

Set Free and Standing Out with God

All my life I've run the hamster wheel of achievement and acceptance; a headstrong, type-A control freak, looking for love. As a child, I earned love by working hard to fit in. At church, I earned love by memorizing verses. At school, I earned love by pleasing teachers. Looking back, I see a girl in pigtails; acceptance her endgame.

In kindergarten, I repeated the sinner's prayer before I could write complete sentences. I memorized King James verses with words like sanctification, edification and fornication. I regurgitated the definition of justification – "Just-as-if-I-hadn't-sinned" – even though I didn't understand what the words meant. I absorbed all this burdensome religion like a six-, seven- and eight-year-old sponge and, furthermore, I believed it must be true, all of it.

A chameleon of sorts, I learned the ways of fitting in, of popularity and of being liked, all the while grasping for permission to be fully known and, in spite of that, fully loved. But what about freedom? The God I was striving for was rigid and lifeless and seemed far away. And although I believed He was real, I wasn't convinced He was good. So I went on trying to be the best version of myself, hoping maybe I'd catch a glimpse of His approval.

Whenever I felt rejected or insecure, I buckled down with strategies to be more confident, more accepted and more loved. I watched what others were doing and adopted their games. But the more I learned, the more fraudulent it all appeared. I read freedom in the pages of Scripture, but it felt elusive and temporary. I wore myself ragged trying to be enough and longed to be free.

Then, many months ago, I walked a Florida beach at sunset, watching the last sliver of crimson sun slip under the waves, far out on the horizon. Streaky pinks and golds burned into my mind, unlocking my memory of rhythm. And there, on the beach, I danced.

And there, in the twisting and twirling, I felt a glimpse of the freedom God longed for me to live, a reckless abandon blooming into unencumbered joy. As the wind picked up under the cotton-candy sky, I pictured the Almighty looking down, eyes landing on His little girl leaping on the beach. Spontaneous and awkward, though I didn't care, I embraced this moment alone with Him at dusk. *This is what freedom feels like. This is the way I was meant to live*, I thought. This is the miracle of grace.

When we become enslaved to anything – achievement, approval, popularity, even religion – we miss out on a life of surrender and peace; a life where we experience the truth that God is enough; a life where God is the Good Shepherd who gives us everything we need; a life where we lack nothing.

Jesus wants to relieve you of this world's weight. He's waiting, just beyond the horizon, for you to be ready. He will come.

He will teach you to be free. Say yes to His freedom.

Reflect: What is enslaving you and keeping you from experiencing all the freedom Christ has to offer? Are you ready to throw it off, step into the light and dance in the freedom of Christ? Ask God to help you step into the freedom He wants you to live in. {eoa}

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