'll all come out here and do this together.' But then I got wiser and realized that wasn't going to work. And so I put some gloves on and I got down on my hands and knees and I took about an hour, hour and a half and I went all the way down the side of our house and I picked up the yuck. But you couldn't have paid me to do that and here I am doing it for free. Why? Because I love that crazy dog and I'm responsible for her and I'm afraid of what my neighbors are going to start writing if I don't take care of that smell going down the side of my house. And so you do those kinds of things because you have a responsibility to those that you care about in life. Now think about this: sometimes we understand we have responsibilities as it comes to relationships with friends and even animals, but sometimes we duck and dodge our responsibilities when it comes to our relationship with God. And we know there's some things that God calls us to do to grow in our faith, to pray, to open up the Bible, to experience more of God's grace moving and working in life. Maybe we know there's some sin areas in our life we need to deal with and get honest with. Maybe we know there's some forgiveness areas we need to face in our lives. But sometimes we can be tempted to just sort of pull back and say, you know what? I won't. I won't do that. I won't forgive that person, I won't forgive the one who hurt me. And we miss out on the joy that we can experience by extending forgiveness. We say I won't show love to that person until they show love to me. And so we miss out on what that relationship could be. We say I won't trust God with the financial side of my life, or I won't be generous back to God and others.

And we miss out on the joy on God working and moving in the financial side of our life. We say I won't be obedient about whatever area He's convicting us about, we hold out. And I think when we do, we miss an opportunity. Every time that we, you and I, that we face a situation, a tension in our life, every time that we're tempted and we face a choice in our life and we sense clearly that this is what we should do, but this is what we're drawn to do. And we make the right decision. Every time we're in that moment, it's an opportunity to grow, to experience more of who God is, to experience more of His love and His grace moving and working in our lives. Listen to this, Matthew 28:20, he says, "Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands that I have given you." [Matthew 28:20] Engage in God's plan, he's saying and you'll experience God moving and working in your life. Real freedom trades I can do whatever I want to God can do whatever He wants with me. And we come with open heart to say, "Jesus, teach us. We want you learn your word, we want to know who you are, we want to grow in your faith so that we can be the kind of people you've called us to be in our lives." First step is right around the corner across our campus and that's a great opportunity just to reach out and allow God to move and work in some of your lives. Many people around Central across our campuses have recently become followers of Jesus and it's so exciting. But you know a next step for you as a follower of Jesus is then to lean in and be baptized. Jesus put it this way in the words that we read earlier, Matthew 28:19, he says, "Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations." And then what is He saying? "Baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit." [Matthew 28:19] Baptism is just this act where we go down into the water and we come up out of the water. And ultimately it's just an act where it's picturing what Jesus did for us. We're united with Him. And when He was crucified

He went down in the water just as He was buried and then He rose again after three days. And when we go under the water we're buried with Christ, it's a picture of that, and we rise again out of the water because we believe He rose again and one day we believe that we'll rise again as well.

And so Jesus Himself got baptized in the Jordan River. The Bible says that and we just kind of read it and move on, but we don't realize that it was so important to Him that he walked 60 miles so He could be baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan River. It was a marker, it was a picture for Him in His life. And for those of you that maybe have put this off, maybe you've said, "You know what, I won't do that or I'm not ready to do that", I want to encourage you this weekend to take a step of faith and follow Christ in baptism. I know sometimes we have questions when it comes to baptism in our lives. Some people think, "Hey, I was baptized as an infant, should I be baptized again as an adult?" And if you were baptized as an infant, you know it was a very special thing that your parents did for you. They took you to the church, they had you dedicated, you were sprinkled as an infant, it was very meaningful. There's nothing I would ever want to do to take away from that act of commitment that God did for you. But I believe when you make the choice as an adult to be baptized, you're actually saying, "My parents prayers and commitment of me as a child are being fulfilled." When they took you down to the Catholic church or whatever and had you sprinkled, they were saying, "We hope our child grows to follow Jesus in their life and to follow God and trust Him." And as you come to a place understanding baptism in your own life and take that step for yourself, you're saying, "I'm going to follow God faithfully." You're really fulfilling those early prayers of your parents. Maybe you're here today and you think,

"Gosh, I've been baptized before but I'm not sure it took and maybe I need to get baptized again." You know, "Like I got baptized before but gosh I still have a temper and I can still kind of lose my religion when I'm out driving my car and somebody cuts me off. I'm not always the nicest boss or an area for me where I just struggle the most, I just never feel like I'm a good enough dad." Hello. "And I just wish I had more grace and more compassion and more understanding sometimes with my kids." You know, the Bible I think it teaches that we should be baptized once. And then it's a picture of what Jesus did for us and there's no need after that to be baptized again and again. Otherwise we'd have baptismal tanks set up in all our campuses every weekend and you would get baptized every weekend. Right, you'd just come, people would be showing up at all hours of the night like, "I'm getting in the baptismal. I can't believe I did that." So the good news is I don't think we have to be baptized again and again because it's Jesus who forgives us our sins and it's Jesus who works in our life. If you feel led and convicted to get baptized again, then nobody is going to stand in your way; you can certainly do that. But I would encourage you to make it something that you're not doing again and again and again as if by doing it, you're receiving forgiveness. Make it something you're doing as a statement to say, "God, I'm following you in my life and I'm committed to you." Some people think they've got to get all their issues worked out before they're baptized. They just feel like, "Man, I've got to work through all this junk in my life that's holding me down. I've got to deal with this addiction, I've got to get this relationship worked out. I've got to get all these things taken care of and then I'll take the step of baptism." But friends, baptism is for those of us who are struggling to come and to say, "I believe and I

trust in Jesus Christ. I believe that He's the only one who can forgive me for my sins and work in my life. I believe that He's my only hope. I put my trust in him. I'm a mess, but I'm God's mess." And in that act of faith, God works. It's not like you get cleaned up to take a bath. If somebody came in and said, "What are you doing?" "I'm getting cleaned up." "Why?" "I'm going to take a bath." You say, "That's crazy. You just take a bath." And when it comes to baptism, you don't get cleaned up to get baptized, you come as you are and you take that step of faith in your life. I know some of you may be wrestling with any number of things in your life and you don't feel like you're worthy, you feel like you've got to get your life together. But what I've seen over and over in my life over the years is that baptism becomes a marker, and when a bunch of us who don't have our lives together take that step of faith - not only to follow Jesus, but to mark it in our lives with baptism - we begin a journey and sometimes it's a many year journey. It's always a many year journey where we see God moving and working and beginning to shape us. It doesn't happen overnight, but you can come as you are and take that step in your life. I love the story we read in Acts: they're cruising along and there's this Ethiopian in a chariot and he hears the good news of Jesus for the first time. And ultimately as he begins to understand who Jesus is, he's placing his trust and his faith in him and he looks out ... Acts Chapter 8, Verse 36: he says, "Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?" [Acts 8:36] And so he gets out of the chariot, walks right down into the water in his street clothes, probably had very expensive clothes, and he's baptized. Because it's not about the water, it's not about the building you're baptized in, it's not even about who does the baptism. It's about your heart before God to say,

"God, I'm committing to you and I'm going to follow you in my life." And if you've never taken that step of baptism, this weekend I want to challenge you right now to take that step, to say, "I'm not going to say I can do whatever I want God, but I'm going to be willing to say 'I'll do whatever you want to do with me.' I'm not going to say 'I won't' because your word clearly says that's my next step of faith. And if I'm going to follow you in my life then I'm going to do it." So if you're life, "Well, I want to be baptized, that's good, but my hair. I got my hair done, it's looking good, I got stuff going on", baptism is the great equalizer whether you've got a \$4 cut or a \$40 cut or \$100 cut, you all come out of the water equal. If Jesus went to the cross for you, you can get wet for Him. Some people say, "Well that's good Jud but my car .. my car, I've got my ride here. I don't want to get in my car and be wet. That would be a little crazy and you know, I like my leather seats" or whatever, and that's why we've got trash bags that you can put down in the seats of your car so that they don't get wet. So you say, "Well, I've got my wallet, I've got valuables, I've got my phone, I don't want to just turn those over." Well that's why we've got Ziploc baggies so you can put all that stuff in a Ziploc baggie and take that step of faith. You say, "Well I didn't bring a towel." Well we've got towels for you. You may have a white shirt on. You say, "I don't know, I have this shirt, you might be able to see through it." Well we've got shirts that we can give you that you can pull on over that shirt. And so friends whatever that excuse is that you haven't taken that step of faith in your life, I want to challenge you to take that step today and just allow God to move and to work. Freedom isn't freedom from responsibility; the real recipe for freedom is to realize we are free to responsibility under God's authority. And we can engage in God's

plan. Friends, when we do that we experience love and joy and peace flowing and moving in our lives today.