

## Lesson Two

# Freedom's Partner

### LESSON IDEA

Freedom goes hand-in-hand with an indispensable partner: responsibility. We merit freedom when we behave responsibly, but freedom is inevitably lost when we act irresponsibly.

### VISUAL AID

None recommended for this lesson.

**L**AST WEEK, we discussed the nature and importance of freedom, concluding that freedom can be defined as the ability to act for oneself; to make our own choices about what we do and how we live.

Were we to visit a busy shopping center and ask those we meet if they favor freedom, all would probably respond with an enthusiastic, "Yes!" Everyone prefers to live in freedom. But if we were to ask what steps are necessary to deserve freedom, there would doubtless be a wide variety of answers. Few of us ever stop to think about the requirements of freedom.

Tonight, we will examine situations in everyday life to pin-point the basic principles of freedom and how its blessings can be attained.

**F**IRST, let us look at the Smith family. Mr. and Mrs. Smith have four children: Larry, age 18; Diane, age 15; Becky, age eight; and Jimmy, who just turned three.

Larry recently graduated from high school and now works as a clerk in a hardware store, saving most of his salary for college. He recently received his driver's license and is allowed to use the family car for special occasions.

Diane graduated from junior high last year and is now a sophomore in high school. She earns spending money by babysitting on weekends. Becky is in elementary school. Her mom depends on her to help tend Jimmy after school.

Which of the three older children has the most freedom? Which has the least? What determines how much freedom each has? [Encourage an in-depth discussion of these questions. A likely answer, though only partially correct, is that the

older the child, the more freedom he or she has. Someone may even suggest that Jimmy has the most freedom, since his responsibilities are virtually nil. But absence of responsibilities is not the true test of freedom, for prisoners also have very few responsibilities — and very little freedom.]

It is true that Larry has the most freedom, but is it due to his age? What if he performed poorly at the hardware store? What if he behaved irresponsibly, causing his parents to lose trust or question his judgment? What freedoms might they take away? [Examples: use of the family car, staying out late on weekends, handling the money he earns.]

Jimmy, the toddler, has the least freedom, since he has little or no control over where he goes, what he eats, or the toys and friends he plays with. [Encourage a discussion about why this is so.]

We see that an important factor in determining how much freedom a child is given is the degree of trust and confidence parents have in his or her judgment. Mr. and Mrs. Smith expect Larry to make the wisest decisions, while Jimmy cannot,

### FOR YOUNGER AMERICANS

Since the second example in today's lesson is most appropriate for junior and senior high school students, it is recommended that it be omitted for children in elementary school.

As an alternative, encourage younger children to learn the relationship between freedom and responsibility for themselves by noting how a pet is raised.

When a puppy first becomes a part of the family, for example, how much freedom is it given? What is it permitted to do for itself compared to what must be done for it?

Before the puppy is allowed to go outside alone, what must it first learn? When do you know that it can be trusted not to run into the street or damage furniture? How is it taught what it can and cannot do?

How does appropriate punishment help lead, in the long run, to freedom? What would happen if the puppy were never disciplined for doing what is wrong, or never taught to be careful? How do these lessons apply to us?

in most cases, be trusted to determine what is in his best interest.

Is there a word that describes making wise decisions and earning the confidence of others? [If no one suggests “responsible” or “responsibility,” ask: Suppose someone carelessly loses money with which they have been entrusted, or does not come home at a certain time after promising to do so. That person would not be behaving very \_\_\_\_\_.]

To be worthy of trust, one must be responsible, which means being accountable for one’s actions. Responsibility precedes freedom, and is essential to the maintenance of freedom. When responsibility erodes, so does freedom.

**T**O UNDERSTAND this principle more fully, let us consider a case where responsibility failed, and see what happened to freedom.

Diane Smith (the 15-year-old from our first story) admired her friend and high school senior, Barbara Jones. Diane was also somewhat envious of Barbara, who was allowed to use her parents’ car, was given lots of spending money by her folks, and seemed to have even more freedom than Diane’s brother, Larry. But then Diane learned something that drastically changed her mind.

One weekend, Barbara’s parents were out of town on business. Prior to leaving, they made arrangements for Barbara to stay with an aunt. Barbara, however, had another idea. She invited her two best girlfriends to a slumber party at her home. The friends were not only enthused, but suggested that the evening should be further enhanced by inviting their boyfriends as well. Which they did.

During the course of the evening, Barbara came up with another seemingly bright idea: why not visit the beach in the family car? She knew where duplicate keys were kept, and soon the six youngsters found themselves at a popular amusement center and beach resort on the outskirts of town.

Meanwhile, Mr. and Mrs. Jones decided to skip the evening social which followed their day-long meetings, and instead catch an early flight home. They arrived at about the time Barbara and her friends were nearing the amusement center. They were shocked to find lights burning and evidence of a party scattered throughout the living room, family room, and kitchen. It was after 10:00 p.m., their

#### FOR SERIOUS STUDENTS

In our imaginary story, Barbara’s parents restricted her freedom because she behaved irresponsibly. What else could they have done to help Barbara develop and exercise more responsibility? How would you have handled their situation?

There is a sizable segment of our adult population that has also behaved irresponsibly, and has lost freedom as a result. The persons involved have been found guilty of serious crimes and sentenced to prison. Such punishment is usually determined by a jury of their “peers.” What are “peers”? How do other countries punish dangerous or harmful criminal behavior? Is the French penal code, for example, based on the assumption of “innocent until proven guilty,” as is ours? Do most other nations use the jury system? Can you think of another system that would be more effective and just than ours?

Can you think of any society or civilization where citizens enjoyed (or enjoy) freedom without accepting corresponding responsibilities?

daughter was missing, and the car was gone. The next couple of hours were a nightmare of fruitless telephone calls and fearful imaginings. When Barbara and her friends arrived home around midnight, her father met her at the door, drove her friends home, then confronted his remorseful daughter.

At first, Barbara’s only thought was that she had been disgraced in the eyes of her friends. But she gradually realized that something far worse had happened: she had disappointed her parents and would lose some of the privileges — the freedoms — she had been granted.

“You not only broke the agreement to stay with your aunt,” her father reminded her, “but you violated our strict family rule that there are to be no parties in this home without an adult being present. Even worse, you took the car without permission, and drove friends — without their parents’ consent — to an amusement park late at night. I’m sure that you now regret it, but we must nevertheless take away some of your privileges for a time. For the rest of the school year, you may not drive the car to school. There will be no more parties at home, no weekend dates, and no allowances. You demonstrated by your actions tonight that you are not yet prepared to handle as much freedom as you were given. You have not yet learned what it means to be responsible.”