

Freedom Through Grace

*Fly Beyond Every Life Struggle
and Feel your Spirit Soar*

INTRODUCTION

My Freedom Renewed website – www.shannonericsson.com – begins like this:

*“There is a Crisis in the Land... Life comes at us really fast at times, and we all want to avoid a destructive crisis of some kind getting a grip on our life... **We want FREEDOM** – but, it can be so elusive and difficult to attain.... even for seasoned Christians.*

More to the point – *“There is a Crisis in the Church.”* – Even the most Bible Thinking, God Walking, Upright Christian Believer will experience seasons of life that make them vulnerable and susceptible to the trouble that Jesus spoke about in his Gospels—here’s what he said: ***“In this world, you will have trouble...”***

Turns out of course, that he was spot-on. Some believers are just becoming aware of this trouble and recognize that it’s beginning to influence them and their lifestyle, and they’re seeking a *“tune-up,”* at the very least, to strengthen their relationship with Jesus—and for good reason. They’re wanting to avoid some kind of crisis developing in their life that could really hammer them. Many have talked to me about a battle they are having with spiritual discipline—especially younger guys—it’s about their thought-life, and how they are struggling to take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, like the bible says. They are realizing that their life has veered off course a little bit, and they are looking for an effective way to get it back on track, moving forward again. They long to ignite, or, to reignite their faith and their love of God like they know they need to do—*like so many of them used to do.*

However, many others know they need way more than a tune-up—they need a total spiritual life overhaul. A multitude of believers are looking for fulfillment in all the wrong places resulting in a crisis of substance abuse and even long-term addiction hammering their souls. In addition, our families are having to take on the emotional upheaval and debilitating stress caused by this Covid pandemic winding down on the world stage, and now, ramping up on the world stage, comes war, and rumors of war, just like Jesus said would happen, in the end days of this age. Mom’s and dad’s grappling with increased levels of anxiety, insecurity and depression in their children that they’ve never experienced before. They struggle mightily just trying to cope with the reality that life demands of them, in the wake of this menace. For some it’s economic, family, or work-related stress. Some Christians have lost their marriage, a loved one, or their career. Others lose their health, or their 401k or life savings.

All too often, Christians recoil from stress and painful events by yielding to one or more scourges of life such as anger, eating or drinking too much, drug addiction, alcoholism, sexual immorality like porn or adultery—even seemingly innocuous things, especially relevant today, in this culture we live in. *Check this out:*

Who would have thought that Christians would be getting hooked on romance novels, digital gaming, gambling, and social media of all kinds? An insightful book of research on this subject that I have found, comes from one of America’s leading Psychiatrists and Authors, Dr. Anna Lembke, MD. I paraphrase the following from her – *Dopamine Nation* – book: ¹

*“Americans especially, are becoming heavily influenced to **overconsuming** all kinds of things, because of the ease of accessing and acquiring, all kinds of things. We’re all running from pain. We take pills—we drink booze—we gorge on chocolate cake—we binge on romance novels. We’ll do almost anything to distract ourselves from ourselves—yet all this trying to insulate ourselves from pain seems only to have made it worse. The reason we’re all so miserable just might be because we’re working so hard to avoid being miserable.”*

Though these things can provide some escape and relief, it's only temporary—and then reality shows up again exacerbating the turmoil of life, especially if you're a Christian, because of guilt. It's a soul-crushing cycle that many Christians have a deep desire to stop, but they don't know how—and, not because of bible ignorance—turns out that their current plan is just not sufficiently effective. They need a new one; a better one—an effective one.

Are you, or someone you know and care about having to live like that?

Truth is... no one desires to live like that. We want to determine and control our temperament, attitude, and behavior in a way that produces a deep-rooted contentment and fulfillment from our lifestyle. Isn't that it—doesn't that sound right to you? So, what would you think if I told you that kind of hope, renewed freedom and lifestyle is not only possible, but very attainable and very available, right now...?

There certainly is a crisis of spiritual freedom weaving its way through the church today—however, there is also, and forever has been, a profusion of really good news that comes in the form of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. ***He knows everything and he can do anything.***

Trouble is, there's also a multitude of Christians out there in the church today who are blissfully unaware of that—*their need-to-know Jesus, way more effectively than they do now*—has also become a crisis for them, and it is growing more prevalent in church life today.

An increasing number of Christians experience Jesus more as an acquaintance, or historical icon—akin to George Washington, or Abe Lincoln. They just don't know him well enough to consistently walk in the authentic, biblical freedom that he has provided us. Their spiritual foundation is very weak, making them vulnerable for some kind of train-wreck coming down the line, in their not-to-distant future.

¹ *“Dopamine Nation”* – Publisher: Penguin Random House; New York, 2021

Many are becoming aware of this and are getting inspired to do something about it. Now, that's some really good news. *Here's why*—the primary motivation for these believers to think about purchasing this book is clearly to either fix, or to avoid, the bad habits and destructive lifestyle issues that I write about—my research distinctly tells me that.

However, there's something else—something bigger. Every believer who chooses to begin adopting my **FRP** can anticipate something unforeseen and wonderful happening in their life—*they'll be drawn much closer to Jesus than they ever were before*. Most won't see that coming—but, that's what happens when you hang out with Jesus—they just don't know it yet, but they will...This book will put them on the right path.

But, like I said before, life comes at us really fast at times, and the well-worn method of simply reading and memorizing scripture just isn't enough this day and age. You need a plan, or process, to help you focus and consistently apply those biblical principles of truth. This book offers that plan and process—and it's distinctive, in a number of ways.

And, here's one of them—a very key reason for writing this book the way that I have. A large number of believers shared that they were not interested in putting a “*Band-Aid*” on the issues of life they were struggling with—they knew that a couple of seminars or a weekend drive-by retreat just would not be sufficient to plug their life into. And further, it didn't matter whether their spiritual need was relatively minor, rekindling a little more discipline, or whether that need was massive, reordering their entire lifestyle. They wanted their spiritual condition fixed—NO MORE BAND AIDS! That's what the **FRP** in this book is all about—providing a plan that actually works, and works really well, for ordinary Christians, and church leaders alike. Truth is... that's exactly why I put an action-plan on my website and why I wrote this book—and that's exactly what the program in both of them has been meticulously designed to accomplish within any and every Christian who will seriously invest themselves in it.

So, what do you think—how does that sound to you? Is it time to experience that fun, joy and fulfillment in your life again—*are you interested?*

Almighty God, the creator of the heavens and the earth, has a message for you. There is something that He wants you to know, about yourself or someone you care for, that you simply do not know right now. You really need to hear this, for yourself or for them—*It truly is a life-changer*. That freedom message begins here in the Old Testament book of Jeremiah:

Jer. 33:3 “Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known...”
(NRSV)

There is a clear and compelling logic woven into this message of freedom that I encourage you to consider and think about in the following two points:

1. God knows that if your personal relationship with Jesus was sufficiently effective right now, you wouldn't have need to acquire an increased level of authentic, exhilarating, biblical freedom—***You'd actually be living it.***

2. God deeply desires to reveal those great and hidden things to you. However, He alone understands the motive behind every thought. So, God wants you to know that if you determine to seek him for yourself or to help someone you love, with *authentic sincerity in your heart*, he will be found by you (*1Chr. 28:9*). He is waiting for you to take the first step and call out to him.

He stands ready, right now, to begin renewing and reinvigorating your hope and your hunger for the deep things of God. Question is, are you ready...? *He always rewards those who diligently seek him* (Heb. 11:6).

I can tell you that this message is all about ***Authentic Freedom***—not just some old clichés about freedom to live-out a few hopes and dreams or even answers to some prayers that you’ve likely pondered over and over—but the kind of change in life that can truly set you or them on a path to experience a more fulfilling, and even exhilarating life-style, characterized with much deeper joy and peace. That’s what God’s message and his reward looks like.

That hidden message that God wants you to know is also revealed here in the New Testament book of Galatians, with a little more perspective:

Gal. 5:1 It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery... (NIV)

Jesus wants each and every Christian follower of his to experience the kind of freedom and abundant life-style that I have just described, however, the truth is that there are a multitude of us in the church today who are not free to live like that. So, if you or someone you love and care about are in need of that kind of freedom, this book is for you. That’s exactly why I wrote it—acquiring, or re-acquiring an abundant lifestyle of authentic, exhilarating, biblical freedom. It’s time to have fun and really enjoy life again—***what do you think? Are you ready for that?***

Jesus himself said, from John 16:33, *“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”* Jesus is making a strategic point here by inference. He is counseling us to actually anticipate the arrival of trouble in this life and to prepare ourselves for it—and not to run from it, but, like him, to overcome it. *There is a way—he always makes a way for those who seek him with all their heart.*

This experience of freedom, documented in Galatians 5:1, is wrapped up in the person of Jesus Christ, and the unsearchable riches of your knowledge of him—***of just how well you know him***. And that unique kind of formidable and powerful knowledge my friend, is the great and hidden thing that Almighty God wants you to know, and know so well, so effectively, that your life will be wonderfully changed forever more.

That freedom you are seeking—that you might even be desperate to acquire, is inextricably linked, both now and forever, to your working knowledge and relationship with Jesus. Following here, is a very easy and effective sound-bite to memorize that will lock this unassailable truth into your brain:

- ***Insufficient Knowledge of Jesus—Always Results in Insufficient Freedom, Insufficient Joy and Insufficient Peace in Your Life.***

Therefore, at the very least, I have authored this book for that very reason—that your personal relationship with Jesus will have been made significantly stronger and more effective as a result of reading, studying, and applying what I’ve written.

And further, that many of you will actually acquire that *Freedom through Grace* that I write about—and begin living it out with a new found joy and exhilaration. That’s what Jesus wants for you – But, there’s that trouble he talks about... We need to deal with it.

Let’s begin examining some of that trouble...

Life struggles, temptations, and our response to them, affects all people, from all walks of life—including Christians—including Christian church leaders. We are all vulnerable. We are all at risk. We all battle with this, in some way, throughout almost every day of our life. And, God has already documented the response he expects us to make, here, from the book of Hebrews:

Heb. 12:1 let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. (NIV)

Begs a question – Can you fulfill this scripture right now?

Are you able to consistently and faithfully fulfill what God is instructing every Christian to do here? Can you do this all of the time—Some of the time—A little of the time—Every once in a while—or, like so very many Christians, would you have to say—Hardly ever, or even, not at all – I just keep striking out. *Your answer will reveal a lot about how well you know Jesus right now.* God knows just how easy it is for any of us to become entangled in some kind of sinful behavior, and also, what it takes to throw it off and stay clear of it. However, it turns out this is way easier said than done. In fact, many Christians possess sufficient *intellectual knowledge* of what they need to do. Knowledge of the biblical truth designed to set them free is not their main issue.

They have discovered, much to their dismay, that the discipline, willpower, habits, and overall life strategy they have adopted for themselves is not as effective as it needs to be. Try as they might, their numerous attempts to overcome destructive habits and lifestyles still fall short of success. And, it is certainly not because of any lack of desire. Every Christian I am aware of strongly desires to do what God is instructing them to do, not only here in Hebrews 12, but throughout the bible.

What an enigma. They may know what to do, but they are just not able to develop a method, or a plan for themselves that really works; Like Jesus said: “*The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.*” For example, here’s the issue documented in Romans by the Apostle Paul:

Rom. 7:18-19 I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. (NIV)

This passage of scripture accurately describes the conflict and bewilderment that results when Christians consistently yield themselves to sin. They may clearly recognize, understand, and desire to conform their lifestyle in a way that fulfills the teaching of Christ, but have not been able, or are not currently able, to consistently make that happen.

So many have just given up. They're *Out-of-Gas* or, their spiritual gas tank is almost empty – *Running on Fumes*. They have yet to find what it takes to get themselves free.

The problem looks just like this: ***“No Jesus – No Gas!”***

The solution looks just like this: ***“Know Jesus well – Lots of Gas!”***

Jesus clearly doesn't want you to live like that. He wants you to be free so you can determine and control your temperament, attitude, and behavior in a way that produces that deep-rooted contentment and fulfillment throughout all the days of your life, like I stated earlier. This is true whether you believe in God or not. However, there is a certain type of person I am convicted to emphasize and reach out to with this program:

Let me describe that person – ***it just might be you:***

“Outwardly, you may be a normal functioning man or woman trying your best to succeed with your life.... Your family, close friends and associates may have no idea that you are having any significant problems. But Inwardly, where no one but you and God can see, you are really struggling to get free.”

Does that describe you? ***Definitely...? Maybe...? Sometimes...?***

You'd almost certainly be surprised at just how many wonderful men and women of God are having to deal with this, and, they absolutely hate it.

They're having to struggle outwardly, conforming to what they know looks like a God honoring lifestyle, but inwardly, they have not yet been able to find an effective way to throw off the stuff in their life that causes trouble and distress. This can be a very miserable way to live.

THE PROBLEM

Here's the rub—I write a lot about it throughout my FRP—it's all about *“the cry of every human heart to be loved, to be accepted and to be respected.”* Turns out that God deliberately created this longing within every one of us, and, it also turns out that God is the only one who can effectively fulfill it, through Jesus.

However, we all like sheep have gone astray, and are prone to wander, just as the bible states—so, because that is true, our minds can easily be deceived into thinking that we can satisfy that very powerful yearning for love, acceptance & respect by indulging in all kinds of destructive behavior. As a result, many of us end up getting heavily influenced by it, or, even addicted to it. ***That's the crisis***—and, it's getting worse in the church—not better.

Many Christians like those I've just described have become trapped in a destructive behavior cycle. This cycle starts by yielding to a temptation of some kind... Then comes remorse and sorrow and many times even some intense anger at one-self.

That's followed by conviction and confession to God... then a short-lived state of repentance providing a temporary respite of freedom and peace... only then to repeat the cycle by yielding to temptation again and again resulting in more defeat and misery. The cycle goes on and on, sometimes for years and yes, even decades for some Christians. This process describes the actions of a Yo-Yo, and can become a very merciless cycle of misery for those held fast by the grasp of it. A Yo-Yo travels up and down, **but never forward—it doesn't go anywhere**. Some believers have been living like this for years, living in denial with some kind of binding affliction, and having to become extremely *stealthy* to keep from exposing their lifestyle addiction or destructive behavior to others.

However, there is a way to either effectively inoculate one-self from being driven like this in the first place, or to get yourself free, and keep yourself free, from the tenacious grip of one of these afflictions. That's what the program and this book is all about—Intended to benefit any Christian seeking consistent personal freedom from destructive habits and lifestyles. Over time, it is designed to develop within you the knowledge, wisdom, fortitude, tenacity, grit and perseverance that will help you live your life in a more consistent state of freedom. That's why I developed this program and wrote this book—providing ordinary believers, a freedom plan that actually works, and works really well.

This book is not just another Christian self-help encyclopedia to wander through and try to digest. I didn't want to write yet another self-help tome for the Christian DIY book market, of which there are many. Let me explain – A real perplexity that begs an answer to a number of questions, beginning with these – Why are so many Christians, in this generation, becoming so afflicted with destructive lifestyles? What is causing this and why are they so deeply rooted, entrenched and difficult to get rid of? When I began developing this program and researching the effectiveness of existing books about the subject matter, I discovered something very compelling. A significant amount of the information needed to accurately and authentically define both questions of what was causing these debilitating lifestyles, and what can be done about it, was either not very clear at all, or, was missing entirely.

However, please don't get me wrong here... Many great and inspirational Christian books have been authored over the years, and many of them have brought me notable insight, enjoyment, and benefit. In my research, I could easily find support from bible study companion guides and other clinical resources from Christian and even secular behavior therapists, scientists and related professionals in the marketplace. There are numerous books and resources providing lots of good advice, lots of beneficial guidance. But I found nothing to substantially, or adequately, answer these questions of mine—after a lot of research, it became apparent to me that *a new and unique development method* could be employed that would be far more effective.

THE SOLUTION

I began developing this program in 1986. It occurred to me that if simply reading and memorizing scripture could produce the desired freedom from a destructive lifestyle, then a book like this would not be needed. Christians have been using scripture for eons. That is not the issue.

Statistical facts verify that this kind of program definitely is needed for so many of the reasons I have already documented within these last few pages.

So, what makes this FRP unique? Actually, a number of factors.

First, the program embedded within the pages of this book has been produced using a meticulous process of searching out and compiling, over many years, specific axioms of biblical truth, combined with other freedom oriented, authoritative and beneficial sources.

These other sources include the development and implementation of very efficient life management skills, the clinical workings of the mind from experts within pertinent fields of behavior sciences, advanced training methods of high-performance athletes and business professionals, accelerated and advanced learning techniques, and other applicable resources. Then ***integrating all of this into an actual working plan*** that is always pragmatic, productive, exceedingly effective and very rewarding.

Further, I have also developed my process, in this way, to seriously avoid wasting your time and spinning your wheels. I have purposely researched only those specific and highly relevant principles and precepts from scripture, and also from these other particular sources, ***that really matter***.

However, I can't tell you that this program is super easy and requires little effort to get through it. *(If I did, you would have some difficulty trusting me and believing that this program is worth very much)*. In fact, the study can be challenging, and even daunting at times.

Nonetheless, I have worked painstakingly hard to make both, the study process, and the retaining of knowledge, to be as easy for the reader as I can possibly make it. Here's another time-saver—at specific milestones of introducing essential precepts of biblical freedom, I document a *Key-Principle* to really help the reader “Lock-In” the crucial truth being presented.

For example, here's one of these essential key-principles:

Key #3 – Jesus Christ is more intent on helping you and teaching you how to obtain a vibrant, functional, and stronghold busting lifestyle than He is about exposing your weaknesses and failures to public humiliation.

So, this program is definitely not designed to be a quick drive-by presentation of information like you might receive from reading a few self-help books, or attending a couple of weekend seminars or workshops.

But, it doesn't stop there. The program goes on to identify, develop and help you maintain what is needed to avoid these freedom sucking bandits for the rest of your life. This FRP of mine will help provide that needed structure to plug your life into and develop some long-term stability—a functional and formidable spiritual foundation that you can reliably build your life upon. This book meticulously and systematically reveals the *What, Why* and *How* all of this destructive behavior is happening to well-intentioned Christians navigating life right now, today.

And, most importantly, this book illuminates an exceedingly effective method of actually helping to acquire that life-changing freedom sought after by so many. So, I reiterate; this program simply works – *IT REALLY WORKS!*

WHY WRITE THIS BOOK - SOME OF MY PERSONAL MOTIVATION

Considerable research has convinced me over the years that a significant percentage of Christians are experiencing cycles and seasons of misery in their lifestyles.

It is not like being in a state of inward denial, for they know their affliction very well. It is because this insidious and hidden state is real, and afflicts a multitude of wonderful people in the Church, that I have developed so much passion and dogged-determination to design this program and write this book. So, how have I become aware of these spiritual issues, you may ask?

Good question; let me offer some background.

My career, as a professional ministry consultant, has put me in almost daily contact and relation with literally hundreds of pastors, administrators, ministers of music and worship, gifted bible teachers, and lay leadership within the Christian Church Community across our nation. In this capacity, I have personally experienced many of the denominational structures that identify Baptists, Pentecostals, Methodists, Presbyterians, and the other many expressions of faith within the Christian Church, taken as a whole.

So, I have learned to develop a very keen insight, knowledge and expertise of both evangelical and liturgical expressions of ministry, and, have also not been confined to construct this book from a single denominational viewpoint. This has been invaluable to me and I've been able to design this program for a very wide appeal within the Christian Church, at large.

To perform my work well, it is essential that I “*get to know*” these ministers and their ministry performance goals and mandates with considerable accuracy, effectiveness, and depth. Most of these Church projects of mine, over the last 25+ years, have taken from several months to sometimes several years to complete. This has provided me a more than sufficient time frame to establish very strong and trusting relationships with many. Through this network of endearing relationships, there have been extensive discussions and sometimes deep concerns being revealed. And, even great sorrow expressed at times, with many intercessory prayer sessions conducted when well-intentioned men and women of God, with great skills and service to offer, seemingly lose so much when life “*breaks down*” for them.

Therefore, I have developed a sincere sense and conviction that I am writing this book not so much to a group of readers that I do not know, but rather, to very dear friends whom I have a very real connection with, and care a great deal about. I also have a lot of empathy with Christians who struggle with addictive behavior. I was saved myself while in my 20's from a lifestyle of being a functional alcoholic. I know the struggle very well, and have had to be vigilant and diligent in my pursuit to know and relate to Jesus effectively enough to maintain my own spiritual freedom. *I get it... I really do get it...!*

And so, now you have explored the introduction, probably scanned the table of contents and have been evaluating what this program is all about. The syntax of the program within this book has purposely been developed to ensure a very high return on the investment of time, research and study that each of you will choose to employ.

I know very well that you will need to develop a formidable *Strategy and Life Action Plan* to establish an effective lifestyle of freedom for yourself. I strongly believe that this book will help you do that very effectively.

I have also endeavored to design some flexibility in how you study and take-in this program. Some of you may only be looking for a very solid reference to just help you get back on the path of a more rewarding lifestyle. You may simply want to eliminate some errors in judgment before they lead to the formation of bad habits. If that lines up with your thinking, then I can encourage you to read and study the introductory and prep sections, and then read and study the Key Principles, located throughout the book. This will save time and give you a quick overview of the overall freedom program.

On the other hand, if you know that just a refresher course will not be sufficient for you, and that you realize your desire or your need for a very comprehensive plan – A plan designed to completely re-order your thinking about life stuff and your behavior(s), then I recommend a different approach. Here’s what that could look like:

Read through the entire book without taking any *extensive* notes, but definitely documenting for yourself sections of the book that you realize will need further study. I strongly recommend that you do this without any regard for how much time this may take you to complete. Take all the time that you need. Then go back through the book as often as needed, but each time focus a lot more attention and detailed study on those sections that require more concentration. That’s also when you should take extensive notes. I especially encourage you to start a written journal—it will become invaluable to you, as the Holy Spirit of God uses it to renew your mind more quickly, and more effectively. This book has been deliberately designed to be very challenging at times, for many effective and beneficial reasons. However, I know you will also find it extremely compelling and rewarding.

And now..... I thank you for your initial interest and consideration to read through this book Introduction. I sincerely hope that you enjoyed it and that these words of mine have given you a number of life changing things to think about..... Wishing you the very best as you now begin to plan and develop your own Freedom Strategy studying your way through the pages of this book..... **GODSPEED!**