

THE STRONGER ONE

Session 8: The Spoils of War

Galatians 5:1-25 · Mark 5:1-20 · John 8:31-36, 44

Part 1: Leader Preparation Guide

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim. The group discovers what freedom is for. The liar's voice, tracked since week one, is finally named from Jesus's own mouth and answered by the truth that frees; the freed man of the Gerasenes shows that the first assignment of the delivered is testimony; and Isaiah reveals the study's last discovery: the freed captives become the rebuilders of ruins. The spoils of this war are people.

Catholic Touchstone. "There is no true freedom except in the service of what is good and just" (CCC 1733); the fruits of the Spirit as first fruits of eternal glory (CCC 1832); the witness of a Christian life as a power that draws others to the faith and to God (CCC 2044).

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Everything tonight is harvest. Begin with Galatians 5:1, the study's final memory verse and its whole arc in one sentence: "For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery." Both halves matter: the indicative (Christ has set us free: the Stronger One's work, not ours) and the imperative (stand fast: the freed man garrisons his liberty). And then Paul immediately guards freedom's meaning: "only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love be servants of one another" (5:13). Freedom in the Catholic grammar is not the absence of claims on me; it is the capacity to give myself away. The Catechism compresses it: "The more one does what is good, the freer one becomes" (1733). Escape is week one; tonight is about what the escaped are for.

The liar's voice thread resolves tonight, and the resolution has been parked in John 8 since Session 2. First the naming, from Jesus without euphemism: the devil "was a murderer from the beginning... there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies" (8:44). The liar's pattern runs through every whisper the study has catalogued (the fog, the denial, the slander, the minimize, the annihilate), amplified by flesh and world; and lying has become his native language by his own irrevocable choice (he was created good, and ruined himself). Then the answer, the two verses we have refused to cash for six weeks: "you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (8:32), and "if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed" (8:36). Put them together, with John 14:6, and the study's deepest claim lands: the truth that frees is not merely information but ultimately a Person; the Son is the truth the liar has no answer to. The war against the father of lies was always going to be won by the one who said "I am the way, and the truth, and the life."

The Gerasene demoniac (Mark 5:1-20) is tonight's commissioning text, and read it whole: the man who lived among the tombs, whom no one could bind any more, even with a chain: a stronghold in its terminal form: isolation, self-harm, a man whose own voice is buried beneath the demons' answer, "Legion." Then the deliverance, and the detail Mark loves: the man "sitting there, clothed and in his right mind." And then the surprise that gives tonight its shape: the man begs to come with Jesus, and Jesus says no. "Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." The first person Mark shows evangelizing the Decapolis is a former demoniac, and his commissioning is simply to tell what mercy did. Freedom's first assignment is testimony,

delivered to the people who knew you walled. (One guardrail said aloud: the Gerasene's affliction is extraordinary demonic possession, which the study's "stronghold" metaphor is not claiming about anyone's habit, wound, or illness; what carries over is Christ's authority and the shape of the commissioning, not the diagnosis.)

Teach testimony's prudence alongside its power, because your room has been promised privacy for eight weeks and must not hear tonight as a demand to unseal the Wall publicly. The Gerasene pattern is exact: he narrates mercy, not pathology: "how much the Lord has done for you" is the assignment, not a tour of the tombs. Some walls (and other people implicated in them) should stay under the seal of prudent discretion or the confessional forever; what can always be shared is the shape of rescue: I was stuck; Christ was stronger; here is where mercy lives. Discernment, a spiritual director, and time decide how much more. Session 7's Peter already set the deeper truth: it is the healed wound, not the open one, that feeds sheep.

Last: the fruit and the ruins. Galatians 5:22-23 lists what grows in the garrisoned house: "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control": notice these are fruits, not achievements: what the occupying Spirit produces in soil kept clear, and the direct opposite of a stronghold's produce. And Isaiah 61 (the night's central discovery) shows the last movement of the arc: the anointed one proclaims "liberty to the captives," and then the freed captives themselves "shall build up the ancient ruins... they shall repair the ruined cities." The delivered become the construction crew. Somebody in your parish is sitting inside the wall your participant just left, and your participant's experience gives them a rare empathy and credibility for finding them, used with discernment, stability, and help. In the study's imagery, the spoils of the Stronger One's war (Luke 11:22: "divides his spoil") turn out to be people: recovered, and then deployed.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Isaiah 61:1-4. The anointed one's manifesto ("to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound"), which Jesus claimed as his own in Nazareth: and its rarely-read fourth verse, where the freed ones become rebuilders of the ancient ruins. Central discovery; do not name it in advance.

Psalms 124:7. "We have escaped as a bird from the snare of the fowlers; the snare is broken, and we have escaped!" Israel's corporate victory cry after rescue: tonight it becomes the group's own closing acclamation, prayed together.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Irenaeus of Lyons

Against Heresies IV.20.7

One of St. Irenaeus's best-known sentences reads, literally, "the glory of God is a living man, and the life of man is the vision of God"; the popular modern paraphrase runs "the glory of God is man fully alive." Either way the claim is staggering: God's glory is not diminished by human flourishing but displayed in it; a human being restored to full life is what the Father's renown looks like in public.

For our purposes: a stronghold is an anti-glory: a life narrowed, dimmed, and walled. Every wall that comes down makes God visible. Your freedom is not merely your relief; it is his reputation, walking around the parish.

The common rendering and the more literal one are both given; the sentence is his, from Against Heresies IV.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Augustine of Hippo

Confessions, Book I (ch. 1)

We began this study with Augustine bound: the chain of habit, welded link by link, from Book VIII. We end with the sentence he placed at the very front of the Confessions, the one the whole work exists to explain: “you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.”

For our purposes: here is the study’s last diagnosis and first cause in one line. Every stronghold was a counterfeit rest: the restless heart trying to build a home out of the wrong materials. The man of the chain became the man of the rest: not by better chains management, but by finally coming home. That is the home Christ desires, and his grace is working toward, for everyone in your room.

Confessions I.1, in a familiar English rendering; translations vary.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. John Paul II

Homily at Oriole Park at Camden Yards, Baltimore, 8 October 1995

Preaching in America, St. John Paul II declared: “Freedom consists not in doing what we like, but in having the right to do what we ought.” One sentence, and the whole modern counterfeit of freedom (limitless option, zero claim) is set aside for the real thing: freedom as capacity for the good, the liberty of a hand finally healthy enough to give.

For our purposes: the pope of the twentieth century’s great captivities says what Galatians 5 says: freedom has a purpose written into it. The stronghold promised freedom as license and delivered slavery; Christ delivers freedom as power to love, and it holds.

The sentence is quoted in the wording widely reported from that homily.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

- **CCC 1733.** “The more one does what is good, the freer one becomes. There is no true freedom except in the service of what is good and just.” Freedom grows with use, like the virtues it serves: the exact reverse of the stronghold’s physics, where each surrender narrowed the next choice.
- **CCC 1832.** The fruits of the Spirit are perfections the Holy Spirit forms in us as firstfruits of eternal glory; the tradition counts twelve (Galatians’ Greek text lists nine, which is what your group reads; the Latin tradition behind CCC 1832 counts twelve): fruit is grown, not manufactured: your assignment is the soil (the garrisoned, furnished house), and the Spirit does the producing.
- **CCC 2044.** The witness of a Christian life, and good works done in a supernatural spirit, have great power to draw men to the faith and to God. Mark 5 gives one vivid form that witness can take: telling what the Lord has done. Testimony is not optional decoration on freedom.

THREAD WATCH (LEADER ONLY): FINAL RESOLUTIONS

THE LIAR’S VOICE (RESOLVES TONIGHT). Named from John 8:44 (a liar and the father of lies: it is what he is), and answered by 8:32 and 8:36: the truth that frees is a Person, and the Son’s freedom is “free indeed.” When it lands, take a moment to walk the whole thread aloud: the fog of Eden, the “never in bondage” self-deception, the two-stroke engine: all one voice, all answered by one Word. This is the study’s summit; do not rush it.

THE ARMOR and THE SWEPT HOUSE (resolved Sessions 4-6). Tonight's fruit passage shows the furnished house flourishing; if the group connects fruit to furniture, the study has done its work. THE WALL (final instruction tonight). Whether sheets were torn or kept, tonight each participant writes something new on Take-Home 8's commissioning card: one name (someone still walled-in, held in prayer) and one act of strengthening. The study ends facing outward.

COMMISSIONING: run the closing as written: Psalm 124:7 prayed together as an acclamation, the sending prayer, and any parish touch you arranged (a blessing from Father, a candle, the cards). Send them out as the Church sends: with a job.

SESSION GOALS

1. Land Galatians 5:1 whole: the indicative (Christ freed) and the imperative (stand fast), with freedom defined as capacity for love, not absence of claims.
2. Resolve the liar's voice: named (John 8:44), answered (8:32, 36): the truth that frees is a Person.
3. Read the Gerasene as commissioning: deliverance, right mind, and the surprising "go home and tell."
4. Teach testimony's prudence: narrate mercy, not pathology; discernment governs disclosure.
5. Deliver the Isaiah 61 discovery: freed captives become rebuilders of ruins.
6. Commission the group: fruit in the garrisoned house, a name on every card, Psalm 124:7 as the closing acclamation.

TIMED PLAN (90 MINUTES)

- Welcome, covenant (final time), opening prayer: 8 min
- Win questions: 8 min
- Build: Galatians 5:1, 13-25 and the freedom steelman: 22 min
- Build: John 8: the liar named, the truth that frees (thread resolution): 15 min
- Build: Mark 5 commissioning and the Isaiah 61 discovery: 20 min
- Send, commissioning cards, Psalm 124 acclamation, closing: 17 min

If time runs short: cut the Dig Deeper box and one Win question. Do not cut the John 8 resolution or the commissioning; the first is the study's summit and the second is its purpose.

PASTORAL NOTE FOR THE LEADER (STANDING NOTE, FINAL SESSION)

No one is ever asked to name their battle: including tonight. Testimony teaching must be delivered with the privacy covenant explicitly reaffirmed: nothing tonight asks anyone to unseal their Wall to this group or any group; the Gerasene narrates mercy, not pathology, and discernment (ideally with a confessor or director) governs every disclosure beyond that. Where a stronghold involves addiction or compulsion, commend continuing exactly the alliances this study built: Confession, direction, professional and group support: freedom is garrisoned, not graduated from. And end warmly: eight weeks of this material is heavy lifting, and your people did it. Tell them so.

Part 2: Discussion Guide

OPENING PRAYER

*Lord Jesus Christ, Stronger One: eight weeks ago we came with walls we could not name.
You have named them, mapped them, armed us, absolved us, fed us, and lifted us when we fell.
Tonight, finish what you began: name the liar, speak the truth that frees,
and send us out as witnesses of your mercy, each as you call us: many, like the Gerasene, home, with a
story about mercy.
Amen.*

WIN: OPENING QUESTIONS

1. What is something you were finally freed from (a debt, a cast on a broken limb, a terrible job) where the strangest part was learning what to do with the freedom? What did you do first?
2. Who is someone whose story of getting through something gave you real hope: more than any expert's advice could? What made their telling of it so powerful?

BUILD: INTO THE TEXT

Read Galatians 5:1-25 aloud (keep vv. 2-12 in: they name what the yoke was).

3. Galatians 5:1 has two halves: an announcement and a command. Name them both. Why does the study's whole arc need both halves?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The announcement: "For freedom Christ has set us free": the indicative, the Stronger One's finished work; freedom is given, not achieved, exactly as Session 1 promised. The command: "stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery": the freed man garrisons his liberty; the gift is defended or it is lost. Grace precedes, enables, and sustains everything, and the will healed by grace truly fights: Session 2's answer, now as a life posture. One more precision from verse 13: freedom is "not... an opportunity for the flesh, but through love be servants of one another." Freedom's content is love; its shape is service. "The more one does what is good, the freer one becomes" (CCC 1733).

Build, Then Press: The Free Spirit's Case

BUILD THE OBJECTION AT FULL STRENGTH

A friend who has watched your eight weeks says, with Galatians open: "'For freedom Christ has set us free: do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.' Exactly! So why are you leaving this study with more structure than you started: daily suit-up prayers, examens, confession schedules, accountability partners, opposing-virtue drills? That is a yoke. You escaped one master and hired five new ones. If the Son has made you free indeed, live free: no more regimens, no more religious scaffolding. And be honest: scheduled confession, virtue drills, accountability: to a reader of Galatians that can look like returning to law as the ground of your standing with God. Grace means the training wheels come off."

Honor its force: it quotes tonight's own memory verse, it fears real legalism, and everyone tired of white-knuckling feels its pull.

4. Now press from the passage itself: what does Paul call the yoke of slavery, what does he say freedom is for (v. 13), and what do free people's disciplines actually serve? (Session 2 veterans: whose machinery are the disciplines running?)

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Read what the room just heard in vv. 2-6: the "yoke of slavery" in Galatians is accepting circumcision and the Mosaic law as necessary for justification: seeking standing with God through law rather than receiving it in Christ. It is precisely not the free man's training. Paul guards the other flank in the same chapter: freedom is "not an opportunity for the flesh"; and he ends our passage with "self-control" listed as fruit of the Spirit: the free life has a spine. The disciplines this study taught are not a new master; they are the freed man's garrison: Session 2's machinery (repetition forms inclination) deliberately run for the Kingdom instead of against it. Nobody calls a farmer a slave for tending what he was freely given, or an athlete for training in the liberty of health.

The test that separates garrison from yoke is simple and Pauline: what is it for, and who is it from? Done to earn God's love: yoke; drop it. Done from God's love, to guard and grow a freedom already given: garrison; keep it, joyfully and lightly. "Stand fast" is itself a command to effort: freedom, it turns out, is a position you hold, and held positions have watch schedules.

Read John 8:31-36 and John 8:44 aloud.

5. Since week one this study has tracked a voice: the fog of Eden, the "you will not die," the "never in bondage," the minimize-then-annihilate engine. Tonight Jesus names its owner. Who is he, what is he, and how do verses 32 and 36 answer him: finally and completely?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The devil "was a murderer from the beginning... there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies" (8:44). Not: he sometimes lies. Lying has become his native language, by his own irrevocable choice (created good, self-ruined); and the liar's pattern runs through every whisper the study catalogued, amplified by flesh and world. And note Jesus's pairing: liar and murderer: the lie was always aimed at a death ("you will not die" was spoken to kill).

The answer: "you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (8:32): and then verse 36 names the freer: "if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed." Read with John 14:6, the truth that frees is not merely propositions to memorize but ultimately a Person to abide in: the one who said "I am the way, and the truth, and the life." Against the father of lies, God did not send an argument; he sent his Son. That is why every weapon this study issued (the Word, the sacraments, the renunciation, the disclosure, the countersword) works the same way: each one brings the lie into contact with him. The war of the strongholds ends where it began in Luke 11: the Stronger One, standing in the house, and the liar with nothing true to say.

Read Mark 5:1-20 aloud.

6. Here is a stronghold in its terminal form: tombs, chains, isolation, a name dissolved into “Legion.” Watch the deliverance, and then watch the ending closely: what does the freed man ask, and what does Jesus answer? Why is the answer a surprise: and a commission?

ANSWER (*share after the discussion*)

The man begs “that he might be with him”: the most understandable request in the Gospels: and Jesus refuses it: “Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.” The first person Mark shows evangelizing the Decapolis is a former demoniac with no training and one qualification: he was there, and now he is “sitting... clothed and in his right mind,” and everyone knows it. His testimony needs no theology degree; its content is assigned in the sentence: how much the Lord has done, and how he has had mercy.

Mark the prudence inside the power, and reaffirm our covenant while you do: the Gerasene narrates mercy, not pathology: the assignment is the rescue, not a tour of the tombs. Nothing in this study asks anyone to unseal their Wall to any group, ever; what can always be told is the shape of rescue: I was stuck; Christ was stronger; here is where mercy lives. How much more to share, and with whom, is discernment work: a confessor or director helps. But the direction of freedom is now fixed: home, toward the people who knew you walled: because somebody there is sitting inside a wall tonight, and your history gives you a rare empathy and credibility for finding them: used with discernment, stability, and help, it is a gift few others carry.

DISCOVERY MOMENT (THE STUDY’S LAST)

Say: the passage Jesus read at Nazareth, in the inaugural sermon of Luke’s Gospel (Luke 4:16-21): the anointed one proclaiming liberty to captives: has a fourth verse almost nobody reads. It is the last discovery of this study. Send them to Isaiah 61:1-4, and ask them to find who the “they” of verse 4 are and what they do.

Read verses 1-3, savoring the ones this room has lived: liberty to the captives, the opening of the prison, the oil of gladness instead of mourning. Then verse 4, slowly: “They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations.” Ask: who does the rebuilding in this verse? The restored people: the freed and comforted of verses 1-3 become the builders of verse 4: repairing devastations older than themselves (“of many generations”: some walls run in families, and someone in this room may be the one who ends a generational one). Then close the arc aloud, in the study’s imagery: Luke 11:22 said the Stronger One “divides his spoil.” Read this way, here is the spoil: people: recovered, and then deployed to the ruins. You are the plunder of Christ, and the plunder gets a trowel.

DIG DEEPER (IF TIME ALLOWS)

Galatians 5:22-23 as the anti-stronghold inventory: set each fruit against the wall it replaces (peace against the anxious grip, self-control against the compulsion, joy against the anesthetic). Fruit is grown, not manufactured: the Spirit produces it in soil kept clear: which is what all your disciplines are actually for.

Luke 22:32 revisited: “when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren.” Peter’s commission and the Gerasene’s are the same commission at different scales. So is yours.

SEND: TAKING IT OUT (THE COMMISSIONING)

7. Privately, on your Take-Home card: write one name: someone who may need encouragement, prayer, or hope right now: and commit to pray for them daily. Then write one act of strengthening within your reach this month: an invitation, a conversation, a shared meal, a copy of a book, a word of your story's shape ("I was stuck; Christ was stronger"). Names are never shared aloud: this stays between you and God.

8. Eight weeks ago you named a wall on a sealed sheet. Whatever its state tonight: down, cracked, or still standing under siege: what has actually changed? Name to yourself what you know now that you did not know then: about the wall, about the enemy, and about the Stronger One.

LIVE IT: THE STANDING ORDERS (FOR LIFE, NOT A WEEK)

- **Keep the garrison.** The morning suit-up, the nightly examen, frequent Confession and Communion, the countersword, the tell-someone person, and the tradition's beloved weapon this study only now names: the Rosary, Our Lady's own patrol of the mysteries: these are not the study's homework; they are freedom's watch schedule. Keep them lightly and joyfully, from love, never for earning.
- **Work your card.** Pray the name daily. Do the act this month. Then find the next name; the ruins are large and the crew is hiring.
- **Tell the shape.** When God opens the door (he will), tell the Gerasene version: how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy. Mercy narrated is a wall-breaker in someone else's siege.

CLOSING ACCLAMATION AND SENDING (LEADER SCRIPT)

Say: eight weeks ago, most of us walked in guarding a wall. Tonight we end with Israel's shout on the far side of a rescue. Pray it with me, aloud, together: and mean every word:

"We have escaped as a bird from the snare of the fowlers; the snare is broken, and we have escaped!" (Psalm 124:7)

Then pray the sending prayer below, add any parish blessing you arranged, and send them home: the same direction Jesus sent the Gerasene.

SENDING PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ, Stronger One: you entered the strong man's house, and you did not leave empty-handed.

We are the spoil. Divide us now among the ruins.

Send us home clothed and in our right minds, with mercy for a message, and let every wall we ever built become, in your hands, a testimony that walls fall.

To you, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, be glory forever. Amen.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY

"For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery."

Galatians 5:1

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

Every passage used in Session 8, in order:

1. Galatians 5:1-25 (main reading: freedom's gift, the yoke named in vv. 2-6, guard, and fruit)
2. John 8:31-36 (the truth that frees; free indeed; read first)
3. John 8:44 (the liar named: thread resolution); John 14:6 (the truth in person, question 5)
4. Mark 5:1-20 (main reading: the Gerasene; commissioning)
5. Isaiah 61:1-4 with Luke 4:16-21 (Discovery Moment: the restored rebuild the ruins; Nazareth)
6. Luke 11:22 (arc closure: he divides his spoil)
7. Luke 22:32 (Dig Deeper: strengthen your brethren)
8. Psalm 124:7 (closing acclamation)
9. Galatians 5:1 (memory verse)