

Lesson One

Our Priceless Legacy

LESSON IDEA

To explain the basic concept of freedom, and to remind each family member how few have enjoyed its blessings throughout history.

VISUAL AID

The Declaration of Independence; map or globe of the world.

THROUGHOUT the world, something precious has been disappearing. It is something that most Americans have enjoyed from birth, a gift often taken for granted, like the air we breathe.

Because so many of us have merely inherited this gift, we may think little about it, and tend to regard it as something that will always exist, like the sun that lights the day and the moon and stars that shine at night.

Since the people of the United States have enjoyed it to an extent previously unknown in world history, it may never occur to many of us that this precious legacy could slip away, be stolen, or become lost.

What do you think it is? [Ask each family member until someone answers "freedom."]

Yes, freedom is the gift which has distinguished America from other nations, for the United States was conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights. [Call on someone to read the first few words of the second paragraph of the Declaration of Independence, which include that thought.]

Exactly what does freedom mean? Can it be defined? [Give everyone a chance to answer.]

Here is a simple definition of freedom that will assist us in comprehending its true meaning: Freedom is "the power to act for oneself." To appreciate the importance of being able to act for ourselves, let us first consider a parable about a mythical kingdom ruled by a wise and loving king.

ONE DAY, this great king beckoned his two sons and said, "In all my days I have ruled my kingdom with justice. It is now time for

me to retire. I must decide which of you is best qualified to inherit the kingdom and rule in my place. I therefore wish to ask each of you two questions."

What questions did the king ask to determine which son would make the best leader?

Question One: What would you seek to accomplish as ruler of the kingdom?

Question Two: How would you seek to achieve your objectives?

Were you one of the sons, how would you answer?

The eldest son said, "Father, I would like this land to be known as the kingdom of truth, where men and women are free to find their own happiness. To accomplish this, I would teach them the laws of truth in all things, and seek to make them free, and responsible for their own actions and welfare."

His younger brother said, "I would like to become known as the greatest ruler in history, the one who eliminated such social evils as poverty, famine, crime, and disease. To do so I would select the smartest and best-educated citizens to study those evils and determine the cause of each. Then

FOR YOUNGER AMERICANS

For younger children, our next story may be omitted, so that more time may be devoted to discussing the above parable. Its basic elements will be readily understood by most grade-school children. Here are some questions that may be posed to stimulate further comment about the meaning of freedom:

1. Did the king believe that freedom was important for the citizens of his country? How did he show this?
2. Did the eldest son also believe freedom was important? How do we know this?
3. What was the youngest son's opinion of freedom? What did he believe was more important than freedom?
4. If the king had selected his youngest son, what would likely have happened to freedom in the kingdom? If the scientists and experts ran the country, what freedoms would have been lost first?
5. Which son would you prefer as king? Why?

I would organize a planning committee from among the experts and authorize them to prepare a scientific system of government to solve the problems. Among the goals would be equal wealth, equal work, and equal rewards. When no one is in need, all will enjoy life, and the masses will honor my name.”

After listening to both answers, the king said: “I will choose my eldest son to rule in my place, for he will be the wisest ruler.”

Why do you think the king chose his eldest son? Do you think he made the right choice? [Give everyone a chance to reply.]

Why were the eldest son’s desires and plans preferable? What was wrong with the youngest son’s aspirations and proposals? Which son would have given his subjects the most freedom? [Encourage discussion about both plans.]

OUR second story concerns a modern family. The father is a musician who, after long years of effort and struggle, became famous and financially successful, first as a violinist and then as a conductor. Although respected and admired throughout the world, he vowed that his son would never spend as many years as he had in an impoverished condition.

After giving the matter much thought, the father decided that his son should become a lawyer. “In the profession of law,” he said, “my son will be his own master, can plan his own time, and can set his own fee. He will not be a slave to the whims of employers or the public.”

The father also wanted his son to have more freedom than he had enjoyed in his youth. His goals (independence and security for his son) were praiseworthy. But did he make a mistake in attempting to plan his son’s life? Let us look at what happened.

From infancy, the son was given only certain books to read. His father dictated the courses he would take in schools, selected the college he would attend, and determined the career he would follow. The son was not allowed to attend his father’s concerts, nor were his dad’s musician friends and associates permitted to visit when his son was home.

Despite his father’s precise planning, however, as the son grew older it became apparent that he had a different dream for his life — he, too, want-

ed to become a concert violinist.

As a child, his mother arranged for him to take violin lessons, and when he became a young man he would spend hours practicing and listening to great works by other violinists. His grades in law school suffered until, finally, the college sent a warning to his father that his son was in danger of flunking.

The father was bitterly disappointed. He had envisioned his son becoming a famous lawyer, company president, or high government official. But instead of working and studying to achieve such goals, his son was only interested in music.

Desperate, the father confronted the son. How could he be such an ingrate? Why was he throwing away an opportunity for success by wasting his time on the violin? The son replied that he loved the violin, and wanted to make music his profession. He reminded his father that the violin had enabled him (the father) to become rich and famous. But the father would not listen. In a rage, he picked up the son’s violin, smashed it against a chair, and warned his son that he never wanted to hear such nonsense again.

The next day, when the father returned from an engagement, his wife met him in tears. She gave him a note which she had found in their son’s

FOR THE SERIOUS STUDENT

To increase the impact of this lesson for high school students, we suggest you encourage outside study of the principles raised in this discussion. Here are two areas for them to explore.

1. How much importance was placed on individual freedom in earlier civilizations? Study, for example, the Aztecs or Mayans in Central America with ancient Sparta. (An encyclopedia will have a basic account of each society.) What similarities existed? What were some of the most important differences? Which system provided more freedom for the individual? Did any of these civilizations provide nearly as much freedom as an individual possesses in this country?

2. Some persons occasionally attempt to differentiate between political freedom and economic freedom. Actually, these are two sides of the same coin. With very few exceptions, one will not exist without the other. When political freedom (the right to choose rulers) is lost, economic freedom (the right to your own earnings or property) soon perishes. Why is this true? Did the American Revolution begin as an effort to gain economic freedom or political freedom?

empty room. It said simply, "Goodbye, Mother and Father. I must continue to study music. If I starve to death, it could not be worse than living under your roof. Sorry to have failed you."

SINCE THIS is just a story, we can create a happy ending. Let us suppose that the son continued to play the violin, and became widely acclaimed and successful. And that, in time, the father and son came to understand and respect each other. Indeed, let us conclude the story by having them perform together in concert: the father conducting the orchestra, the son playing a violin solo.

But what went wrong earlier? The father wanted to help his son, but what did he forget? [Give everyone a chance to reply, until someone points out that the son was denied the freedom to choose his career.] Which of the two made his own choices? Which sought to make choices for the other? Why could there be little happiness for either under such circumstances?

Concluding Thought

Are we happiest when we are free to plan our own lives, or when we are restricted and told what to do and how to do it?

The right to think freely, to act responsibly, to choose wisely, to be creative, to possess our own property, and to reap rewards from what we sow, is one of God's greatest gifts to us. The statement that "freedom is necessary for happiness" is as true and unchanging as the law of gravity.

Yet, as we look at a map of today's world, we should keep in mind that most nations on Earth either do not grant, or severely restrict, the freedom to choose. In country after country, government rulers make decisions for their subjects. If you lived in one of these countries, you would be told where to go to school, what to study, where to work, how much you could earn, and how your earnings may be spent. You would not be allowed to leave the country of your own volition, and should you dare to write or speak against the rulers, or seek to worship as you please, you might be thrown in jail, have your property seized, and see your family split asunder.

Even here in the United States, the freedoms which our forefathers won for us are being eroded and are slipping away. It is imperative that we, as a family, study the meaning and importance of

freedom. We want the spirit of freedom to ring in our home and our hearts, so that we may be stronger and happier individuals in a stronger and happier family, and help restore and preserve freedom in our country and throughout the world.

Looking Ahead

What must we do to be worthy of freedom? Freedom requires an important partner called "responsibility." In our next lesson we will learn why responsibility is such a crucial ingredient of freedom.