

Study guide for

Freedom Fences:

How to set limits that free you to enjoy your marriage and family

by Gerald W. Kaufman, L. Marlene Kaufman, Anne Kaufman Weaver, Nina Kaufman Harnish

Discussion Questions for Sunday Schools, Book Clubs, Pray Breakfasts, and other settings

See also release on [Freedom Fences](#) in the Herald Press online catalog.

Study guide for your class or small group

Overview

Freedom Fences is about a paradox: freedom and fences. At first glance, they seem like a contradiction. How can it be that we can find freedom within a fence? Isn't it obvious that restrictions take our freedom away? Modern culture often encourages us to remove boundaries that restrict us. It suggests that we should "do our own thing" or find "our own space." In the spirit of being nonjudgmental, we are asked to accept virtually any behavior and any lifestyle. The result of this emphasis is that we are creating a secularized, assimilated people who are moving away from a covenanted relationship with God. It is forming an individualistic society that is governed by the self.

We are becoming a people who abandon important marital, family, and community standards. Such standards are necessary for our health, civility, and spiritual survival. *Freedom Fences* offers an alternative to this popular cultural standard. It suggests that we can celebrate real freedom by choosing to live within the fences. These safe territories are created by God's discerning community and by individuals whose consciences are sensitized by the Holy Spirit.

Suggested study plan

Each chapter of *Freedom Fences* begins with a biblical quotation and concludes with questions. Some chapters suggest an activity that may be used to clarify an idea. "Freedom Fences" (which may also be called commitments) are included to stimulate the reader or small group member to create fences that may emerge from the material in the chapter.

We suggest that these fences be written down and displayed on the "doorposts" of our homes and classrooms in a manner similar to the way God instructed the children of Israel to keep the Ten Commandments. See Deuteronomy 6:9.

The final chapter (13) includes personal stories of those who have found freedom by containing their lives. We hope that all who read and study *Freedom Fences* will celebrate their own freedom stories and share them with others.

Class format

- Begin with a devotional and or prayer
- Discuss the content of the chapter
- Divide into small groups to develop freedom fences, work together on an activity, or discuss ideas and questions in greater depth.

Session 1: Surviving Freedom Through Restraint

Text for study and discussion: Foreword, author's preface, and chapter 1, pages 9-36

People have always wanted to be free. We want to be free to make our own choices; to speak freely; to do what we want, and to reach our personal goals. In our time many of us are overcoming the oppression of sexism, racism, poverty, physical handicaps, and a host of other constraints.

We rejoice in these freedoms as they free us all. At the same time, we lament a society that continually struggles with the consequences of mishandled freedom. These outcomes include such results as marital failure, increases in the instances of venereal disease, violent behavior among children, and individuals who are more self-centered. This spirit of protest and rebellion has left many victims in its wake. Thus we need to revisit the issue of boundaries.

The church must reassert itself as a moral agent in the community. Obviously these fences cannot be arbitrary and cannot be given as pronouncements from insular leaders.

Indeed, the church community should be a model of sensitive and compassionate discernment. However, it cannot back away from its responsibility to build fences that protect the very freedom that is important to everyone.

Session 2: Freedom: Eden and Beyond

Text for study and discussion: Chapter 2, pages 37-50

When God gave humans the gift of freedom, it was with the knowledge that we could and would abuse the gift. From the beginning God did not hesitate to give instructions for the way freedom was to be handled. Adam and Eve chose to ignore that advice. They became the first victims of freedom. Later the Ten Commandments were given as a tool for structuring freedom. Finally, with the coming of the Messiah, a New Covenant was provided to show structure and order with a human face.

The spirit of love, of which Jesus spoke, was to be lived out in a covenanted, disciplined community. But it is human nature to fail. We make wrong choices because of the frailties of the human spirit. Failures are often the result of fatigue or stress. Some personalities invite high-risk behavior or self-defeating activities. While God gave everyone the same freedom, some seem to need more boundaries than others do. In any case, no one can live successfully without boundaries.

Session 3: Permanence in Marriage

Text for study and discussion: Chapter 3, pages 51-70

Clearly God intended that marriage be a permanent union. Marital failure contributes to a breakdown in the God-human relationship; destabilizes the church community; permanently damages both spouses; and leaves a lifetime legacy of pain for the children of divorce. Permanence is difficult because of human vulnerabilities. It involves the spiritual, physical, and emotional aspects of life.

All marriages are affected by the influences of the surrounding culture that devalues permanence and overvalues pleasure and individualism. It is the responsibility of the church to find new ways to uphold the integrity of marriage; to help create meaningful fences; to assist couples in maintaining their promises to each other; and to be agents of healing and mentoring to couples who are at risk.

Session 4: Freedom and Conflict in Marriage

Text for study and discussion: Chapter 4, pages 71-88

It is unusual to be married and not experience conflict. In fact, some conflict can be positive in that it can contribute to growth in the relationship. Conflict can be clarifying. It can create new levels of understanding. It enables spouses to have a voice in important matters. But when conflict is destructive, spouses need to discover what it is within themselves and within the relationship that needs to change.

Sometimes the pattern for hurtful conflict is learned earlier in life. It may be a result of emotional illness. At other times it comes from unresolved stress. Whatever the source, hurtful conflict needs to be corrected. Restoration can take place through spiritual healing, counseling, medication, and other approaches. Abusive conflict is a violation of the marriage covenant as well as the covenant with God.

Session 5: New Roles in Marriage

Text for study and discussion: Chapter 5, pages 89-104

We play many roles in marriage. Some of them overlap. Many are interchangeable. We often think of roles in terms of what we DO. That is, we work at jobs where we earn money; we cook dinner, or we balance the checkbook. Today many couples are sharing these tasks, not always smoothly or without protest. Our society is experiencing more role sharing, in part by choice and in part from necessity. As more spouses work outside the home, the in-home tasks need to be done by both.

However, the BEING roles are also important to the health of marriage. These are the intangible roles we all play for each other. Some are specific to gender. There can only be one mother and one father. Husbands are intrinsically different from wives. Each couple constructs a unique way of being. There is wonderful mystery in the BEING roles.

While the DOING roles can be posted on the family bulletin board, the BEING roles cannot. They are the soul of marriage. They make every relationship unique. Couples may need to negotiate their DOING roles. However, they can only seek to understand and celebrate their ways of BEING with each other.

Session 6: Lifestyle Choices

Text for study and discussion: Chapter 6, pages 105-119

Everyone has a lifestyle. While we all have some similarities in the ways we express our lifestyles, we also have many differences. Some of our lifestyle choices may be morally neutral. Frequently, though, our lifestyle choices have a direct impact on others. God

cares very much about our lifestyle choices. We are advised to "choose life" and not destruction.

Our choices include the way we earn and spend our money; how we use our time; the type of recreation we choose; and the ways we relate to people around us. As Christians we will make lifestyle choices that maintain our relationship with God. These choices strengthen marital and family relationships and contribute to our health, as well as to the well-being of others.

Session 7: Balancing Work and Family

Text for study and discussion: Chapter 7, pages 120-138

In the previous generation, work was done primarily to provide for the necessities of life, but today many have other motives for working. Many people believe that work should be personally gratifying; advance self-esteem; use fully their creative potential; create friendships; and lead upward on a career ladder.

For others the workplace has become more inviting than home. Increasingly workplace friendships, including male-female relationships, threaten the primacy of marriage. In addition, as more couples raise their material expectations, time and energy for the marriage and for the children are declining. Non-parents are raising a growing number of our infants and preschool children during their waking hours.

We need to take a critical look at what work is doing to us. Are we primarily being motivated by material success and by personal needs? Or is it more important that we be the best spouses and the best parents possible?

Session 8: Spiritual Fences for Freedom

Text for study and discussion: Chapter 8, pages 139-154

Within family we can experience God's presence in meaningful ways. Although many households are setting earlier patterns of family worship aside, it is important that we develop new ways to know God in families. Children develop their understanding of God through their relationships with their parents. They learn the lessons about the "gentle Shepherd" from parents through modeling, singing, plays, nature, and the spoken word.

It is often difficult for parents to choose from a virtual smorgasbord of religious expressions offered by the various Christian traditions. Rapid changes are occurring in congregational worship style and in the character of church life. Families must decide which patterns serve them best. Yet the local congregation remains vitally important as

an extended religious family for nurture and teaching, as well as for guidance in the maintenance of freedom fences.

Session 9: Children: Birth to Kindergarten

Text for study and discussion: Chapter 9, pages 155-174

Being a parent is perhaps the highest of all callings. Jesus took children very seriously. Parenting can never be a casual, marginal activity. It requires the focused teamwork of both mother and father. Each is equally important in the parenting role. In most cases parents are the best caregivers for their children. Unfortunately, parents are increasingly purchasing childcare services from vendors. Parents need to make decisions about their priorities, for when priorities are mottled, everyone suffers.

Children begin as very dependent infants and emerge as independent children who are ready for kindergarten. During this time they also learn to know right and wrong. It is important that parents practice preventive discipline by being disciplined in their own lives and by anticipating the needs of their children. This will enable parents to make adjustments to the unique personality of each child, which become defined during this period.

Session 10: The Peaceful Years: Parenting for Middle Childhood

Text for study and discussion: Chapter 10, pages 175-194

While these years are very busy for parents they are, thankfully, relatively benign. Parents no longer have to deal with children who are very dependent. They do not yet have to confront the conflicting adolescent. These are the years in which children learn the educational language of school, the social language of their peers, the importance of work from parents, and spirituality from parents and the church.

Parents need to be supporters and teachers of their children during this stage. Their goal is to create a home environment that supports positive learning. This includes parents learning to control and manage their own lives. Careful thought is required as to how many activities children engage in and what their motivation is for choosing them. All activities should build character strengths that have life-long consequences rather than provide only short-term gratification for the child or the parents.

Session 11: Adolescence: Searching for Independence

Text for study and discussion: Chapter 11, pages 195-213

Adolescence is often a turbulent process through which a child moves toward adulthood. While an adolescent acquires a body that is in many ways adult, the child's judgment is less developed. It is a period of high-risk behavior in which teens are not able to fully understand the consequences of their choices. Even though they appear to reject it, adolescents need good parenting as much as ever. Because of their desire to fit in with the peer group, they transfer dependency from parents to peers.

Parents who have been consistent and effective communicators in earlier stages and have left their own adolescence behind will enjoy better success during this time. Effective parents will know when to say "no" to their teens and when to say "oh!"

Session 12: The Joys and the Challenges of the Middle Aged

Text for study and discussion: Chapter 12, pages 214-235

There may be no period that is more demanding than the middle years of life. Middle aged are often relating actively with their young adult children, especially to those who are still living at home. Sometimes middle aged are also heavily involved as grandparents, especially for their married offspring who are pursuing careers. In addition, many middle aged need care for their aging parents. All of these come at a time when middle aged are reaching the peak of their career, church, and community responsibilities.

Many have reached a level of financial security that allows them to travel and to realize many of their long-delayed dreams. Finding the right balance in the midst of these competing demands and opportunities can be difficult. The marriage may experience strains from this overload. However, for many couples this can be the most rewarding period of their life.

Session 13: Freedom Stories

Text for study and discussion: Chapter 13, pages 236-257

This chapter is a collection of stories by people who, at different stages in life and in a variety of life situations, have chosen to live within fences that provide them with true freedom.

A personal note from the writers

If you have questions about how to facilitate a given session, please feel free to contact us. We would enjoy hearing from you and welcome your comments.

Gerald W. and L. Marlene Kaufman, 904 High Street, Akron, PA 17501
Telephone 717-859-3908; fax 717-859-3887

e-mail: germark@desupernet.net