

Positive Parenting
July 2006
Marilyn Sharpe

LET FREEDOM RING!

“You’re not the boss of me!” Can’t you just see it? A sturdy, intense three year old, fists firmly planted on hips, defiant face thrust forward, delivering a personal declaration of independence. Cute, isn’t it? Perhaps cuter at 3 than at 13 or 23 or ... oh, you get the picture.

As we celebrate this Fourth of July, thanking God for freedoms we enjoy as Americans, it is a perfect opportunity to reflect on the freedom we know in Jesus Christ and to wonder about how that freedom lives in our families.

Jesus teaches us so much about freedom. In Martin Luther’s words, Jesus has “freed us from sin, death and the power of the devil,” offering us eternal and abundant life as a free gift. It is nothing we can earn or deserve. We have **freedom from** having to earn God’s love and approval; God already lavishes that love on us, with no strings attached. That’s grace! So, God’s love, God’s gifts aren’t about a “got to.”

But now, what do we “get to” do in loving response? What is this **freedom for**? It is not freedom, as license to be greedy or cruel or thoughtless or self-centered. 1 Peter 2:16 says it this way, “As servants of God, live as free people, yet do not use your freedom as a pretext for evil.” It is freedom to live as a child of God. It is freedom to love and serve God by loving and serving God’s family, to love one another as we have been loved.

So, how does freedom look in families? Children of all ages need a balance between boundaries that keep them safe and space to explore. Children need opportunities to

- Discover their world
- Explore their gifts, talents and preferences, and discover who they are uniquely created to be
- Make choices, to help them learn to make good decisions
- Fail, to experience consequences, and learn to recover from mistakes
- Have time alone, balanced with time with others
- Know that they are loved, just as they are.

So, this month, celebrate freedom as a Christian family, to become all that God has created you to be.

FAMILY ACTIVITIES

1. At a family dinner, provide a supply of tea light candles and a box of matches. As a family, name the freedoms we enjoy, lighting a candle for each one named. Close with prayer, thanking God for those freedoms.

2. Read the paper together, identifying examples of the freedoms people enjoy and the lack of freedom others experience. Wonder out loud together what we as a family can do to insure continuation of the freedoms we enjoy and to bring freedom to others.
3. Celebrate new freedoms for your family members, like learning to cross the street alone, receiving a driver's license, getting a cast off a broken leg that now is healed, retirement, and so many more.
4. Read the Amnesty International website at <http://www.amnestyusa.org/> to find opportunities to be informed and to act on behalf of others who do not have freedom to live a safe life with opportunities. Choose one thing you will do together.