

Exercising Authority

Luke 10:19 (NIV)

I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you.

We are told to exercise authority over evil spirits as part of our mission. How exactly are we to do that?

Discuss as a group.

Acts 16:16-18 (NIV)

Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. ¹⁷ This girl followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved." ¹⁸ She kept this up for many days.

Finally Paul became so troubled that he turned around and said to the spirit, "In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!" At that moment the spirit left her.

Why did Paul cast out the evil spirit?

The spirit was disrupting Paul in the process of trying to get his message across to the people. What the spirit was saying was true, but Paul did not desire verification of his ministry coming from an evil spirit. By affirming Paul and his message it also would have given credibility to the slave girl, as if she were on the same side, and also empowered by God. Paul would not want any connection to be seen between his ministry and the fortune-telling ability of the girl.

What insights can you gain from Paul's response to the evil spirit?

- Paul commanded the evil spirit to leave the girl. He didn't ask, he didn't suggest, he commanded.
- Paul didn't even need to pray about it; he simply spoke with authority. However, Paul's life was a life of prayer and that would have prepared him for this encounter.
- Paul understood the authority he exercised was based on the name of Jesus Christ. By claiming the name of Jesus Christ, he was saying that what he was doing was in keeping with the mission and purposes of Jesus and that he was merely acting on behalf of Jesus.
- Paul expected an immediate response from the spirit.

This type of interaction is what we call a "power" encounter. It is a straight-forward presentation of authority that commands the spirit to leave and the spirit must obey. This is needed in certain circumstances, but there are other dynamics we will now explore that may also come into play when trying to help a person long term.

Luke 11:24-26 (NIV)

When an evil spirit comes out of a man, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. Then it says, "I will return to the house I left." ²⁵ When it arrives, it finds the house swept clean and put in order. ²⁶ Then it goes and takes seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that man is worse than the first."

Spirits are comfortable with that which they are familiar (just like us). Once they find "rest" in a person, they establish their hierarchy, their realm of influence and control, their networks, their deception, and embed their destructive patterns in the person's life. When a spirit leaves a person, it is at unrest and longs to return to what it had before.

In the meanwhile, with the spirit's absence, the person put their life back in order. The spirit returns only to find the "dwelling place" cleaned up and empty. He then invites other spirits to join him in bringing destructive control back into the person's life.

What would be needed to prevent the evil spirit from being able to return to the person's life?

A new, stronger inhabitant (who would not allow them access) is needed. The only person who can strip away Satan's armor is Jesus Christ. Without the spirit of Christ in a person's life there is no guaranteed protection from the presence of evil spirits. That person dwells under Satan's kingdom rule and has no defense available to him.

What are the implications for the slave girl if she does not acknowledge Jesus as her lord?

If the slave girl walks away demonically free, but does not allow the Holy Spirit to indwell her, she leaves herself open to future demonic control, perhaps even a greater bondage than she had before.

Simply casting a spirit out of a person is not the person's final solution.
They need to have their dwelling place (their lives) filled by the presence of Spirit of Christ.

Is it possible for a Christ follower to be controlled by an evil spirit?

Discuss as a group.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 (NIV)

Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; ²⁰ you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.

What truths can we gain from the above passage?

Christians cannot be owned or possessed by a spirit because we've already been purchased by Jesus Christ.

However, just because Christ has purchased our lives with his blood doesn't guarantee we fully surrender to his control. This is why Paul includes the exhortation to honour God with your body. We must still make a decision to surrender control of our lives to the Holy Spirit.



Ephesians 5:18 (NIV)

Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.

If a person has areas in their life not fully surrendered to God, what are the implications for evil spiritual influence in this area of their life?

Discuss as a group.

Every area in our lives not controlled by the Holy Spirit is potentially open to be influenced by an evil spirit. These are sins that we have not yet let go of, due to either ignorance or defiance.

Ephesians 4:26-27 (NIV)

In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry,²⁷ and do not give the devil a foothold.

Greek word for foothold: *topos* =

A dwelling place, position

An opportunity to exert power

When we embrace sin we give Satan an opportunity to exert influence in our lives. We potentially become a dwelling place for him for as long as we give him that point of access to our lives.

What are some indicators that a person may be accompanied by an evil spirit?

Discuss as a group

Some red flags to watch for:

Quests for information (even if just for “fun”)

Ouija board, tarot cards, palm readings, etc.

Whenever we pursue these activities, we are seeking information about our lives, or other's lives, that we know God does not want to give us in our normal walk with him. In turning to another source of knowledge, we are turning from God and embracing the part of the spiritual realm that is opposed to God and his purposes. When we turn to Satan for insight and knowledge, we choose to come under the realm of his influence and direction, opening up a place in our lives to his control.

Premonitions

Premonitions are, again, knowledge that comes from evil spirits. They give us a feeling that we are special, that we have an unique ability, and that we are significant. This need for value and significance drives us deeper to rely on these spirits for ongoing knowledge and insight. Many people will struggle with the idea that this special ability is not truly a unique part of who they are until the spirit behind the ability is exposed.

Voices and visions

Just because a person hears voices in their head doesn't mean they are crazy. If evil spirits are present, they will speak words and thoughts into your mind. Strong compelling thoughts of suicide, harm, sin, vengeance, etc. can all be voices of spirits trying to build destructive patterns into your life. These voices will often try to interfere whenever God's truth is being presented.

God speaks and gives visions, but they will always be consistent with his Word and bring glory and honour to Jesus Christ.

Spirit guides

Some people see beings in their minds that come to them as friends, spirit guides, angels, who want to walk with them through life, to "encourage" them. However, when confronted these beings become anything but friendly. They will use threats and fear to maintain their control and place in the person's life.

Sustained Fears

Fear never has anything to do with God. In fact, scripture tells us that God's perfect love will cast out fear. Fear and God are incompatible. If a person struggles with ongoing fear, that may be an indicator that a spirit has used that distrust of God as a foothold in the person's life.

Other possible indicators:

Ongoing nightmares
Inability to sing praises
Blank scripture pages
Drowsiness during spiritual discussions/bible studies
Mental interference during discussions about God and truth
Intense sinful feelings
Ongoing Despair
Sin patterns that can't seem to be broken
Etc.

For more insight into potential foothold areas refer to *The Steps to Freedom in Christ* by Neil Anderson.

If a Christian comes under the influence of an evil spirit, how can they become free?

This following process is what we would identify as a "Truth" encounter. It differs quite a bit from a power encounter as the goal is to identify the lie, replace it with truth, and in so doing break the hold an evil spirit has on the person's life. The benefit of this approach is that it removes the foothold or point of permission in the person's life so that the spirit has no grounds for returning.

Use the following scriptures to give insight in to the freedom process.

Psalms 139:23-24 (NIV)

Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. ²⁴ See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

John 16:8 (NIV)

When he [the Holy Spirit] comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment.

1) Confess your sin

If there is an evil spirit who has a foothold in your life, it is solely because there is an area of sin in your life that has not been confessed and surrendered to the Holy Spirit. This area may be deeply buried in your life and may take times of prayer and assistance of others to discover. However, if we are willing, God will always reveal any area in our life that is not completely surrendered to his control.

John 8:31-32 (NIV)

To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. ³² Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

Ephesians 6:17 (NIV)

Take the ... sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

2) Affirm God's Truth

If it is a lie (that we buy into) that traps us in sin, then it is the truth that will set us free. It is one thing, though, to "know" the truth; it is another thing to believe and live out the truth. If I say that I believe the truth but live as though I don't – my actions speak louder than my words.

When I "choose" to believe God's truth, it means that I will make all my decisions based on the truth and not on the lie. It does not necessarily mean I will "feel" it is true immediately. Feelings will always follow what you believe, but will sometimes lag a bit behind. To affirm truth means to act on the truth.

God's truth will always be presented in scripture. Find a scripture passage that destroys the lie you have believed, memorize it, and embed it in your life.

James 4:7-8 (NIV)

Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. ⁸ Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

- 3) **Renounce/reject** any evil spirit that has been attached to you due to that lie

Just because you now believe the truth doesn't mean that the spirit will simply choose to walk away, though sometimes that may happen. Most times you will still need to rebuke the spirit and tell it that it is no longer welcome and that you command it to leave.

If you have truly removed the sin foothold in your life, the spirit no longer has any legal right to exert control over you. The permission you originally gave it, due to your sin, is removed.

Romans 12:2 (NIV)

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will.

- 4) **Research scripture**

Find as many scripture verses as you can to strengthen that perspective in your life. If the lie was deeply embedded in your life for many years, it is easy to slip back into old patterns of thinking. Renewing your mind is a process and not a one-time event. You may have to keep coming back and dealing with that same lie for some time. The more scripture you research on that specific issue, the stronger you will stand in defeating the lie in the future.

You do not have to be a victim.

You are seated on the throne beside Jesus.

You have authority over evil spirits.

Do not let Satan fool you into believing otherwise.

1 Corinthians 6:2-3 (NIV)

Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? ³ Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life!

Romans 16:20 (NIV)

*The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.
The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.*

Days 1-4

Teacher's note: We recommend providing students with *The Steps to Freedom in Christ* booklet available at:

<http://www.freedominchrist.com/>

<http://www.ficm.ca>

Read through “**The Steps to Freedom in Christ**” booklet by Neil Anderson very slowly and carefully. The goal at this point is not so much to pray the prayers, but to **understand the content**.

Make sure you reflect on all the points raised and make note of any specific areas that relate to you.

Day 5

Set aside a couple of hours to go back to the beginning and pray through all the prayers in *The Steps to Freedom in Christ*. It is best to do this all at once as opposed to broken over several days, but this is not a rule.

Share with your group at the next meeting as to how the process went for you.

Was anything revealed?

Was any freedom gained in any specific area?

Was it a meaningful exercise?