

Surrender and Walk in Freedom

✖ *Everyone has struggles. But God's power will free us when we give ourselves to Him.*

I took the old shoebox from my closet and looked through the tattered love letters James had written to me during his first year of college. It occurred to me that they were 20-year-old letters.

A lot had happened in 20 years.

We'd become a family of five. The James Robison Evangelistic Association had grown to its peak in outreach. Many respected spiritual leaders described James as the most dynamic and gifted preacher of our day.

I chose a letter randomly and read its yellowed pages, hoping to recapture a sense of my husband's early passion for the Lord:

Betty, I went to the woods as soon as I could get away from class. God's presence saturated the place where I sat, and He seemed to say, "I've been waiting for you, James."

I felt as if I could reach up and take Him by the hand. I told Him, "I want to tell everyone how great You are."

God said something that totally stunned me. He told me He wanted to use me to preach His Word to the world. I told Him I couldn't begin to think in those terms.

Then He said, "Within a year, you will be preaching in the largest churches, stadiums and coliseums." He showed me thousands of people crowding the aisles and surrounding the platform to surrender their lives to Jesus.

I dropped to my knees and told God that He didn't have to give me a big ministry like that.

"All I care about is You and me, Jesus, right here. No matter what happens, if You give me a big ministry or a small one, I promise I'll always come right back here to You and tell You that I love You."

Tears filled my eyes as I read the last line again.

"Oh God," I prayed, "everything you showed him that day has happened. You kept your word to James.

"Why didn't he keep his promise to You? What's happening to him?

"After the last crusade, he asked me to pray that he would die. He talked about depression and lustful thoughts that were tormenting him. He says it's not my fault, but I know it is.

"I'm not close to You like James is," I cried. "He has always been the strong one. How can I help him?"

How Did We Get Here?

When I first started planning a future with my shy high school sweetheart, I imagined a safe, comfortable and predictable life. But then God called James to preach and filled him with boldness—and I became the wife of a man in public ministry.

To survive I made sure I did all the right religious things. At the same time, I insulated myself by sticking close to the one place I felt safe: at home with my family.

Meanwhile James' zeal and the demands of his schedule thrust him into a web of religious activity. Somewhere in the midst of all his busyness for God, however, he lost his intimacy with God. By his late 20s he found himself experiencing defeat, depression and emptiness.

I prayed desperate prayers for him. People close to him also prayed and attempted to speak into his life.

Eventually, by the grace and power of God, James experienced a dramatic deliverance. The change in him was striking. His schedule remained busy, but now his heart and soul were peaceful and unstressed.

He studied the Bible for hours each day as a new, life-giving message seemed to explode in his preaching. He used every possible platform to describe the victory he'd found, hoping to set other captives free.

I was happy for James, but I was also horrified at having our private lives played out openly before the world. James' new freedom destroyed my comfort zones and created a whole new, unpredictable world for me.

Suddenly I was forced to deal with my own well-disguised strongholds, which glared in ugly contrast to the open, Christ-like life James was now living.

Believing Lies

The Holy Spirit showed me that my strongholds were largely the result of deceptive thinking—lies from the enemy I had believed from an early age.

As a bashful middle child, I had developed a pattern of thinking negative thoughts about my appearance, my intelligence and my purpose in life. I had avoided competition and seldom attempted anything new—not because I lacked interest, but because I was afraid of failing.

I had carried that baggage into my marriage. No matter how James tried to build me up, I was never able to receive his edification.

Proverbs 29:25 says, "The fear of human opinion disables; trusting in God protects you from that" (The Message). How true!

The disabling lies of the enemy had literally paralyzed me

with fear. As I began to acknowledge the deception, however, and trust God more and more with my life, the Holy Spirit helped me build up a powerful resistance to Satan's schemes.

Lie 1: "Betty, you can't understand God's Word." Growing up in church, I read my Bible but had difficulty understanding it. I avoided reading the Old Testament, convinced that it was beyond me.

Then I learned that the Holy Spirit was sent to reveal God's Word to believers. Once Satan's lie was exposed by this truth, I asked God to fill me with His Spirit and teach me His Word.

I began to spend the early mornings studying the Bible and making notes on what I was learning. I was amazed when I saw New Testament truths foreshadowed in the writings of Moses, David and the prophets. The Bible was a new, exciting book, and I couldn't stop studying once I started.

Whenever I shared the insights God was showing me with James, our discussions reminded me of the spiritual exchanges he had with other preachers. I could understand the Bible after all! Sometimes James would even tell a congregation, "Tonight I am preaching something Betty showed me in the Word."

Lie 2: "Betty, God has His favorites—and you're not one of them." One evening after a long day of ministry, James and I fell into bed exhausted but spiritually refreshed. Suddenly I felt my emotions being overwhelmed, and tears began to flow freely.

James reached for me. "What's wrong, Honey?"

"Nothing's wrong," I said through my tears. "God is just loving me."

"For the first time I feel like God is saying, 'Betty, I love you just as you are. I am pleased with you. You let Me do the changing in you. Quit trying to change yourself.'"

As His love flowed through me in a new way that night, I felt special to the Lord. It was a totally freeing experience.

Lie 3: "You will die, and James will get the wife he deserves." Secretly I had believed this lie all our married life. When I finally confessed it to James, he held me, rebuked the fear, and prayed Scriptures of Christ's authority over me.

My body shook violently as the enemy made his last desperate attempt to keep me in the lie. Then the shaking stopped, and I rejoiced because I knew I was free.

For the first time, I understood 2 Timothy 1:7: God had not given me a spirit of fear, but I had allowed one to control me.

I'll be honest. Fear still assaults my mind sometimes. But now I recognize its source, and I trust God's love and the authority of His Word to protect me.

Six Steps to Freedom

For me, freedom didn't come overnight. It was a process. But the key was found in one word: surrender.

Using a simple progression through Scripture, God showed me that surrendering to Him was the only path to true freedom. He led me through six steps of surrender that eventually broke the power of Satan's lies in my life.

1. Humble yourself before God (see James 4:7). This first step of surrender often reveals a well-hidden stronghold of pride. Pride hates to be uncovered—and when it is, we generally don't like what we find underneath.

At one point I found myself suffering a series of severe headaches. I asked James if God was showing him anything about me. I knew he'd learned in his studies that affliction can sometimes be demonic and attached to unconfessed sin.

James sat down next to me. "I believe God is showing me something, but you aren't going to like it."

I insisted I could accept whatever it was.

"Well," he continued, "I think God is saying you have an unteachable spirit."

In a burst of energy, I stood, planted my hands on my hips and announced, "I do not!" My head pounded fiercely as I ran to the bedroom, hurt and upset.

James took the kids out and left me alone pacing the floor. Immediately evil, impish faces appeared in the room and in my dresser mirror. Their mouths curled up in taunting smirks, and their voices mocked me in my thoughts.

I wanted to scream or run, but my limbs felt paralyzed. The images ambushed me on every turn, and their heckling grew louder.

"Please God, help me," I prayed. "Make these things go away. I will do whatever you say."

Then I wept as I confessed, "I do have an unteachable spirit."

When I opened my eyes, the terrifying images were gone. I walked to the mirror and saw only my reflection. A peaceful smile came over my face as I realized my headache was gone too.

An unteachable spirit partners with pride to keep from being exposed. Only humility can uncover them both.

2. Resist the devil (see James 4:7). Some Christians get trapped in sin and live defeated lives because they don't think the devil attacks them. They believe, as I did, that their distorted thoughts are their own.

They don't realize that "we are not fighting against people

made of flesh and blood, but against the evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against those mighty powers of darkness who rule this world, and against wicked spirits of the heavenly realms" (Eph. 6:12, NLT).

The truth is, the enemy does attack us. He targets our minds and feeds us subtle lies that often keep us in bondage.

We can resist him, however, by believing God's Word and allowing the Holy Spirit to equip us in spiritual armor—the only kind that will allow us to stand against the devil's schemes (see Eph. 5:13-18).

3. Wash your hands and purify your heart (see James 4:8). Amazingly, when we confess our sins to Jesus, He replaces our desire to sin with a desire for His purity. The Bible says the Holy Spirit within us "jealously longs for us to be faithful." When we come to Him with contrite hearts, He gives us the strength to make pure choices and "stand against such evil desires" (vv. 5-6).

4. Feel sorrow and deep grief for your sins (see James 4:9). As a young woman, I had the idea that God would "get me" if I didn't live a pure and obedient life. So I worked hard at being good. I honestly think that if I hadn't learned about saving grace in Ephesians 2:8-9 and known people who had intimate relationships with Jesus, I might have missed salvation through Christ.

But Isaiah 64:6 says, "We are infected and impure with sin. When we proudly display our righteous deeds, we find they are as filthy rags."

When the Holy Spirit showed me my sin and how it had opened my life to strongholds, my heart was broken. I grieved and repented before the Lord, realizing I had been trusting in my own goodness, not His grace.

5. Submit to the Lord's plan (see James 4:10). When James

initiated our African mission work, I battled a different fear. In the unknown of foreign places, I would be far from my physical comfort zone. Our very lives could be threatened.

What a blessing I would have missed if I hadn't submitted my future to the Lord! Feeding starving children, drilling wells and building orphanages throughout the world has become a ministry passion. I have been surprised by how much I love being in the middle of it all.

6. Allow God alone to lift you up (see James 4:10). The Bible is clear: If we humble ourselves under God's mighty hand, He will lift us up in His own timing.

After James' deliverance was made public, our ministry lost half its financial support. Friends slandered and rejected us. But we forgave—without compromising the message of freedom God had given us.

As it turned out, the opposition only served to open up greater opportunities for outreach. The support we lost was not only replaced, it was greatly increased. God did indeed lift us up!

Wave the White Flag

Everyone struggles with something. My battle was with deception, fear and pride. Your battle may be with something else.

The good news is we can wave the white flag of surrender—not to the schemes of the enemy, but to God. As James and I learned, it's only by surrendering ourselves to God—by humbling ourselves before Him, repenting of our sin and trusting in His love and grace alone—that we find the path to freedom in our lives.

Betty Robison is the author of Free to Be Me, published by Tyndale House Publishers, from which this article is adapted.